

READING GENESIS 33:1-17 AS KEY TO CIVILITY AND PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Jacob's meeting and reconciliation with Esau as narrated in Genesis 33:1-17 has created problems for interpretation, especially given Jacob's use of subservient language to Esau, his insistence that Esau accepts his gift, and his apparent lying. An analysis of the dialogue using peaceful philosophy reveals that Jacob uses his language to encourage Esau to grant two requests favourably. These are: first, to encourage Esau to forego his right of retaliation for Jacob's stealing of the blessing due to him, narrated in Genesis 27; and second, Jacob desires to remove himself from being with Esau. Neither of these requests is stated openly. Jacob's language is typical of requests in Genesis, but he uses it to portray himself not necessarily a social inferior to Esau, but as a key for peaceful coexistence. This allows Esau to avoid loss of face or feeling of revenge he has been forced by his being supplanted to have, if he grants the two requests. Against this background, the presenter adopts rhetorical and phenomenological approaches to explore and study the concept validity of every relevant dimension of the subject under consideration. This model led to a case presentation analysis, which most probably offers further insights to the understanding of the cause, context, content and aims of the Genesis 33:1-17. The researcher found out that so much depends on a contextual understanding, interpretation and application of Jacob's civil language especially as it matches with some other literary interpretations of the dialogue and gives caution to the appropriateness of the common contextual interpretations that Jacob recompenses to Esau the stolen blessing while Jacob negotiates a peaceful treaty with Esau.

1. Introduction

Genesis 33:1-16, which communicates Jacob's meeting with his separated brother Esau, presents a number of problems for interpreters. One of these problems is Jacob's use of master-slave submissiveness (ynlβdoal; ('my lord/master'^D<)b.[-ta, 'your servant/slave') to a social equal; here, his biological brother. In contrast, Esau uses familial language (namely, yxiPa' 'my brother') but does not correct Jacob's language.¹ In the wider narrative (Genesis 25-33), Jacob's language is ironic. It contrasts with the prediction in Genesis 27:29 that Jacob will 'be lord over his brothers' (^yx,êa;l.

'rybig>hwEÜh/)²and the prediction in Genesis 25:19-23 that Esau will be subject to Jacob. From this, a psychological interpretation, deriving from a possible intent by the narrator of Genesis 25-33 can be suggested: 'Perhaps it feels good, and seems just, for Esau to hear Jacob humble himself in Esau's presence'.³That is, no matter what Jacob intends by his language in Genesis 33, the narrator may be using it as redress for how Jacob has treated Esau in Genesis 25 and 27. For the narrative in Genesis 33 itself, Jacob and Esau's clash of language type raises the question, frequently asked, as to what Jacob intends by using his submissiveness. The most common answer is that he negotiates a treaty with Esau with himself as vassal.⁴ This historical reconstruction interpretation is in keeping with a widely held view that the Jacob-Esau narratives in Genesis, the genealogies of Esau (Genesis 36; 1 Chronicle 1:38-54) and Number 20:14-21, c/f Deuteronomy 2:1-8 reflect various events in the history of Israel/Judah-Edom relations.⁵

A second problem is Jacob's intention with the gift he sent to Esau (Genesis 32:14-22 [13-21]⁶), which Jacob urges Esau to accept in Genesis 33:10-11. This problem is an issue within the narrative, but one that recognises that Genesis 32 and 33 are linked as integral parts of the wider narrative and therefore any determination of Jacob's intention in his language has to recognise that the wider narrative has bearing on it. The most common understanding is that Jacob gives back to Esau the stolen blessing of Genesis 27,⁷ though some argue that Jacob makes reparation or restitution for the stolen blessing.⁸ Only rarely is the comment made that Jacob's language may be intentionally ambiguous: 'Esau is free to interpret it [the intention of the gift] as he wishes'.⁹ Part of this problem is relating what Jacob says in Genesis 33:10-11 to what he says to himself in Genesis 32:21 (20). In the latter, Jacob's purpose for the gift is to 'cover his [Esau's] face' ('hx'n>MiB; wyn"©p' hr"äP.k;a) so that Esau will forgive him wyn"©p' hr"äP.k;a], 'he will lift my face').

Another problem is Jacob's use of hx'Pn>mi (32:14, 21 [13, 20]; 33.10) and hk'r'B. (in 33.11) for the gift. hx'Pn>mi can mean 'tribute', which gives support to the view that Jacob seeks to be a vassal of Esau. However, the language contained in 32:21 (20) is also used in the religious sphere in the context of offerings for forgiveness from hwhy (of. Leviticus 1:4; 21-14; 4:20, 26, 31).¹⁰ Despite Jacob's clear intent in 32:21 (20), there is the possibility that he may intend something else, because his intention is stated in 'self-talk'.¹¹

Clearly there is no agreement on these issues, despite the two common interpretations that Jacob negotiates a treaty with Esau or sought to give back the stolen blessing. Yet, even for these two interpretations there are problems. For the former, the Bible makes no mention of Judah or Israel being vassal to Edom; rather, Edom was the vassal to Judah from about 1000 to 850/840 BCE (2 Samuel 8:14; 2 Kings 8:20). This of course does not deny the possibility that Judah may have been at some point in time a vassal of Edom, but there is no extant evidence, biblical or otherwise, to prove that this occurred. There is, however, evidence of some Edomite influence in southern Judah from the late eighth

century onwards, and Edom as being a threat to Judah in the last years of the kingdom of Judah (cf. Obad. 10-14). After the exile, Edomites who survived the Nabataea invasions migrated to Southern Judaea, a situation possibly reflected in Malachi 1:2-5. There is general agreement that the many prophecies against Edom (e.g. Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 26:12-14; Obadiah 1:14; and Malachi 1:2-5) reflect this long-standing influence, hostility and later migration,¹² which gives impetus for interpreting the references to Esau and Edom in the Pentateuch, as noted above, as reflecting events in Israel/Judah-Edom relations. Yet, in the discussions on Israel/Judah, Edom relations, Genesis 33:1-17 is rarely mentioned.¹³

