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‘How much evil he has done to your saints?’:
Ananias, Saul, and a Christian approach to the Contact Hypothesis in the Scottish refugee context

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Abstract

This article offers an exegetical and theological reading of Ananias’ involvement in Saul’s restoration (Acts 9:10–19) through the lens of the Contact Hypothesis. In this pericope, Ananias’ response balances an honest acknowledgement of the effects of Saul’s violence on his community with a courageous commitment to risky, personal contact. The paper argues that the Ananias-Saul narrative can provide both a theological perspective on, and a corrective to, the Contact Hypothesis, developing a praxis-based model for responding to the effects of violence and to its perpetrators. Case studies are drawn from the author’s experience in an integration sports project in Glasgow that facilitated contact among refugees, asylum seekers, and communities on either side of the city’s sectarian divide.

Introduction

As remarkable as the supernatural nature of Saul’s Damascus road revelation is, so too is the follow-up (Acts 9:1–9), namely the bravery of

Ananias as the unexpected facilitator of Saul's restoration and integration into the Christian community. The example of Ananias can serve as a challenge, an inspiration, and a model for the Christian praxis of reconciliation and peacebuilding in the aftermath of suffering. In this article, first, I offer an exegetical and theological interpretation of Acts 9:10–19, focusing on the figure of Ananias. Second, I propose that this passage can guide us towards a distinctly Christian approach to the Contact Hypothesis (henceforth CH). This social psychological theory will be elucidated through examples drawn from my own experience working with refugees and asylum seekers in Glasgow, followed by concluding reflections on what a distinctly Christian approach to contact might look like and the corrective insights the theory itself offers to Christian praxis.

Setting the scene: Ananias, Saul's violence, suffering, and restoration

After an interlude about the ministry of Philip the Evangelist in the wake of the great persecution that followed the murder of Stephen, Luke[1] brings a shadowy 'young man'[2] by the name of Saul into the narrative. In Acts 7:58, Stephen's assailants lay their garments at the feet of Saul, which suggests that he had some role in orchestrating the violence.[3] Saul, however, is not part of the mob violence described in Acts 7:54. He is depicted as more calculated: approving, but at a distance, so as not to get his hands dirty by lifting a stone. In Acts 9:1–2, he is described as 'still

[1] Most critical scholars agree that the same author wrote both the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles, viewing them as a single, two-part narrative called 'Luke-Acts'; see Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 1: The Gospel According to Luke* (Fortress Press, 1986), 1–9. Christian tradition has identified the author with Paul's companion Luke, mentioned in the epistles (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Philem 1:24), although the text itself is technically anonymous. For a defence of Lukan authorship, see Osvaldo Padilla, *Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History, and Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 2016), 21–37; cf. Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (NTL; Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 1–4. In this article, 'Luke' is used as a shorthand for the author of Luke-Acts, rather than as a statement on questions of historicity or authorship.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, translations of the Greek come from the *NRSVue*.

[3] Patrick Schreiner, *Acts* (CSC; Holman Reference, 2021), 259; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (SP 5; Liturgical Press, 1992), 140.

breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord', the adverb 'still' (ἔτι) suggesting a continuation of the pattern of violence described in Acts 7:58 and 8:3.[4] Saul's life, the very breath that sustains him, is characterised by hostility. The persecution instigated by Saul caused a forced migration (Acts 8:4b) and now he has intentions to pursue those refugees as they seek safety amongst the Diaspora in Damascus; to compound the trauma of forced migration, these refugees now experience precarity in the place they have sheltered. Saul is not content with the absence of Jesus-followers in Judea but actively pursues them. Although the letters to the synagogues from the high priest that Paul obtains would be without any technical legal weight,[5] he makes the most of his connections with the Jewish authorities to extinguish the flickering flame of 'the Way'.[6]

The stark description of Saul's violence is necessary to give context to the commissioning and response of Ananias in Acts 9:10–19. The geographical note in Acts 9:10a 'Now there was a disciple in Damascus', marks him out as one of Saul's potential victims. Anaias is said to be 'in Damascus', rather than from there. Here, the preposition 'in' (ἐν) is locative, rather than ablatival,[7] which could suggest that Ananias was among 'those who were scattered', as described in Acts 8:4a. Regardless of where Ananias is from, Jerusalem or the Diaspora, his allegiance to Jesus marks him out as a potential victim of Saul.

The first indication to Luke's implied audience about the character of Ananias comes with his response to the ascended Jesus: 'Here I am, Lord' (Acts 9:10b). The phrase 'Here I am, Lord' draws immediate comparison with faithful patriarchs who responded to the voice of God with immediate

[4] L. Scott Kellum, *Acts* (EGGNT; B&H Academic, 2020), 108.

[5] See the discussion on this in Holladay, *Acts*, 193 and Steve Walton, *Acts 1–9:42* (WBC 37A; Zondervan, 2024), 575.

[6] 'The Way' is Luke's collective term for the early followers of Jesus, rather than 'Christian', which was an etic description (e.g., Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). For an excellent study on Luke's thoroughfare language, see James Morgan, *Encountering Images of Spiritual Transformation: The Thoroughfare Motif within the Plot of Luke-Acts* (Wipf & Stock, 2013).

