

Practices of Confession, Intercession, and Forgiveness in 1 John 1.9; 5.16

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1 John 1.9 and 5.16 reflect practices of public confession of sins, intercession, and mediation of God's forgiveness. Divine forgiveness and belonging to the community were integrated in the Johannine community to the extent that one equalled the other. Therefore, these practices had important group-dynamic functions for the Johannine community. First, public confession functioned as a costly signal that deterred less committed group members but was meaningful to committed group members. Second, the practice of intercession induced role taking, allowing the offended party both to empathize with the offender and to restore his or her dignity and honour.

Keywords: forgiveness, intercession, confession, 1 John, costly signalling, role taking

1. Introduction

The First Epistle of John reflects practices of confession, intercession, and forgiveness within the Johannine community.¹ The practices are evident in two passages: 1.8–2.2, particularly 1.9, and 5.14–17, particularly v. 16a.

ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος, ἵνα ἀφῆ ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας καὶ καθάρσῃ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀδικίας.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1.9)

¹ This study will avoid the term 'penance', since the practices that may fall under the umbrella of 'penance' are so diverse in the history of Christianity that the term might become misleading. Cf. J. Dallen, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance* (New York: Pueblo, 1986); I. Goldhahn-Müller, *Die Grenze der Gemeinde: Studien zum Problem der zweiten Buße im Neuen Testament unter Berücksichtigung der Entwicklung in 2. Jh. bis Tertullian* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989); B. Poschmann, *Paenitentia secunda: Die kirchliche Buße im ältesten Christentum bis Cyprian und Origenes* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1940).

Εάν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, αἰτήσῃ καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον.

If someone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and give him life—to those sinning not unto death. (5.16a)

This study argues that these practices, if observed, had important group-dynamic effects.² Behavioural research on rituals and forgiveness will heuristically aid the analysis of these potential effects.³ First, we investigate the character of forgiveness in 1 John. Second, we discuss how the practice of confession in 1 John functioned as a costly signal, that is, a signal of sincere commitment to the group. Third, we examine how the practice of intercession and mediation of forgiveness helped the group handle forgiveness and reconciliation in a collectivistic context, where honour and shame made forgiveness between equals difficult.

2. Integrated Communal Acceptance and Divine Forgiveness in 1 John

Definitions of forgiveness vary considerably in contemporary forgiveness research, depending on the goal of the analysis. In Everett L. Worthington's summary of how different researchers from the behavioural sciences define forgiveness, it is possible to distinguish four dimensions: (a) emotional (e.g. change from anger to affection), (b) attitudinal (change of motivation for action), (c) relational⁴ (restoration of relationships, reconciliation), and (d) pragmatic (e.g. resuming cooperation).⁵

This analysis will focus on the relational and pragmatic aspects of forgiveness. The reason to focus on these rather than the emotional and attitudinal aspects is not that the members of the community of 1 John did not have emotions and

2 We will never know to what extent the norms of 1 John were practised in real community life. However, this analysis proceeds from the assumption that 1 John 1.9 and 5.16 reflect and influenced community practices.

3 The 'heuristic' use of the behavioural sciences to structure our interpretation of history is well established, see e.g. P. F. Esler, 'Social-Scientific Models in Biblical Interpretation', *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (ed. P. F. Esler; London: SCM, 2005) 3–14; G. Theißen, *Erleben und Verhalten der ersten Christen: Eine Psychologie des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlags-Haus, 2007) 20–32. This study will be sensitive to both cross-culturally recurring and culture-specific patterns of human behaviour.

4 Everett calls this aspect 'interpersonal'. In a collectivistic context, where forgiveness often means reconciliation with a group, the word 'relational' is more adequate. Moreover, in a religious context, we should include the experienced relation to the divine in the relational aspect of forgiveness.

5 E. L. Worthington, 'Initial Questions about the Art and Science of Forgiving', *Handbook of Forgiveness* (ed. E. L. Worthington; New York: Routledge, 2005) 1–14, esp. 3–5.

attitudes about forgiveness. On the contrary, recent behavioural research on human forgiveness indicates that all humans, including the first Christ-believers, have innate emotional dispositions that stimulate our forgiving (or taking revenge).⁶ Rather, the reason not to discuss the emotional aspect is that 1 John does not describe forgiveness in terms that give us a window onto what forgiving or being forgiven felt like in the Johannine community.

Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh argue that forgiveness in the NT should be understood as mainly relational in the collectivistic context of the first-century Mediterranean.⁷ In such a context, where the self is constructed in relation to a social network of dyadic relations,⁸ one cannot talk about forgiveness in isolation from reconciliation. Malina and Rohrbaugh overstate their case when they claim that first-century Christians were 'anti-introspective' to the extent that they did not consider their emotions,⁹ but they are nevertheless right in their emphasis on forgiveness as restoration of relations. Modern discussions of whether one can forgive someone emotionally without resuming the relationship are absent in the NT, and more recent comparisons of how Congolese (collectivist) and French (individualist) persons understand forgiveness confirm Malina and Rohrbaugh's suggestion that people from collectivist cultures tend to emphasize the relational aspects of forgiveness.¹⁰

In contemporary Christian discussions about forgiveness, it is commonplace to say that one can be forgiven by God although one is not forgiven by one's neighbour, at least if one has first seriously tried to set things right. As this analysis will argue, such an understanding of forgiveness seems foreign to 1 John. A group member who is forgiven by God is also accepted by the community (and vice versa). God is the forgiving subject in 1 John (1.9; 2.12).¹¹ However, the community is highly involved in the process of forgiveness through confession, intercession, and mediation of forgiveness.

In the beginning of 1 John, the text states that the sinner has to 'confess' (ὁμολογέω, 1.9) his sins, refuting the idea that community members may claim

6 M. McCullough, *Beyond Revenge: The Evolution of the Forgiveness Instinct* (San Francisco: Josey Bass, 2008) xiii-xix, 41-87, 112-56.