This is no doubt because of what has been noted: Judah seems to have never been the vassal of Edom. Genesis 33:1-16 therefore needs to be viewed as integral to the story about Jacob as presented in Genesis rather than be thought of as a text that reflects Judah's relations with Edom at some point in Judah's history. For the latter view, that Jacob sought to give back to Esau the stolen blessing, there is the problem that the wider narrative, as it now stands, does not entertain this idea. Genesis 27:33-37 makes it clear that the blessing could not be rescinded. Even if it could be rescinded, Isaac, the only person who could rescind it, is not yet dead (35:27), a matter which prompts Arnold to note that Jacob cannot give the blessing to Esau, since the blessing was not his right to give.¹⁴

What then is Jacob doing with his language in Genesis 33:1-17? This study proposes, with reference to the wider narrative (Genesis 25-33) and also with some reference to the larger biblical inter-text and historical considerations, that Jacob is simply being polite to his brother. Yet, by being polite, he gets what he wants from Esau. This has been noted by others,¹⁵ but a use of civility philosophy will give theoretical grounding to this observation. Specifically, it will be argued that Jacob wants Esau to receive him favourably and so waive his right of revenge for the stolen blessing; and second, that Jacob can remove himself from Esau. Jacob achieves these two wants by using master slave respectful language to construct an identity of social subordination to his brother, recognizing Esau's power to harm him. To assist the argument, civility philosophy will be used to analyse the dialogue between Jacob and Esau.

2. Civility Philosophy

Civility philosophy, especially in its classic expression in Brown and Levinson's *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*,¹⁶ attempts to explain why social harmony occurs in the context of actions that may disrupt relations and how this is achieved. This writer has in a previous article summarised and evaluated this philosophy, especially Brown and Levinson's contribution to it and its applicability to biblical texts, and tested it on Numbers 20:14-21,¹⁷ so will give a brief summary only. The essential argument of civility philosophy is that all people have 'face', which can be defined as a public perception of oneself.¹⁸ 'Face' is essentially a sense of honour that people have about

themselves, whether derived from their own view about themselves or from others' views about them.

Further, all people, barring a few occasions, desire to respect face when they interact with others, both their own face and that of the other. 'Face' is appropriate to the present study because of its frequent use in biblical Hebrew in the preposition *ynEiPl*. (literally, 'to the face/s of') and because of Jacob's reference to Esau's 'face' (~*ynIP*.) in Genesis 32:21 (20) and 33:10. Brown and Levinson's unique contribution to civility philosophy is their argument that there are certain strategies of civility universal to all cultures, and that these can be graded. They argue that people will choose strategies they think are appropriate to their perception of how much face loss they cause to their listener/s.

These strategies are also classified as 'positive civility' and 'negative civility'. 'Positive civility' are those strategies that show approval to the listener (representing people's desire for approval, called 'positive face'), and 'negative civility' are those strategies used to show respect for the listener's desire to be free from imposition (called 'negative face'). In addition, negative civility is considered to be more polite than positive civility. With 'S' referring to the speaker and 'H' the intended hearer of the speaker, the list of strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson reads:

Positive Civility

Notice, attend to H (hearer)
Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy)
Intensify interest to H (hearer)
Use in-group identity markers
Seek agreement
Avoid disagreement
Presuppose/raise/assert common ground
Joke
Assert or presuppose S's (speaker's) knowledge of and concern for H's (hearer's) wants
Offer, promise
Be optimistic
Include both S (speaker) and H (hearer) in the activity
Give (or ask for) reasons
Assume or assert reciprocity
Give gifts to H (hearer) (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation) ¹⁹

Negative Civility

Be conventionally indirect
Question, hedge
Be pessimistic
Minimize the face-threatening action/imposition
Give deference

Apologize

Impersonalize S (speaker) and H (hearer) (avoid 'I' and 'you')

State the face-threatening action (as a general rule)

Nominalise

Go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H (hearer)

In addition to these, there are 'off-record' (where the intention is not stated) and 'bald-on-record' (i.e. an absence of civil language, such as in imperative requests and commands) strategies. Brown and Levinson note that 'bald-on-record' strategies are used mostly by people in power or influence over their listener/s, in situations of urgency, or where the people involved in the interaction decide to dispense with civility. The former is represented in the Hebrew Bible, for example, by 2 Samuel 14:1-24, in which King David did not use civil language to the wise woman or to Joab. Brown and Levinson also argue that 'off-record' strategies are the most civil of all civility strategies as they allow the bearer complete freedom to interpret the speaker's intent.²⁰ On the whole, civil language is essentially an exercise in ambiguity and manipulation: encouraging a hearer to respond favourably to what is said or requested without them feeling they have been coerced. In this article, Brown and Levinson's distinction between positive civility and negative civility is accepted, but not their grading of politeness strategies. This is due to Jacob's use of a number of strategies, and a lack of data from Ancient Israel that allows attempts to grade civility strategies.²¹

Civility philosophy has yet to become familiar in biblical studies. It is used in some doctoral dissertations but always in conjunction with other interpretative strategies.²² A few publications use civility philosophy, but the topics for which it is used to assist discussion-deferential language in biblical texts,²³ self-abasement,²⁴ analysis of the particle 'ab';²⁵ honour-shame dynamics,²⁶ Hebrew language letter-ostraca from the pre-exilic period,²⁷ Egyptian letters,²⁸ and rhetorical questions in biblical prose²⁹ - indicate its usefulness as an experiential tool for analysing both biblical texts and other texts from the Ancient Near East.

3. Jacob and Esau's Dialogue

Genesis 33:1-17 is a dialogue which contains five rounds (i.e. each participant in the interaction has a turn speaking), headed by an introduction in which Jacob bows to Esau and a conclusion in which both go their separate ways.