7 Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Scientific Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 63-4.

8 B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 3rd ed. 2001) 58-80 (originally published in 1981), introduced to biblical studies the notion that a person from a collectivist culture has a 'dyadic personality'. That is, such a person experiences his identity as interwoven with others.

9 L. J. Lawrence, *An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew: A Critical Assessment of the Use of the Honour and Shame Model in New Testament Studies* (WUNT 2/165; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 113-41.

10 J. K. Kadiangandu, E. Mullet and G. Vinsonneau, 'Forgivingness: A Congo-France Comparison', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 32 (2001) 504-11.

11 God is most probably the implicit agent of the passive verb ἠφέωνται in 2.12.

that they 'have no sin' (ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, 1.8, 10). Some scholars are reluctant to see the confession in 1.9 as a public confession.¹² Raymond E. Brown argues convincingly, however, that the author has public confession in mind.¹³ The verb ὁμολογέω is used four more times in 1 John (2.23, 4.2, 3, 15). In all these cases, the verb is used for confessions of the Son, particularly that he 'has come in flesh' (4.2) and 'is the son of God' (4.15). The use of ὁμολογέω in 4.1–3 is particularly revealing, since there the confession is a means by which they can 'examine' (δοκιμάζω) and thus 'know' (γινώσκω) whether someone is really a community member. Further, 1.8–2.2 is directed to a communal 'we', indicating a community setting of the confession. Moreover, public confessions of wrongdoing before a god were practised among both Jews and Greeks,¹⁴ and other early Christian texts reflect practices of confession in the community (Jas 5.16; *Did.* 4.14; 14.1).¹⁵ Therefore, we have good reason to think of ὁμολογέω in 1.9 as a public act within the community.

Towards the end of 1 John, community members are instructed to pray for a brother who sins (5.14–17). The general lack of references to institutionalized leadership structures gives us no reason to think that the Johannine community reserved the practice of intercession for an elite group or an office within the community.¹⁶ Although some certainly exercised more leadership than others,¹⁷ they are all primarily 'brothers'¹⁸ (ἀδελφοί, e.g. 3.13).¹⁹ The interceding subject in 5.16 is just 'someone' (τις), without further qualification. The instruction to pray for a brother's sins is therefore most probably directed to all group members.

Several features of this instruction are interesting. First, they can pray with 'confidence' (παρηρησία), knowing that their prayers will effectuate what they pray for (5.14–15, cf. 3.19–23; John 14.13–14; 15.7, 16; 16.23–26), that is, the

12 E.g. S. S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (WBC 51; Waco, TX: Word, 1984) 30, considers public confession to be a reasonable interpretation, but remains cautious. G. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 32, thinks that it cannot be decided whether confession is public or solely before God.

13 R. E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982) 208.

14 On the Jewish practice of confessing sins on the day of atonement, see R. Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles: Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 82; on confessions of sins among Greeks, see F. Graf, 'Confession, Secrecy and Ancient Societies', *Religion in Cultural Discourse: Essays in Honor of Hans G. Kippenberg on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (ed. Brigitte Luchesi and Kocku von Stuckrad; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004) 259–72.

15 Poschmann, *Paenitentia secunda*, 52–62, 85–97.

16 Cf. M. Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus* (WUNT 242; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 197–203.

17 The authoritative 'we' in 1:1–5 proclaims a message from a position of charismatic authority. Cf. 2 John 10; 3 John 9.

18 As J. Painter, *1, 2 and 3 John* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008) 182–3, points out, 1 John is silent about 'sisters'. Although ἀδελφοί may mean 'siblings', it is more problematic that the community is addressed as νεανίσκοι and πατέρες in 2.13–14.

19 John proclaims that the anointing they received teaches them directly so that they need no teaching (2.20–21, 27), indicating relatively flexible leadership structures.

forgiveness of sins (5.16–17).²⁰ This implies the sinner's need of the prayers of other community members to receive forgiveness (cf. John 20.23). Second, they should pray for a 'brother' (ἀδελφός), that is, a community member, and not people in general.²¹ In other words, prayer for the forgiveness of sins is an activity within the community. Third, a group member is considered capable of distinguishing between sins 'unto death' (πρὸς θάνατον) and 'not unto death' (οὐ πρὸς θάνατον) (5.16–17). In other words, the text imagines that the community may make a judgment call as to whether a sin should be considered beyond forgiveness and thus merit exclusion from the community.²² Fourth, 5.16 seems to suggest that it is the praying brother, not God directly, who mediates 'life' to the sinning brother. Many commentators find it theologically problematic that the subject of the phrase 'shall give him life' (δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν) seems to be the praying human, since God is clearly the ultimate source of 'life' (2.25; 5.11) and the one who forgives sins (1.9) in 1 John.²³ Nevertheless, from a syntactic point of view this is the most plausible way to read the text.²⁴ Moreover, Alan England Brooke points out that Jas 5.15, 20 is structurally similar to 1 John 5.16, and there it is quite clear that a human mediates forgiveness and life.²⁵ Brown suggests that the praying brother could be seen as the mediator of forgiveness that ultimately comes from God.²⁶ The latter interpretation is supported by the promise in John 20.23: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if

20 M. M. Thompson, 'Intercession in the Johannine Community: 1 John 5.16 in the Context of the Gospel of John', *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin* (ed. M. J. Wilkins and T. Paige; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992) 225–45, esp. 228–37, argues convincingly that in the Johannine tradition the prayers of the community are considered analogous to the prayers of Jesus, since they share Jesus' positive relation to the Father.

21 The vocative ἀδελφοί in 3.13 suggests that 'brother' is an ingroup designation.

22 I here assume the interpretation of the majority of commentators that 'sin unto death' means 'sins that lead to spiritual death'. In 1 John 'death' is the state of those who do not belong to the group, but 'life' the state of those who do (3.14–15). Since 1 John ideally equates the visible community with the community of God and Christ (no *corpus mixtum*), as this article argues, sins unto death (probably false Christology and hate of brothers, see n. 59) are most likely sins that merit exclusion from the community.

23 E.g. I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 146 n. 17; Schnackenburg, *Johannine Epistles*, 249; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 300.

24 R. Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 87 n. 16, rightly argues that 'a change of subject between αἰτήσῃ ("will ask") and δώσει and the ἐρωτήσῃ ("pray") following is improbable. Otherwise a τις would be required before (ἵνα) ἐρωτήσῃ in v 16d, which is added in some MSS.'

25 A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) 146. A third possible translation, not usually mentioned by commentators, is 'it [i.e. the prayer] shall give life'. This translation is, however, functionally equivalent to Brown's suggestion.

26 Brown, *Epistles of John*, 612, 634–5.

you retain the sins of any, they are retained'.²⁷ For some reason, most commentators do not note the relation between 1 John 5.16 and John 20.23, but if the Johannine community members found themselves authorized to mediate forgiveness of sins, since they have been given the Spirit (John 20.22), it is not only grammatically but also theologically probable that the (mediating) subject of δώσει in 1 John 5.16 is the praying human. As will be argued further below, the mediating position of group members had a highly important function in the Johannine practice of intercession. 'Life' equals membership in the community of 1 John (3.14–15), which means that 5.16 imagines a practice where humans mediate the forgiveness by God necessary for acceptance by the community.

Should we understand 1.9 and 5.16 as two different practices or two glimpses of the same practice? In favour of the former, it is somewhat speculative to juxtapose the practices in 1.9 and 5.16, since they are at opposite ends of the letter.²⁸ Moreover, Schnackenburg notes that the initiative to pray for a sinner comes from a fellow brother, not from the sinner himself.²⁹ There are, however, reasons to think that 1.9 and 5.16 are parts of an integrated practice of confession and intercession. The most important reason to think that these two verses should be seen as parts of the same practice is that confession and prayer for each other's sins match up well. Marianne M. Thompson argues that if 1 John follows Jewish traditions, where repentance was a condition for forgiveness, 'sins unto death' in 5.16 would include sins that have not been confessed, as described in 1.9.³⁰ Since confession is considered a prerequisite for forgiveness in 1.9, we may suspect that confession is also part of the practice of intercession in 5.16. Moreover, if we juxtapose 1.9 and 5.16 we can see several structural similarities with the practices in Jas 5.15–20 and 1 John 1.8–2.2; 5.14–17.³¹

- Assurance that the prayer is effective in mediating the forgiveness of sins (1 John 5.14–15; Jas 5.16–18).
- An interpretation of forgiveness of sins as bringing the sinner from death to life, implying reintegration into the community (1 John 5.16–17; Jas 5.19–20)

27 The change from a human active voice (ἀφῆτε) to a divine passive voice (ἀφέωνται) indicates that human action mediates divine action.

28 This is not necessarily a problem. One might argue that the conclusion in 5.13–21 connects to 1.8–2.2 by means of allusion to a practice that was familiar to the audience. I will not pursue this argument in detail here, but many commentators label 5.13–21, 'Conclusion', and point out that the passage summarizes many themes of the letter, e.g. Brown, *The Johannine Epistles*, 630–41; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 293–4, 310. The confidence in prayers for forgiveness in 5.14–17 is reminiscent of the assurance that Christ is their advocate in 2.1–2.

29 Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles*, 83 n. 47.

30 Cf. Thompson, 'Intercession in the Johannine Community', 242–5.

31 Cf. Poschmann, *Paenitentia secunda*, 68–9.

- Confession of sins in the plural, indicating confession of specific sins (1 John 1.9; Jas 5.16).
- Confession of sins in a community context (1 John 1.9; Jas 5.16).
- Prayer in a community context for the sinner (1 John 5.16; Jas 5.15–16).

We will never know for sure to what extent the practices in James and 1 John were similar and perhaps even had influenced each other, but Jas 5.15–20 is the closest analogy we know. The present argument is not dependent upon whether we understand 1.9 and 5.16 as parts of the same practice or as two different practices, but this author finds the former more plausible.

It is reasonable to imagine that confessions and intercessions were recurring in the community. The conditional clauses in 1.9 and 5.16 are iterative, indicating a recurring event.³² The description of Jesus' activity as an 'advocate' (παράκλητος) in 2.1 is in the present tense, suggesting a still ongoing activity. Also the activity of 'sinning' (ἁμαρτάνοντα) in 5.16 is in the present tense, committed by someone who is already a 'brother',³³ indicating an imagination of ongoing sin.³⁴

What we have seen so far is that the community is deeply involved in God's forgiveness.³⁵ Although the forgiving subject in 1 John is God, forgiveness was integrated into the social and cultic life of the community, not just a private matter between God and the individual believer. God forgives, but community members must confess in the community and one community member can mediate forgiveness to another through prayer. This fits a larger pattern in 1 John, where being forgiven and saved by God equals belonging to the community and participation in communal life (1.6–2.2; 2.19; 3.13–18). Those who belong to the community are closely aligned with God: They are born of God and the 'seed' of God remains in them (3.9), they have community with the Father and the Son (1.6–7), they have access to knowledge from God through the anointing (2.20–21, 27), and they obey his commands (e.g. 3.19–22). This imagination is quite compatible with the conviction that they have the capacity to understand and mediate

32 This argument is weakened by the fact that 1 John has a tendency to use the iterative case in conditional clauses where the real case would do, cf. Brown, *Epistles of John*, 207.

33 Cf. Thompson, 'Intercession in the Johannine Community', 243, who rightly criticises the interpretation that 'sins unto death' in 5.16 refer to sins committed by outsiders.