Introduction (verses 1-4) Jacob and Esau meet; Jacob bows to Esau

Round 1 (verses 5-7) Esau asks about Jacob's family; Jacob focuses on the children

Round 2 (verse 8) Esau asks about the gift; Jacob says it is to find favour

Round 3 (verses 9-11) Esau objects to receiving the gift; Jacob insists he accept it

Round 4 (verses 12-14) Esau asks to accompany Jacob; Jacob refuses

Round 5 (verse 15) Esau offers protection; Jacob refuses

Conclusion (verses 16-17) Esau and Jacob go their separate ways

Even though Esau initiates all rounds of the dialogue, it is Jacob who acts first when they meet: he bows to Esau (v. 3). Bowing is a form of deference, representing the negative civility strategy, ‘give deference’. Jacob continues this strategy of civility with his master-slave deference to Esau in the dialogue (verses 5, 8, 13-15). By using deference, Jacob places himself in the role of social inferior to Esau, despite being Esau’s brother. His seven-fold obeisance ([b;v,ä ‘hc’r>a;’ WxT;Ûv.YIw: ~h, _ynEp.li) is parallels a common element in prostration formulae in Amama, Ugaritic and Hittite correspondence.³⁰ It is this parallel that no doubt encourages the interpretation that Jacob acts as a vassal toward Esau, being used by vassals to an overlord.³¹ However, as already noted above, there is no biblical or other extant evidence indicating Israel/Judah was a vassal to Edom, which could give rise to this narrative. Further, Genesis 33.1-17, as it stands, does not include Esau imposing obligations on Jacob. In addition, other narratives in Genesis contain both bowing and the use of master-slave deference to a bearer in the role of social superior (18:1-5; 19:2; 42:6-13; 43:26-28; 46:31-47.6; and 50:15-18). Other texts that have a high use of master-slave respect but without bowing are 19:18-20 and 44:18-34.

All these texts use the form of respect, wyxi(a' - d[; (‘my lord/master; your servant/slave’), which Jacob uses in 33:5, 8 and 13-15 (rounds one, two and five of the dialogue). A reduced form of respectful language, ‘yn"doa — ynia/ wnxnia (‘my lord’- ‘I/we’), is found in Genesis 18:23-32; 23:3-16; 47:18-19 and 31:35.³² Jacob also uses this form of deference in rounds four and five of the dialogue (33:12-15). Though wyxi(a' - — yniarespect may seem less polite than , wyxi(a' - d[; respect, since the first-person is used, it is used in conjunction with other civility strategies and so should not be automatically viewed as a reduction in civility, as will be argued below. The comparison of Jacob’s speaking with these other texts in Genesis serves to show that Jacob’s style of speaking is not unusual. What is unusual, and hence the cause for comment, is that he uses this language to Esau. Esau is Jacob’s brother, and therefore his social equal. Civility philosophy predicts that social equals do not, or need not use polite language to each other. This is borne out in Genesis 14:21-24; 20:9-13; 21:22-24; 26:26-29; and 34, in which the patriarchal family interacts with other peoples in Canaan (cf., Jacob’s interaction with Pharaoh in Genesis 47:7-10). The impression conveyed is that they and these peoples are equals. As has already been noted, Esau does not correct Jacob. This implies that Esau accepts Jacob’s language; that is, Esau knows what Jacob is doing. The explanation for Jacob’s use of respect (both in obeisance and, ‘yn"doa — ynia/ wnxnialanguage) comes from Genesis itself.

As is well-known, Jacob has stolen the blessing due to Esau (Genesis 27) and Esau has threatened revenge (27:41). Jacob, now returning to Canaan after his lengthy stay in Haran (Genesis 29-31), has to deal with Esau’s threat. That this is real fear is found in Genesis 32:8 (7) (self-talk) and 32:10-13 [9-12] (prayer). The narrator has not indicated Esau’s intention. Jacob assumes Esau has the power to harm him and his family (Genesis 32:12 [11]).³³ This fear of Esau is the driving emotion behind his large gift to Esau in the

hope the gift will appease him (; wyn"©p' hr"äP.k;a],/yn")p' aF"iyIv. 21 [20]). In effect, Jacob has a request of Esau: he wants him not to carry out his threat of revenge. Deferential language is appropriate in this context, and is used in similar contexts elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In 1 Sam. 25.23-31 Abigail requests David not to kill her husband Nabal. In this narrative, Abigail is at least socially equal if not superior to David (David is an outlaw in 1 Samuel 25). Similarly, in 1 Kings 20:32 Ben-hadad, king of Aram, defeated by Israel in a battle, uses respectful language to the king of Israel in a request to be allowed to live. These three situations-Jacob to Esau, Abigail to David, and Ben-hadad to the king of Israel-are the only instances narrated in the Hebrew Bible where a social equal (or even a superior) to a hearer uses respectful language.³⁴ All deal with the large imposition (i.e. request) on the bearer of sparing life. Civil language is needed to defuse the potential loss of face to the hearer if s/he accedes to the request.

Respect achieves this maintenance of the hearer's face by conveying a power difference between speaker and hearer. It has the effect of abasing the speaker, that is, reducing the speaker's social standing relative to the hearer. At the same time, it raises the standing of the bearer relative to the speaker. By using respectful language, the speaker recognises that the bearer cannot be coerced to act in accordance with the request.³⁵ Respect makes a favourable response to the request appear to be an act of grace or benevolence; that is, freely given by the bearer. Therefore, if the hearer grants the request, his/her sense of honour is not diminished. In Jacob's case, he abases himself as Esau's 'servant' (^D<)b.[;) and raises Esau as the 'master' or 'lord' yn"doa). The use of ^D<)b.[and yn"doa\ suits because slaves were social inferiors (e.g. they were a possession [e.g. Exodus 21:21; Leviticus 25:44-46], subject to abuse [Exodus 21:20-21], had less redress at law than for a free person [Exodus 21:20-27, 32; Leviticus 19:20-22], and slavery was a state people did not desire to be in or have their children subject to [e.g. 2 Kings 4:1; Nehemiah 5:4])³⁶ and it recognizes that the hearer has 'power' over the speaker, whether it is formal³⁷ or informal.³⁸ In the case of Jacob, Esau's 'power' over him is informal and based on physical force: Esau has the power to harm him and Jacob fears this. Esau's lack of correction of Jacob's language indicates he accepts the role of superior status person given to him by Jacob and that Jacob is making requests of him.