34 There is no room in this study to relate the apparent claims of sinlessness in 3.6, 9; 5.18 to 1.9; 5.16–17, but it suffices to say that this author views the statements about sinlessness both as an eschatological reality, and as an ideal with an implicit hortative function, cf. I. de la Potterie, 'The Impeccability of the Christian according to 1 Jn 3, 6–9', *The Christian Lives by the Spirit* (I. de la Potterie and S. Lyonnet; New York: Alba House, 1971) 175–96.

35 The integration of divine and interpersonal forgiveness and reconciliation is a frequent phenomenon in Jewish tradition, which has been explored by M. L. Morgan, 'Mercy, Repentance, and Forgiveness in Ancient Judaism', *Ancient Forgiveness* (ed. C. L. Griswold and D. Konstan; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2012).

God's will in the case of forgiveness, too. As noted above, 5.16 implicitly suggests that community members can decide whether a sin is 'unto death' or not.

It is therefore a reasonable assumption that 1 John reflects a community in which mediating (or not mediating) divine forgiveness was part of how they handled conflicts within the group. Forgiveness by God equals acceptance by the community, and non-mediation of forgiveness by the community equals non-forgiveness by God. From this supposition, we will analyze the discourse about forgiveness in 1.9 and 5.16 as outlines of practices with important social functions.

The analysis of forgiveness in 1 John in the following sections of this article will be functionalistic, that is, the aim of the analysis is to understand how the practices of confession, intercession, and forgiveness served a social function within the group. Such an approach could be accused of reductionism. This author fully recognizes that the experience of forgiveness by God cannot be reduced to just social gluing. Nevertheless, the experience of divine forgiveness seems to have facilitated social functions within the group. David Sloan Wilson argues forcefully that religion can be socially functional and help groups cooperate in ways that would otherwise have been impossible.³⁶ In the case of 1 John, we may hypothesize that the belief in a forgiving God that has granted the group the capacity to mediate divine forgiveness helped the group to resolve conflicts in a constructive way.

3. Public Confession of Sins as a Costly Signal

As argued above, we should understand the verb 'confess' (ὁμολογέω) in 1.9 as referring to public confessions within the community. Since 'sins' (ἁμαρτίαι) are in the plural in 1.9, we should assume that the author has confession of specific sins in mind, not just an abstract confession of general sinfulness.³⁷ In this section, it will be argued that public confession must have been costly for the self-esteem and the social status of the confessor, at least temporarily. The willingness to bear that cost functioned as a costly signal of commitment.

Tertullian gives a fascinating glimpse of what public confession could have been like in his treatise *On Repentance* (*De Paenitentia*, c. 195 CE), particularly chs. 9–10. Our usage of Tertullian's account (which is later than 1 John) is illustrative of the emotions and social costs involved in confessing sins publicly.³⁸ In ch. 9,

36 D. S. Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002).

37 Smalley, 1, 2, 3 *John*, 31.

38 Although Tertullian's account does not strictly prove anything about 1 John, the social and emotional problems he wrestles with are general enough to be valid in other contexts, too. It should be noted, however, that Tertullian seems to have 1 John 1.8–2.2 in mind in these chapters, since he argues that when someone confesses publicly, 'Christ intercedes to the Father' (*Christus patrem deprecatur* 10.6), thus alluding to Christ's function as παράκλητος in 1 John 2.1. There are several references to post-baptismal confession of sin in texts

Tertullian insists that repentance must result in public confession, which ‘is a discipline for prostrating and humiliating a person’ (*prosternendi et humilificandi hominis disciplina est*, 9.3). Such humiliation has a twofold purpose, Tertullian claims: it will increase repentance, and it will honour God by showing fear of punishment. In ch. 10, Tertullian deals with what makes many of his fellow Christians avoid the practice of public confession. Many Christians, Tertullian claims, avoid public confession since they ‘anticipate shame’ (*praesumo pudoris*, 10.1). Against this fear of shame Tertullian argues that the Church is not a community where people abuse the information they gain from hearing someone’s public confession, but a community which is one body, Christ, who shares the burden of the confessor. ‘Why do you consider these [Christian fellows] something other than yourself?’ (*quid tu hos aliud quam te opinaris?*, 10.4). Besides, although public confession might be unpleasant, it is better than Hell (see also chs. 11–12).

Tertullian’s account gives us an illustration of how socially and emotionally costly public confessions may have been. Admitting your errors in front of the group was shameful. The confessor gave up information that others could use to denigrate the confessor and gain a social advantage for themselves. We should note, however, that confession is considered normative in Tertullian’s description. This modifies the social value of public confessions, since people who act according to group norms are usually seen as better group members and thus gain higher status within the group.³⁹ Confession of sins was therefore both shameful and honourable at the same time. It is reasonable to assume that similar social costs and rewards were involved in the confession of sins pictured in 1 John.

We may broaden our understanding of the cost of confession in 1 John further by relating it to patterns of forgiveness in antiquity. David Konstan has recently shown that the processes of reconciliation, forgiveness, and appeasement of anger in Greek and Roman texts do not concur with modern ideals of forgiveness.⁴⁰ After a thorough survey of a large number of texts from a wide range of genres, he concludes:

earlier than Tertullian’s: *Barn.* 19.12; *1 Clem.* 51.3; 60.1–2; *2 Clem.* 8.2–3; *Did.* 4.14; 14.1; *Irenaeus Adv. Haer.* I.13.5, 7; *Jas* 5.16. See Poschmann, *Paenitentia secunda*; I. Goldhahn-Müller, *Die Grenze der Gemeinde*, for overviews. *Irenaeus Adv. Haer.* I.13.7 mentions that some are ashamed (*δυσωπούμενοι*) to confess and therefore apostatize. However, Tertullian’s account gives us the most lively insight into the shame involved in public confession of sin.

39 According to social identity theory, people who act according to group norms are usually more appreciated and gain more influence over the group, see e.g. J. C. Turner, ‘Explaining the Nature of Power: A Three-Process Theory’, *European Journal of Social Psychology* 35 (2005) 1–22.

40 Konstan, *Before Forgiveness*, 22–90. Konstan surveys a great number of texts that cannot be recounted here. The examples from Greek and Roman texts in this section of the present analysis are merely illustrative.

The Greek and Latin terms *sunginóskó* and *ignosco*, usually rendered as *forgive* in English, do not properly bear that meaning, as forgiveness is commonly understood today—that is, a response to an offense that involves moral transformation on the part of the forgiver and forgiven and a complex of sentiments and behaviors that include sincere confession, remorse and repentance. I suggested that, on the contrary, the appeasement of anger and the relinquishment of revenge were rather perceived as resting on the restoration of the dignity of the injured party, whether through compensation or gestures of deference, or else by way of discounting the offense on the grounds that it was in some sense involuntary or unintentional.⁴¹

As opposed to modern ideals, where admitting one's wrongdoing ideally is a way to accept moral responsibility and show willingness to moral reform (repentance), Konstan argues quite convincingly that the goal of admitting wrongdoing in antiquity was often simply to demonstrate one's respect and humble position below the other and thus restore the dignity of the offended party. For instance, according to Aristotle, the main reason to admit one's fault was to humble oneself and show respect for the other (*Rhetoric* 1380a/2.3.5–6).

Konstan does not relate his observation to the code of honour and shame in antiquity, but the connection is easily recognizable.⁴² By being submissive, the transgressor shows that he respects the offended party as superior and thus restores the honour of the offended party. In the Mediterranean culture of honour and shame, it was often considered below the dignity of a superior to be angry with an inferior. Rather, the honourable attitude of a superior was to be merciful towards an inferior, or at least not angry. For instance, according to Seneca, clemency is the most important virtue for a ruler (*On Mercy*, e.g. 1.5). Therefore, submissive displays can appease anger and thus sometimes restore a relation. The confessing person shows the other person that he or she is willing to pay the social price of shame to restore the relation. Seneca writes: 'The man who has offended you is either stronger or weaker than you: If he is weaker, spare him; if he is stronger, spare yourself' (*Moral Epistles* I, 5.5.8). Seneca's aphorism also shows the other side of the coin—there is no reason to ask for forgiveness if you are the superior. As Aristotle writes in the context discussed above: 'It is impossible to be afraid and be angry at the same time' (*Rhetoric* 1380a/2.3.5–6). The basic pattern of reconciliation in asymmetrical

41 Konstan, *Before Forgiveness*, 59. (ἀφίημι, the most common word for 'forgive' in the New Testament, is not used with the meaning 'forgive' in other Greek texts, except in Jewish and Christian texts inspired by the Septuagint, which translates נָשָׂא and סָלַח with ἀφίημι.)

42 On honour and shame, see e.g. Malina, *The New Testament World*, 27–57; H. Moxnes, 'Honor and Shame', *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. R. L. Rohrbaugh; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 19–40; R. L. Rohrbaugh, 'Honor: Core Value in the Biblical World', *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* (ed. D. Neufeld and R. E. DeMaris; New York: Routledge, 2010) 109–25.

relations can be summarized like this: The inferior should admit the errors of his or her way and not argue in order to show due honour to the superior, but the superior had no obligation to ask the inferior for forgiveness or mercy. Rather, the duty of the superior is to treat the inferior mercifully when offended.

While submissive confession of wrongdoing was a suitable strategy for inferiors as a way to appease their superiors among Greeks and Romans, it was a costly resort in relation to equals. For example, Melissa Barden Dowling demonstrates that when Julius Caesar showed clemency toward his former enemies in the Roman senate, many senators reacted quite negatively.⁴³ They felt that the imposed mercy denigrated them and obliged them to be loyal and submissive, and this reduced the power of the senate. In a paradigm of honour and shame, every encounter with an equal is a game of reciprocation where the goal is to behave in a way that maintains one's honour.⁴⁴ Admitting wrongdoing meant giving up honour and thus paying the price of reduced social status. Konstan shows that in interaction between equals, for instance in a court, the transgressor's primary strategy was to make the transgression excusable.⁴⁵ For instance, the transgression might be the result of circumstances beyond his or her control, such as lacking knowledge, uncontrollable external events, or powerful passions. We can easily relate these observations of Konstan's to the paradigm of honour and shame. If the other party accepts the explanation, the transgressor can be excused and a mutually honourable relation can be restored. In a context of honour and shame, excusing the other was probably often the most trouble-free solution to maintain the honour of both parties. However, if the offended party is not persuaded to excuse the transgressor, the offender might have to admit a wrong, be shamed, and lose status. When the offender loses status, the dignity of the offended is restored. In some cases that might restore the relationship between the two. In other cases, the refusal to excuse the other might be the beginning of a feud.

Konstan continues his exploration of forgiveness in antiquity by examining Jewish (and Christian) texts.⁴⁶ The pattern of repentance was of course much stronger in the Jewish tradition. Countless ancient Jewish texts emphasize repentance as a condition of God's forgiveness.⁴⁷ But repentance was always in relation to God, who was in no way equal to a human. In this way, the pattern that one should primarily admit wrongdoing submissively in relation to one's superior is present in Jewish thinking, too. There was no shame in yielding to God.

43 M. B. Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty in the Roman World* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2006) 29–75, esp. 33–4.

44 Cf. the logic of challenge and riposte described in Malina, *The New Testament World*, 40–3.

45 Konstan, *Before Forgiveness*, 38–58.

46 Konstan, *Before Forgiveness*, 91–124.

47 Morgan, 'Mercy, Repentance, and Forgiveness in Ancient Judaism'.

Scenes where one person asks for the forgiveness of another human are quite rare in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁸ When people occasionally do ask other persons for forgiveness in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, they always do it in a most submissive way (Gen 32.20; 50.15–18; 1 Sam 19.18–20; 25.23–28). Thus, both the pattern that the inferior repented and confessed to the superior and the pattern that one had to humble oneself to acknowledge the superiority of the other in order to be forgiven or treated with mercy were the same in Jewish and Greco-Roman thinking. The main difference was that repentance was much more central to Jews than to Greeks and Romans.