As already noted, Jacob reduces his deference from '(yn"doa|- ^D<)b.[;) toyn"doa- ynia, prominent in rounds 4 and 5 in the dialogue (Genesis 33:12-15), in which Jacob refuses to accompany Esau or allow Esau's men to accompany him. The only use of yn"doa|- ^D<)b.[; respect by Jacob in this part of the dialogue is in his counter request in verse 14^a, yn[ua]w: AD=b.[; ynEåp.li ynIßdoa) an"i-rb'[]y:('Please let my lord pass over before his servant'). The reduction in respect should not be seen as less civil. Verses 13-14 function as a civility strategy, 'giving reasons', for the counter-request of verse 14^a.

Giving reasons for a request may seem obvious, but this does not deny it being a civility strategy in its own right. It is a form of claiming that speaker and hearer are co-operators on the matter. The speaker presents reasons to appeal to the bearer that this is why they

would want the request for themselves if they were in the speaker’s situation. ³⁹This phenomenon of reduced respect when reasons are given for a request is also found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. 1 Samuel 1:16^b; 25:28^c-29; also in Genesis 44:20-31^a), so Jacob’s strategy should be understood as being in keeping with what is expected of rhetoric in the context of making requests. Jacob’s ambiguous response, ynI]doaj ynEiy[eB. !xEß-ac'm.a, ('let me find favour in the eyes of my lord', verse 15^b), to Esau’s request that Jacob allow some of his men to accompany him also shows civility. Here, Jacob uses an ‘off-record’ statement that has the intention of ‘no’. The civility of ynI]doaj ynEiy[eB. !xEß-ac'm.a, is evident by the fact that Esau has to guess Jacob’s intention, then decide whether to accept it or not. The natural ambiguity in off-record statements gives the impression that Jacob lies to Esau, especially since he claims that he will follow Esau (verse 14)

yn:p'l.-rv,a] hk'Ûal'M.h ;lg<r<'l. yJi^aail. hl'äh)n"t.a,(ynI]ua]w: AD=b.[; ynEâp.li ynIßdoaj
an"i-rb[[]y:

`hr"y[i(fe,ynIßdoaj]-la aboia'-rv,a] d[;² ~ydIêl'y>h; lg<r<â.l.W ‘

“Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on gently, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come unto my lord unto Seir”, but does not (v. 17).⁴⁰

`tAK)su ~AqßM'h;~vear"iq' !KE±-l[;tKoêshfä[' `WhnE'q.mil.WtyIB"+ Alß !b,YIiw:
ht'Koêsu [s;än" 'bqo[[]y:w>

“And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him a house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth”.

Yet, increasingly, it is being recognized that Esau understands Jacob to be polite.⁴¹As Waltke comments, Jacob ‘could not refuse him directly without offending him and risking his anger’.⁴² That Esau accepts the statement without remonstrance indicates he has guessed Jacob’s off-record request. Jacob also gives reasons in verses 10^b and 11^b (third round), when he insists Esau should accept his gift as is in Genesis 32:14-22 (13-21). However, here, Jacob’s language is surprisingly direct, with respect being absent. It is surprising because Jacob insists that Esau accept his hk|r.b./hxnmo of chapter 32, and the rest of the dialogue hinges on this acceptance. However, like for verses 13-15, respect is replaced by other forms of civil language.

In fact, verses 10-11 contain the greatest concentration of civil forms in the dialogue. This concentration indicates that respect should not be used as the sole criterion to measure civility in biblical texts. Jacob, in countering Esau’s initial refusal to accept thehxnmo, starts with the use of an"-la; in a conditional clause: ^yn<ëy[eB. ‘!xeytiac'Ûm' an"~ai ‘an"-la; (‘No, please, if I have found favour in your eyes’, verse 10^a). This is customary softening (‘an")⁴³in conjunction with the negativecivility strategy, ‘question, hedging’. ⁴⁴His intent is to imply that Esau has already received him favourably, evident by the embracing and tears in verse 4. The mention of favour adds to Jacob’s respect: it reflects recognition that Esau has power over him.

As Clark argues when discussing requests for favour ('!xe) in the Hebrew Bible, 'the subject of the verb is or acts as if he were in a positive but sub-ordinate formal relationship to the grantor'.⁴⁵ The rest of verse 10 is the positive civility strategy-'give reasons'-for Jacob's request, 'Please, take my gift which has been brought to you' %l'ëtab'ähurv<ää] 'yik'r>Bi-ta, an"Ü-xq; (*if now I have found favor in thy sight,*) in verse 11^a. However, it includes the comment that 'to see your [i.e. Esau's] face is like seeing the face of God' (~yhiPl{a/ ynEiP. tao±r>Ki ^yn<©p' ytiyaiär' !Keú-l[;;), which is a use of another positive civility strategy-'exaggerate interest to H'. Despite the clear allusion to the incident at Peniel (Genesis 32:23-31 [22-30]), Jacob flatters Esau. As a character, Esau does not know about Jacob's wrestling with God. The flattery works on the assumption that Esau has already received him favourably. The use of an to soften a request is also found in Genesis 33:11a, in which Jacob requests Esau to accept thehx>nmi /tik'r>Bi. ⁴⁶The rest of Jacob's statement lko+-yli-vy<ykiäw> ~yhiPl{a/ ynIN:ix;-yKi(, 'because God has shown me favour and I have everything', verse 11^b), despite functioning as 'reasons', is also the negative civility strategy 'minimize the imposition'. The 'imposition' Jacob deals with now is the threat to Esau's face if he accepts the hx>nmi /tik'r>Bi too quickly. If Esau has accepted the hx>nmi /tik'r>Bi quickly, he would demean himself. ⁴⁷Jacob minimizes this face-threat by inferring the hx>nmi /tik'r>Bi costs him little to give.

Behind all of Jacob's civil language lies his ultimate request why he wants Esau to accept the hx>nmi /tik'r>Bi, expressed in verse 8^b and 32.21 (20): to be accepted. But why insist on Esau accepting the gift? Esau has already shown acceptance of Jacob, evidenced by his embracing of Jacob and tears in 33.4, his use ofyxia], ('my brother') in his initial refusal to accept the gift (verse 9), and his claim he has much (br" _ yliä-vy<). yxia is in group language and represents that Esau considers to have a (restored) relationship with Jacob. It also indicates social equality between the two brothers. See also 1 Kings 20,32-33, where an exchange of 'yxia precedes the treaty negotiations between Ben-hadad and the king of Israel alter their battle: a friendly reciprocal relationship is started. Esau's claim, br" _ yliä-vy, is an implicit comment that he no longer considers the stolen blessing of Genesis 27 to matter, and hence he accepts Jacob. What Jacob is doing in his insistence that Esau accept the an/HDWD is to ensure that he will forego his right of revenge for the stealing of the blessing. By accepting the hx>nmi /tik'r>Bi Esau cannot renege on his acceptance-he is obligated to Jacob-that is, he foregoes any retribution and so formally relinquishes his claim on the blessing. In this interpretation, Jacob's hx>nmi /tik'r>Bi is reparation.

This phenomenon of obligation inherent in accepting a gift, as with reduced respect when reasons are given for a request, is found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Proverbs 18:16 and 21:14 mention the power inherent in giving gifts, and 1 Samuel 30:26-31 and 2 Samuel 2:4 narrate David's giving spoils of raids to the leaders of Judah and his acceptance by them as king of Judah. ⁴⁸This may suggest that the biblical authors reflect a cultural practice in ancient Israel,⁴⁹ an idea that is given support by social anthropology.

⁵⁰The Genesis 33 narrative indicates awareness of the issues involved in gift giving and acceptance by taking two rounds in the dialogue plus direct narration to resolve the acceptance of Jacob's gift. In effect, this is Jacob's key purpose in his meeting with Esau: he wants Esau to forego his right of revenge for the stolen blessing. It represents an 'implied' or indirect request. Once Jacob is satisfied that Esau will forego his right of revenge, the rest of the dialogue revolves around Jacob's off-record request to be removed from his brother. Despite Esau's friendly and accepting manner, Jacob wants to have as little to do with him as he possibly can. The narrative adds to this by not indicating whether the meeting was successful, but instead moving directly to Jacob and Esau's going their separate ways (Genesis 33.16-17). However, it should be assumed that the meeting was successful, since no further problems between Jacob and Esau are narrated in Genesis.

Both of Jacob's purposes are big 'impositions' in terms of potential face-threat to Esau. In relation to Jacob's use of deferential language and Esau's non-correction of it, it is not language of a vassal or language used by a subject to a king, despite its similarity to this conventional language of the ancient Near East. It is simply Jacob's recognition that Esau has power to harm him.

What is civility?

The Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary defines civility as polite, reasonable, and respectful behaviour. Linda Fisher Thornton, a leading voice in ethical leadership, suggests that "these behaviours are the ones we use when we treat others with care," thereby linking civility with ethical behaviour through The Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would wish to be treated.⁵¹

In Nicole Billante and Peter Saunders' article,⁵² they note three elements of civility: "respect, relations with strangers, and self-regulation". Billante and Saunders describe civility as a public virtue, "behaviour in public which demonstrates respect for others and which entails curtailing one's own immediate self-interest when appropriate". In sum, they view civility as respecting "the Other," which assumes some level of selflessness.

Civility can also be seen when a person is willing to embrace diversity and respect individuals with differing backgrounds, values, and beliefs. Making a point to listen to others and respond to the actual meanings they are trying to communicate - whether or not they are expressly articulated in words - is another example of civility. Being mindful of the sensitivities of those with whom you speak and adjusting your own speech and conduct accordingly also demonstrates civility.

Civility is about more than just politeness. It is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening beyond one's preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same. Indeed, "civility represents a long tradition of moral virtues essential to democracy. Virtues like empathy,

humility, integrity, honesty, and respect for others are ideals of democratic engagement.” Without civility a society can transform into verbal, harsh, offensive verbal attacks on one another which is the way things are headed in Nigeria today.

Civility means to act as one would in a settled city wherein law and manners, not force and passion, guide the interchanges of the public order as well as the normal affairs of humankind within their homes and voluntary associations. Civility presupposes reason but includes courtesy, compassion, and good taste. It usually involves a written or unwritten constitution that broadly defines the orders of procedure for ordinary human exchanges of opinions. It details, through proportionate sanctions, the degree to which the public order is violated by disordered actions. A constitution itself recognises, at least implicitly, the possibility of a law higher than itself. A constitution’s own authority to be followed does not depend on itself, but on the citizens for whom it is intended. They, in turn, cannot will just anything. They too are subject to the reasonableness of the things that are, including what they are.