Apologies are costly in our society, too. People in modern society often hesitate to express repentance. Julie Juola Exline and Roy F. Baumeister discuss the most common barriers for expressing repentance: disagreement with the charge, fear of social consequences, and shame.⁴⁹ Bernard Weiner et al. have shown that, on the one hand, voluntary confession makes a person more agreeable than blank denial of a transgression, but, on the other hand, those who confess are nevertheless not held in as high esteem as those who do not have to confess to anything.⁵⁰ In a way, the situation is still very much the same as it was in antiquity. If we look at real processes of confession and forgiveness rather than theological ideals of confession, the concerns of modern people can be surprisingly similar to those we find in antiquity. However, it is reasonable to claim that the concerns were often accentuated in antiquity, since honour and shame typically played an even more important role in their social interaction than they do in our interaction.

If we return to 1 John and to Tertullian's discussion about regular public confession, we realize that many Christ-believers must have found it costly to participate. The anticipation of shame (Tertullian *On Repentance* 10.1) must have been a barrier to public confession of sins in a society where honour was an important social commodity. If the community of 1 John was a community of equals, as argued above, confession of sins before the group was probably experienced as a loss of status within the group.

If public confession is experienced as costly, we can deepen our understanding of this practice by relating it to *costly signalling theory* of religious rituals, originally proposed by William Irons.⁵¹ (Although we cannot assume that the practice of

48 D. J. Reimer, 'The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology: The Case of Interpersonal Forgiveness', *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (ed. J. Barton and D. J. Reimer; Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1996) 259–82.

49 J. Juola Exline and R. F. Baumeister, 'Expressing Forgiveness and Repentance: Benefits and Barriers', *Forgiveness: Theory, Research and Practice* (ed. M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, and C. E. Thoresen; New York: Guilford, 1999) 111–32.

50 B. Weiner, S. Graham, P. Orli, and M. Zmuidinas, 'Public Confession and Forgiveness', *Journal of Personality* 59 (1991) 281–312.

51 W. Irons 'Morality, Religion, and Human Nature', *Religion and Science: History, Method, and Dialogue* (ed. W. Richardson and W. Wildman; New York: Routledge, 1996) 375–99; Irons,

confession in 1 John was a ritual in a strict sense, Irons's theory is applicable to the practice of confessions.) According to Irons, humans (and other social species) need to distinguish reliable cooperation partners from unreliable partners. In order to do so, we look for signals that potential partners intend to cooperate. But how can we avoid the problem that others may send deceptive signals? By making the signal so costly and so hard to fake that no one but someone who really intends to cooperate will be motivated enough to bear the cost of sending the signal. However, the cost must not be so high that it deters even committed cooperation partners. A group that successfully maintains costly signals that separate committed and reliable cooperation partners from not so committed free-riders will be more functional than a group that fails to develop such signals. That is the basic idea of costly signalling theory of religious rituals. Public confession of sins in 1.9 could be understood as such a signal. Only a committed member would accept the social risks involved in allowing others to see his or her shame.

The signal only works if we have reason to believe that the committed group member perceives the net cost of the signal as much lower than the sceptic.⁵² If the committed group members interpret the cost as low but the non-committed group member interprets the cost as high, the costly signal will have the capacity to deter the less committed without deterring the committed. (Having less committed group members need not necessarily be a problem, but in certain situations the influence of less committed group members may reduce the functionality of the group.) Do we have reason to think that public confession was experienced as less costly by committed group members in the community of 1 John than it was for less committed group members? I think so.

First, a committed group member, as opposed to a more sceptical member, probably accepts the beliefs of the group. In the case of 1 John, we may suspect a recent history of division between one group in the community who claimed to have no sin (1.8, 10), and another group who emphasized the need for continual forgiveness (1.9; 2.1–2).⁵³ The latter group believed that public confession was

'Religion as a Hard-to-Fake Sign of Commitment', *Evolution and the Capacity for Commitment* (ed. R. M. Nesse; New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001) 292–309. The theory has since then been further developed by e.g. J. Bulbulia, 'Religious Costs as Adaptations that Signal Altruistic Intention', *Evolution and Cognition* 10 (2004) 19–38; R. Sosis, 'Does Religion Promote Trust? The Role of Signaling, Reputation, and Punishment', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 1 (2005) 1–30.

52 R. Sosis, 'Why Aren't We all Hutterites? Costly Signaling Theory and Religious Behaviour', *Human Nature* 14 (2003) 91–127.

53 E.g. R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (London: Chapman, 1979) 126, mirror-reads 1.8, 10 as reflecting a group of secessionists who think that they are free from sin. Brown's

instrumental in gaining eternal life, while the former apparently did not. The letter gives us hints that the non-confessing group had been marginalized and left the group (2.18–24, esp. v. 19; 4.1–6). If the community of 1 John was in a social situation where they felt the need to distinguish themselves from those who presented alternative teachings, public confession would have been quite an effective costly signal, since the net value of public confession would have been experienced very differently by these two groups.

Second, a committed group member derives a substantial portion of his self-esteem and social status from being a good group member, as opposed to a less committed group member who rather maintains self-esteem by other means and seeks other arenas for his or her social interaction.⁵⁴ Therefore, if confessing sins publicly was considered to be prototypical behaviour, committed group members would experience the pride and social status of acting prototypically by confessing as to some degree compensating for the shame of displaying their sins to other group members.⁵⁵

Third, the committed group member most probably felt more dyadically connected than the sceptic to the other group members and therefore perceived less risk of being exploited when he or she confessed. As we saw above, Tertullian argues that one should not fear confessing sins within the group, since all other group members will share the confessor's burden rather than take advantage of the confessor. They are really all one (*On Repentance* 10.4). 1 John describes the group as a 'community' (κοινωνία, 1.3, 6–7). The relations between group members are characterized by love (e.g. 4.12). These expressions of intimate community give us reason to think that a committed group member would have experienced other group members as reliable, while a less committed group member would not have shared that trust.

In sum, public confession of sin within the Johannine community was probably experienced as a net gain for committed group members, but a net loss for less committed group members and unconvinced outsiders. As such, the practice

suggestion is but one of many reconstructions of the dissidents from the community, see e.g. R. B. Edwards, *The Johannine Epistles* (New Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996) 57–68. J. Lieu, 'Us or You? Persuasion and Identity in 1 John', *JBL* 127 (2008) 805–19, warns against mirror-reading 1 John too easily, but does not deny the existence of a group of opponents. Even if 1.8, 10 only represent a fictive antitype of the ingroup prototype, this antitype may have functioned as a fence against tendencies that could easily occur in the discourse of the community.

54 N. Ellemers, R. Spears, and B. Doosje, 'Self and Social Identity', *Annual Review of Psychology* 26 (2002) 161–86; N. Ellemers, W. van Rijnswijk, J. Bruins, and J. de Gilder, 'Group Commitment as a Moderator of Attributional and Behavioural Responses to Power Use', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 28 (2005) 555–72.

55 Cf. n. 39.

of confession could function as a costly signal that repulsed less committed group members but attracted committed group members. This practice was probably functional in a social situation where they had to distinguish themselves from a group of people that previously had belonged to the community (2.19). (In another social situation, the signalling cost of public confession would probably have been unnecessarily high.⁵⁶)

4. Mediation of Forgiveness as a Means of Conflict Resolution

On the one hand, public confession was made before the community and could therefore be experienced as shameful. On the other hand, the confession of sins was also made before God, the ultimate superior, and confession of guilt before a superior was proper, as we discussed in the previous section. Therefore, the social and the spiritual dimensions of public confession would trigger contradictory intuitions. Was this tension resolved in the community of 1 John?

Rituals typically involve roles, which the participants of the ritual can play.⁵⁷ (Although 1 John does not give us enough information to claim that the practices in 1.9 and 5.16 are rituals in a strict sense, I will treat the practices as rituals in the limited sense that they provide roles.) All participants in the ritual drama are aware not only of their own role but also of the role of the other participants in the ritual and therefore anticipate certain responses from the other participants.⁵⁸ In the key passages in 1 John, 1.9 and 5.16, two explicit roles can be detected: (a) the person mediating forgiveness through prayer, and (b) the transgressor confessing and receiving forgiveness. We may also assume that usually there was also (c) a victim of the sin, since the understanding of sin in 1 John is largely focused on interpersonal relations within the community, that is, love, hate, and the practical

56 According to Dallen, *The Reconciling Community*, 5–130, the requirement of public confession continued during the persecutions in the second and third century, but was gradually transformed into a private confession in the fourth century and thereafter, although public confession was still sometimes practised for serious transgressions. From a bird's eye view, this development seems to coincide with the lessened need to test the commitment of community members.

57 The idea that religion in general and rituals in particular involve assuming roles is used in many different ritual theories, e.g. E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Interaction* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967); R. N. McCauley and E. T. Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002) 32–3; R. A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999) 39–40; H. Sundén, *Religionen och rollerna* (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsen, 1959).

58 Sundén, *Religionen och rollerna*, suggests that role-taking also involves an expectation of the related roles in the ritual.

consequences thereof (e.g. 3.14–18).⁵⁹ Sometimes, however, the whole community might be the injured party. That would, for instance, be the case when the sin is related to false teachings, such as denial that ‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh’ (4.1–3), since such transgressions undermine the cognitive certainty of the whole group.⁶⁰ Finally, we have the implicit role of (d) the Father, who is imagined to forgive through the Son (1.9; 2.1–2, 12).

The mediator performs three actions: He (1) ‘sees’ (ἴδῃ) the transgression, (2) ‘shall pray’ (αἰτήσεται) for the transgressor, and finally, (3) ‘shall give life’ (δώσει...ζωήν) to the transgressor, that is, mediate forgiveness (5.16). All these actions are described in the third person singular, although the introduction in the two preceding verses (5.14–15) and the elaboration in the following verses (5.18–20) are in the first person plural. This gives the impression of a community context, ‘we’, in 5.14–15, 18–20, in which a mediator prays in 5.16.

As discussed above, it is possible that 1.9 and 5.16 were two different practices. In that case, the role of the transgressor (b) would be reduced to receiving forgiveness. That would not significantly change the role of the mediator (a), and the main point of this section would therefore still be valid. In the following, however, we will assume that confession and intercession were integrated practices.

The role of the transgressor is to confess his sins (1.9). It is possible to assume that confession of sins comes either before ‘see’, between ‘see’ and ‘pray’, or after ‘give life’ in 5.16. The order of events may be reconstructed in several ways, for instance:

- Sequence variant one: The sinner’s confession in the community makes the community ‘see’, the mediator prays, and thus mediates forgiveness.
- Sequence variant two: A community member sees a brother sin (and confronts the brother), the brother confesses his sin, followed by prayer and mediation of forgiveness.
- Sequence variant three: A sin is seen by someone, who then prays (in the community) and somehow mediates ‘life’, which somehow induces confession and thus forgiveness.

59 D. M. Scholer, ‘Sins Within and Sins Without: An Interpretation of 1 John 5.16–17’, *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 230–46, argues that the two major kinds of sin in 1 John are (a) ‘murder’, that is, hating and not helping other group members (e.g. 3.11–18), and (b) ‘lying’, that is, false Christology (e.g. 2.22–23; 4.1–3).