Incivility, by contrast, means the refusal to adhere to commonly accepted standards and customs. It indicates a breakdown, either minor or major, in the public order wherein differing opinions are normally and peacefully worked out among reasonable people who do not always agree with one another. Almost all incivility justifies itself by appealing to something higher than existing laws and customs. This “something higher” may be God, or one’s own will, a constitution, or a theoretical system we have usually come to designate as an ideology. An ideology is an impression or system of interrelated philosophies that are self-justifying as the explanation of how things ought to be. They indicate a pattern or order that is to be put into effect as the solution to a given polity’s own inherent problems.

Is Civility Possible in Nigeria Today?

In this 21st century Nigerian nation, seeming incivility of the political and administrative leadership is very alarming. The country appears to be radically divided. There is even talk of a new kind of civil war. Being in whatever leadership position in Nigeria seemsto be an avenue to administrative recklessness. Achebe clearly observes that, “*there are simply too many political actors on our stage whose prime purpose in grabbing power seems to be no higher than a desire to free themselves from every form of civilised restraint in their public and private lives*”⁵³. This they achieve through incivility, dishonesty, indiscipline, favouritism and ethnic sentiment. The practice of these anti-societal ideologies made Nigeria to be a morally bankrupt society. It makes her a nation where incivility reigns; indeed, a nation that does not mind values and virtues. Civil unity depends on an agreed vision of what humankind is and what the world is. When this agreement is lacking, nothing can really hold that society together.

The country appears to be radically divided. Our streets often seem to look more like revolutionary chaos than civilised society. National and world media dwell on these

chaotic scenes. The adamant spirit makes self-rule difficult if not impossible. Force seems increasingly to substitute for reason and compromise. No common agreement can be found when the very first principles of reason are said to be mere opinions, when they are based on what we will have, not on what is right to have.

Preserve cities, in their self-justification, resemble nothing so much as the nullification theories from the South and the North. Both the national and the local governments claim freedom to enforce only the laws they choose to enforce. This attitude leaves many laws unenforced. A law that is not enforced is, in effect, no law. Rumours, of dubious credibility, hint Nigeria, and make some people want to secede from the nation. No one lifts a finger to retain it.

Rude behaviour and offensive gestures seem on the rise driven by a lack of civility. Given the scope of incivility in our daily lives, each of us should look for ways to decrease these negative behaviours that can cause distress to ourselves and others. If we don't, there will continue to be a growing problem with cyber bullying that sometimes leads to suicide, especially among the youth.

Respect for human dignity is the foundation of human morality because no normal traditional society norm encourages incivility of any form. Abuse of human dignity in any form should be discouraged because human beings deserve dignity by the fact that they are human. Incivility is a negative value, which is very prevalent in Nigerian Society of today. It is pertinent to involve the value of civility in restructuring Nigeria. This will help to forestall any violence, threat, humiliation and retaliation of any kind in Nigerian society.

4. Conclusion

In reference to the wider narrative found in (Genesis 25-33) and in connection with the larger biblical inter-text and historical considerations, it is obvious that Jacob was simply being polite to his brother Esau. Hence, he was able to secure the former's forgiveness. Therefore, one sees that the way to build a better, civil society is to advance the cause of greater ethics. One needs to think about how his/her actions affect others in the context of how they would wish to be treated in similar situations. This requires looking inside oneself in order to understand the difference between right from wrong; good from bad, and then acting in accordance with beliefs which are driven by moral virtues.

Civility cultivates a civil code of decency. It requires disciplining one's impulses for the sake of others. It demands freeing one's self from self-absorption. Since civility is that moral glue without which society could fall apart, by committing to ethical behaviour; one can help bring civility back to society. Civil unity depends on an agreed vision of what humankind is and what the world is. When this agreement is lacking, nothing can really hold that society together. Incivility increasingly becomes dangerous when many citizens just do not follow the letter or spirit of the polity. Discord becomes the

instrument whereby a society disintegrates, separates itself into factions. People want to form their own state with their own laws.

This study suggests that the most important attribute that brings in commitment and engagement is respect. The research found that respect gives rise to much higher levels of health and well-being; drives greater enjoyment, satisfaction, and meaning for living; and had better focus and a greater ability to prioritise. Those feeling respected are also much more likely to engage with work, tasks and positively inclined to stay at peace with others. The study concludes that when the issue of civility is systematically addressed the nation would be a better place to live in.

Endnote

David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (BeritOlam; Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), pp. 249, 251.

²E.g. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 229; Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 289. 'Ada' ('lord') is only found in Genesis 37:29, 37. The feminine equivalent, 'Ada', means 'mistress' (Genesis 16:6-8) or 'queen mother' (2 Kings 10:13); see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (WBC, 210; Waco TX Word Books, 1994), p.210.

³ Cotter, *Genesis*, p. 251.

⁴See, e.g., Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: WW. Norton, 1996), p. 179; Cotter, *Genesis*, pp. 243, 248-51; and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (trans. I. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p. 525; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman: 2005), p. 454, and Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 346, also talk in terms of Jacob being a vassal, but both ultimately view him as in a subject-to-a-king relationship with Esau.

⁵See, e.g., Elie Assis, 'From Adam to Esau and Israel: An Anti-Edomite Ideology in 1 Chronicles 1', *VT* 56 (2006), pp. 287-302; Juan Manuel Tebes, "'You shall not abhor and Edomite, for he is your Brother": The Tradition of Esau and the Edomite Genealogies from an Anthropological Perspective', *JHS* 6 (2006): Article 6 (www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHSO); John R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSup, 77; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), pp. 178-84 (for Genesis 27 and 33); Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 4a; New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 939, 485, 491-92; P.J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC, 5; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), p. 225; and John Sturdy, *Numbers* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 2, 141.

⁶Throughout this study, biblical references follow the MT verse numbering, with any variant English numbering in parentheses.

⁷ See, e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 526; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, pp. 288-89; Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press,

2003), p. 470; Arnold, Genesis, p. 289 (a replacement for the original); William D. Reymond and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* (New York: United Bible Society, 1997), p. 777 (Jacob offers 'to share the blessing').