60 We are emotionally dependent on the support of others to maintain cognitive certainty, particularly about beliefs that are not directly verifiable, see J.-P. Deconchy, ‘Rationality and Control in Orthodox Systems’, *The Social Dimension: European Developments in Social Psychology* (ed. H. Tajfel; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984) 425–45; L. Festinger, S. Schachter, and K. Back, *Social Pressures in Informal Groups: A Study of Human Factors in Housing* (New York: Harper, 1950).

Which of these scenarios is most plausible in real community life is of course a matter of speculation and we should not necessarily assume a fixed sequence of events. The first scenario is closest to the sequence in Jas 5.15–20. The second scenario, however, captures the meaning of ‘see’ in a more natural way than the first scenario. The third is the least probable scenario, since it requires a belief that prayer will induce some kind of supernatural causality that leads the transgressor to confess.

The actions of the mediator are of great interest, since he or she symbolically takes two different roles. First, the mediator speaks for the transgressor to God, and then he or she mediates God’s forgiveness to the transgressor. In other words, the mediator first takes the role of representative of the sinner, and then takes the role of representative of God.

Who is this mediator? As was discussed earlier, nothing in 1 John indicates that the mediator is in some kind of office. On the contrary, the role of the mediator could most probably be played by any community member. The scenario imagined in 5.16 is that the same person who sees the sin also takes the role of the mediator. We may therefore guess that it is sometimes the sufferer of the sin who prays. While this is beyond what we can know, one likely person to ‘see’ someone sin against a brother is the very victim of the sin, at least in cases where the sin affects an individual group member. If some community member other than the victim of the sin ‘sees’ the transgression, that person is an indirect victim, a co-sufferer, since he or she probably sympathizes with the victim, who is a community fellow. In intimate communities, the fate of one affects the whole group. In some cases, it might even be that the whole community consider themselves the direct sufferers, for instance if the sin consists of claiming a false Christology, as suggested above.

Assuming that this reconstruction is fairly correct, we have a most interesting ritual which induces role taking. First, the sufferer of a transgression, or another emotionally involved community member, takes the role of representative of the transgressor as he speaks on behalf of the transgressor before God. Then the mediator takes the role of representative of God as he or she mediates forgiveness to the transgressor on behalf of God. This mediating role was easily recognizable from the scriptures, where priests and prophets acted on behalf of the people towards God and on behalf of God towards the people. Both priest and prophets could be mediators of forgiveness (e.g. Lev 4.26; 2 Sam 12.13).⁶¹ The analogy with the priest and the prophet is, however, only partial for two reasons: First, in the community of 1 John, any brother could take the role of mediator. Second, in

61 T. Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins: An Aspect of his Prophetic Mission* (SNTSMS 150; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2011) 132–78; D. Johansson, “Who Can Forgive Sins but God Alone?” *Human and Angelic Agents, and Divine Forgiveness in Early Judaism*, *JSNT* 33 (2011) 351–74.

the community of 1 John, the very sufferer (or a co-sufferer) of the transgression was probably sometimes the mediator.

Now, role reversal, where one takes the role and the perspective of the other, is a well documented method for inducing forgiveness, empathy, and conflict resolution.⁶² By taking the perspective of the offender, the offended party's empathy with the offender increases, and as a result the victim of sin often becomes more willing to forgive. The framework of the ritual, where the sufferer, or the co-suffering community brothers of the sufferer, pray on behalf of the transgressor, stimulates such a change of perspective. We may therefore assume that intercession changed the community's attitude towards the transgressor in a favourable direction.

However, the ritual does not end with taking the role of the transgressor, but continues with giving the mediator the role of God's representative. Thus, the role-taking allows acting from a position of superiority. As we discussed in the previous section, forgiveness was understood in antiquity as an asymmetrical process where the superior showed mercy toward the inferior. The ritual framework situated the mediator—who was sometimes the victim of the transgression, sometimes a co-sufferer of the victim, and sometimes a representative of the collectively suffering community—in a superior position that restored the honour of the victim(s), and from that position the mediator could be forgiving, acting together with God.⁶³

As discussed above, the Johannine community was a community where most of the members were just 'brothers', that is, most community members considered themselves equal in status compared to others. As we discussed in the previous section, repentance and forgiveness between equals was rare in antiquity.⁶⁴ A community of 'brothers' could therefore easily be torn apart in competitions for honour in the aftermath of transgression within the group. This problem is solved by letting other group members mediate God's forgiveness in a ritual of confession, intercession, and forgiveness. In that ritual setting, the asymmetrical conditions for forgiveness are temporarily created, and when the ritual is over, the group can resume their interaction. The integration of human

62 D. W. Johnson, 'Role Reversal: A Summary and Review of the Research', *International Journal of Group Tensions* 1 (1971) 318–34. More generally, any method that increases empathy increases the chance of forgiveness, see W. Malcolm, S. Warwar, and L. Greenberg, 'Facilitating Forgiveness in Individual Therapy as an Approach to Resolving Interpersonal Injuries', *Handbook of Forgiveness* (ed. Worthington) 379–98.

63 Cf. J. G. Murphy, 'Forgiveness and Resentment', *Forgiveness and Mercy* (ed. J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton; Cambridge: Cambridge University) 14–34 (28). Murphy suggests that an apology can function like a ritual that humiliates the one who apologizes and thereby restores the honour of the offended party.

64 In this respect, Sir 28.2 and Matt 18.21–22/Luke 17.3–4 are rare as the texts imagine interpersonal forgiveness of an equal.

and divine forgiveness helped resolve an otherwise difficult problem of social interaction.

5. Conclusion

For the community of 1 John, divine forgiveness and belonging to the community were integrated to the extent that one equalled the other. 1.9 and 5.16 reflect the outline of practices of public confession, intercession, and forgiveness that mediated God's forgiveness and at the same time reconciled group members who had transgressed the norms of the group. These practices had (at least) two group dynamic functions. First, public confession functioned as a costly signal that deterred less committed group members but was meaningful to committed group members. Second, the ritual induced role-taking, allowing the offended party to both empathize with the offender and restore his or her dignity and honour.