⁸For restitution, see Alter, Genesis, p. 186; Mathews, Genesis, p. 570; John E. Hartley, Genesis (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2000), p. 289. For reparation, see V. Hamilton, Genesis 18 50, p. 346; Waltke, Genesis, p. 455; and Sama, Genesis, p. 230. Paul R. Noble, 'Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions', VT 52 (2002), pp. 219-52 (238 n. 19), argues that Jacob's change in terms represents an expression of goodwill.

⁹Sama, Genesis, p. 227.

¹⁰Noted by the commentators, e.g., Mathews, Genesis, p. 570, and Wenham, Genesis 16-50, p. 292; and canvassed by Bruce K. Waltke, Genesis: A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 455. Cf. M. Weinfeld, 'ht'ieîmi, minhah', TDOT, V111, p. 416, who also notes the religious nature of Jacob's language; see also Sama, Genesis, p. 230.

¹¹Based on Robert Alter, 'Character in the Bible', Commentary 66.4 (1978), pp. 5865 (59), incorporated in Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), Chapter 1.

¹²See, e.g., Johanna Stiebert, 'The Maligned Patriarch: Prophetic Ideology and the "Bad Press" of Esau', in A.G. Hunter and R.R. Davies (ed.), *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll* (JSOTSup, 348; London: Shemeld Academic Press, 2002), pp. 33-48; Elie Assis, 'Why Edom? On the Hostility towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources', VT 56 (2006), pp. 1-20.

¹³For example, in Diana Vikander Edelman (ad), *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition* (Archaeology and Biblical Studies, 3; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), Genesis 33 does not appear in the index of biblical references. That is, this passage has not been discussed in any of the essays, nor is it discussed in J.R. Bartlett, 'The Brotherhood of Edom', JSOT 4 (1977), pp. 2-27. Il-Sennng Chung, *A Revisionist Reading of the Esau Jacob Stories in Genesis 25 36 Understanding Esau, in a Positive Light* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), pp. 222-23, also notes the lack of 'political' interpretation of Gen. 33:21-17. By "'political" interpretation', Chung means the Israel/Judah Edom relations that are argued to lie behind the Esau-Jacob narratives in Genesis.

¹⁴Arnold, Genesis, p. 289.

¹⁵Cotter, Genesis, p. 249: 'Jacob is effusive in his gestures of self-deprecation, but Esau does not gainsay him'; and Waltke, Genesis, p. 452: Jacob is a 'shrewd but non-malevolent diplomat'. Cf. Mathews, Genesis, p. 568.

¹⁶Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use* (SIS, 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1987).

¹⁷Edward J. Bridge, 'Polite Israel and Impolite Edom: Israel's Request to Travel through Edom in Numbers 20:14-21', JSOT 35 (2010), pp. 77-88. See also D.J. Goldsmith, 'Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory', in B. B. Whaley and W. Samter (eds), *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars* (LCS; Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), pp. 219-36, for a general summary and critique.

¹⁸This definition of 'face' is derived from E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 5, cited in Goldsmith, 'Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory', p. 220,

¹⁹19. Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 69. 20. On this, see Bridge, 'Polite Israel', pp. 87-88.

²⁰Cotter, *Genesis*, p. 249: 'Jacob is effusive in his gestures of self-deprecation, but Esau does not gainsay him'; and Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 452: Jacob is a 'shrewd but nonmalevolent diplomat'. Cf. Mathews, *Genesis*, p. 568.

²¹*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38.3 (2014)

²²Edward J. Bridge, 'The Use of Slave Terms as Deference and in Relation to God in the Hebrew Bible' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Macquarie University, 2011); Bryan D. Estelle, 'Know Before Whom You Stand: The Language of Deference in Some Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Documents' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Catholic University of America 2001); Robert M. Johnson, 'The Words in their Mouths: A Linguistic and Literary Analysis of the Dialogues in the Book of Ruth' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1993).

²³E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET, 14; Kampen: KokPharos, 1996), pp. 267-74; Bryan Estelle, 'The Use of Deferential Language in the Arames Correspondence and Biblical Aramaic Compared', *Maarav* 13 (2006), pp. 43-76.

²⁴Edward J. Bridge, 'Self-abasement as an Expression of Thanks in the Hebrew Bible', *Bib* 92 (2011), pp. 255-73.

²⁵Ahouva Shulman, 'The Panicle *ab*' in Biblical Hebrew Prose', *HS* 40 (1990), pp. 57-82; Timothy Wilt, 'A Sociolinguistic Analysis of *mi*', *VT* 46 (1996), pp. 237-55; Bent Christiansen, 'A Linguistic Analysis of the Biblical Particle *n5*): A Test Case', *VT* 59 (2009), pp. 379-93. All three scholars argue that *ab* is conventional politeness.

²⁶Johan H. Coetzee, 'Politeness Strategies in the So-called "Enemy Psalms": An Inquiry into Israelite Prayer Rhetoric', in 8.15. Porter and D.L. Stamps (eds), *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (JSOTSup, 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 209-36.

²⁷Edward J. Bridge, 'Polite Language in the Lachish Letters', *VT* 60 (2010), pp. 518-34; Benjamin Thomas, 'The Language of Politeness in Ancient Hebrew Letters', *HS* 50 (2009), pp. 17-39.

²⁸K. Ridealgh, 'Yes Dear! Spousal Dynamics in the Late Ramesside Letters', in M. Horn et al. (eds), *Current Research in Egyptology 2010: Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Symposium* (Oxford: Oxbow Press, 2011), pp. 124-30.

²⁹Adina Moshavi, 'What Can I Say? Implications and Communicative Functions of Rhetorical "WH" Questions in Classical Biblical Hebrew Prose', *VT* 64 (2014), pp. 93-108

³⁰See Harry A. Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom* (SBLWAW, 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), pp. 29-30, for a brief discussion. For the argument that 'seven times' obeisance was standard courtly protocol, see Samuel E. Loewenstamm, 'Prostration from Afar in Ugaritic, Accadian and Hebrew', *BASOR* 188 (1967), pp. 41-43; this is hinted at also by Hoffner (p. 32), citing others.

³¹This is especially so in the Amama corpus: the vassal kings of Canaan use it constantly in their missives to the king of Egypt. For Ugaritic letters, studies tend to correlate the use of epistolary formulae with relative status between sender and recipient. See, e.g., Robert Hawley, 'Studies in Ugaritic Epistolography' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2003), pp. 49-63; and F. Brent Knutson, 'Literary genres in PRU IV', in L.R. Fisher (ed.), *RasShamra Parallels* (AnOr, 50; 2 vols.; Rome: PontificumIstitutumBiblicum, 1975), II, pp. 153-214 (206). Both scholars, however, argue that when the prostration is not used, relative status is small. This agrees with politeness theory, which states that when social distance and/or power difference between speaker and hearer is small, the speaker will reduce his/her politeness.

³²Of these texts, Genesis 23: 3-16 and 47:18-19 have plural speakers, yet the singular 'yn"doa is used. Perhaps a spokesperson is envisaged, much like Judah's role in 44:16. The same occurs in the dialogue of 42: 6-16 (v. 10).

³³Mois A. Navon, 'The Kiss of Esau', *JBQ* 35 (2007), pp. 127:31, interprets the early Rabbinic interpretation, that Esau attempted to bite Jacob when he 'fell on' Jacob's neck and kissed him in Gen. 33.4, however his teeth were broken, as indicating that Jacob needed a miracle to be spared from Esau. That is, the early Rabbis understood Jacob's fear of Esau to be a real fear.

³⁴Gen. 18.3-5 and 19.2 could be included, but it is debateable as to whether Abraham and Lot respectively recognized their visitors as more than human, despite the MT's vocalization of 'J'IR in 18.3 as 13113, meaning 'my lords' (so Alter, *Genesis*, p. 77) or 'my Lord'--that is, an address to God (most commentators). By 19.18-20, Lot knows his visitors are powerful.

³⁵Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 178.

³⁶For discussion and literature, see Edward J. Bridge, 'The Metaphoric Use of Slave Terms in the Hebrew Bible', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23 (2013), pp. 18-20.

³⁷E.g. king over a subject (2 Samuel 14; 19:34-37), official over a subject (2 Samuel 20:15-22), king over an official (2 Samuel 14:22; 24.3), high official over a foreigner (Genesis 44:18-34), and God over a worshipper (e.g. 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalm 116; 119:122-125)

³⁸E.g. David over Abigail (1 Samuel 25:23-31), Nabal over David (1 Samuel 25:8), and Elisha as a prophet over the foreign military captain, Naaman (2 Kings 5.17-19)

³⁹Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 102.

⁴⁰E.g. V. Hamilton, *Genesis* 18-50, pp. 346-47; Sama, *Genesis*, p. 231.

⁴¹Arnold, *Genesis*, p. 290; Reyburn and Fry, *Handbook*, p. 780; Mathews. *Genesis* p. 571; Wenham, *Genesis* 16-50, p. 300. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis* 12-36, p. 527: 'The decision to separate, veiled though it is. . .'

⁴²Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 456.

⁴³See n. 24 above.

⁴⁴Even Westermann, *Genesis* 12 36, 523, following one grammar, recognizes that 'a conditional clause may express a request'.

⁴⁵W. Malcolm Clark, 'The Righteousness of Noah', VT 21 (1971), pp. 261-80 (262). See also Ina Willi-Plein, 'Die Bin Übersetzungsproblem: Gedanken zu Sach XII 10', VT 23 (1973), pp. 90-99 (93), cited in Westermann, Genesis 12: 36, p. 278.

⁴⁶Christiansen, 'Linguistic Analysis', p. 391, argues that NJ with the imperative indicates heightened politeness. This may be the case here, since the narrator has Jacob insisting Esau take the gift (Genesis 33.11).

⁴⁷Face loss in too-ready an acceptance of a gift is usually assumed for the ancient Near East, but see Mark W. Hamilton, 'At Whose Table? Stories of Elites and Social Climbers in 1-2 Samuel', VT59 (2009), pp. 513-32 (519), for evidence from the Ugaritic literary text, The Tale of Kirta, along with social anthropological analysis,

⁴⁸See also M. Hamilton, 'At Whose Table?', which discusses gift-giving in 1 Samuel 25 and 2 Samuel 19 along with rhetoric; and Victor H. Matthews, 'The Unwanted Gift: Implications of Obligatory Gift Giving in Ancient Israel', Semeria 87 (1999), pp. 91-104 (cited in M. Hamilton, 'At Whose Table?', p., 530).

⁴⁹M. Hamilton, 'At whose Table?' pp. 531-32.

⁵⁰M. Hamilton, 'At whose Table?' p. 519. See also Michelle Stephen, 'Reparation and the Gift', Ethos 28 (2000), pp. 119-46 (119-21). Hamilton and Stephen both refer to the important work of Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (trans. W.D. Halls; New York; W.W. Norton, 1990).

⁵¹Kleingeld, Pauline and Brown, Eric, "Cosmopolitanism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/cosmopolitanism>>.

⁵²Yu, Pauline. "Civility and Its Discontents: Public Discourse and the Humanities." Speech. College of Humanities Dean's Forum. Ohio State University, Columbus. 2005. Web. 29 Sept. 2011 <<http://www.acls.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/PresTalks/05CivilityanditsDiscontents.pdf>>.

⁵³For more context on Pangea Day, watch "Pangea Day Trailer" (www.pangeaday.org/?vid=1) and then watch "Global Storytellers" (www.pangeaday.org/index.php?vid=3). 1983 p.81)