[7] As would be typically conveyed by prepositions like ἀπό or ἐκ; on the grammar, see: Martin Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons and Josiah D. Hall, *Acts 1–14: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (BHGNT; Baylor University Press, 2022), 231.

recognition of the divine voice and a posture of trust and obedience.[8] This faith, however, does not imply naivety on Ananias' part. He is fully aware of the violence Saul has committed and could commit, as shown in Acts 9:13–14:

> But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, *how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem*, and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.'[9]

Ananias honestly names Saul's activity for what it is: evil. He also expresses his own misgivings. Saul is not only violent, but his violence is sanctioned by the tacit authority of the chief priests. Ananias' faithful response, 'Here I am, Lord', does not negate his honest recognition of evil. Steve Walton describes this as 'a feisty conversation with the Lord Jesus about what he is to do, for Ananias has doubts about Saul'.[10] In this exchange with Jesus, it is important to note that Ananias is not chastised for his open questioning.

He receives further explanation about God's plan for Saul and is reminded that the one who causes suffering will also suffer (Acts 9:16). Many commentators rightly note that Luke places Paul among those who suffer for bearing witness to the Lord, presenting suffering as a mark of discipleship in the church.[11] However, it is worth noting how 'he must suffer' (δεῖ … παθεῖν) is used in contemporaneous extrabiblical literature. The formula can convey the imposition of a justly deserved penalty, be that in in legal, divine, or cosmic contexts.[12] Paul's imminent suffering shows that his wrongdoing is not without consequence. How God is involved in that suffering may be uncomfortable to consider, but in the

[8] E.g. Gen 22:1, 11; 31:11; 46:2; Exod 3:4; 1 Sam 3:4.; Isa 6:8.

[9] Emphasis added.

[10] Walton, *Acts*, 604.

[11] E.g. Luke 9:22; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26; Acts 5:41; 15:26; 21:13; Johnson, *Acts*, 165; Schreiner, *Acts*, 305; Holladay, *Acts*, 198.

[12] In forensic or rhetorical settings, the δεῖ … παθεῖν (it is necessary to suffer/undergo) denotes the inevitable consequences of wrongdoing, as in Lyc. *Leocr.* 167; Xen. *Mem.* 2.9.5–6; Ach. Tat. *Leuc.* 4.4; Aristoph. *Plut.* 480; divine retribution in Hdt. *Hist*. 7.17.2; Lucian *D. Deor.* 5.1; metaphysical/natural law in Plot. *Enn.* 4.3.24.19.

narrative, Jesus is responding to Ananias' question about justice. He does not call Ananias to enact justice, but to trust in God's sovereign judgment. This aligns with the wider biblical theology of divine justice, as seen in Deuteronomy 32:35 and repeated by Paul in Romans 12:19, emphasising that vengeance belongs to God and that humans are to leave judgment in God's hands rather than taking it upon themselves.[13]

Acts 9:17–19 shows a remarkable shift from understandable suspicion to restoration. Ananias first makes physical contact with Paul through the laying on of hands, which in Acts serves not as a metaphysical requirement for the Spirit's impartation, but as a symbol of intergroup reconciliation.[14] Second, Ananias no longer refers to Saul as 'this man' (Acts 9:13) but now uses the familial language applied to early community of Jesus followers: 'Brother Saul' (Acts 9:17). Third, Saul takes time for physical healing (Acts 9:19a). Fourth, Saul is reconciled not only with Ananias but also spends time with the community of believers in Damascus (Acts 9:19b). One of the most remarkable features of Saul's restoration and the bravery of Ananias is how Luke describes the quality of their contact. I suggest that our understanding of this passage and its role in guiding Christian praxis on intergroup tensions after violence and suffering can be enriched through dialogue with the social scientific theory known as the 'Contact Hypothesis' (CH). This pericope offers a distinctly Christian approach to fostering meaningful contact that helps to break down prejudice in contexts of human suffering.

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[13] Cf. Heb 10:30.

[14] The normativity of the laying on of hands as necessary for impartation was argued by Nikolaus Adler, *Taufe und Handauflegung: Eine exegetisch-theologische Untersuchung von Apg 8,14–17* (Aschendorff, 1951), and remains a normative practice in some denominations (e.g. the United Church of God) and Independent Network Charismatic churches, e.g. Kris Vallotton, *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry* (Destiny Image, 2007), 28, 63–64; on the laying on of hands in Acts as a sign of community reconciliation, see Beverley Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ANTC; Abingdon Press, 2003), 137–38; see also Schreiner, *Acts*, 274–75; Matthias Wenk, "Acts in a Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit", in *Acts: A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Trevor Burke and Keith Warrington (SPCK, 2014), 118–19; cf. Holladay, *Acts*, 185.

The Contact Hypothesis in theological perspective: summary, prospects, and limitations

Before proceeding, the CH needs to be defined. Simply put, it is the theory that the primary way to reduce intergroup tensions and prejudice is to bring people into meaningful contact. The late personality psychologist Gordon Allport is widely regarded as its progenitor, with the publication of his magnum opus, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), in which the theory is defined in the chapter "The Effect of Contact".[15] Allport proposed:

> Prejudice […] may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports [...] and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity[16]

Allport's student Thomas Pettigrew then synthesised this into four conditions in which contact was deemed to be most effective when reducing prejudice: '(1) equal status between the groups; (2) common goals; (3) cooperation between groups; and (4) institutional support for the contact'.[17] The hypothesis has become one the of most important studies on prejudice in the social sciences and has become so ingrained that, according to John Dixon, a critic of the CH, that the CH 'is perhaps now better described as a fully-fledged *theory*.'[18] A meta-analysis of studies on the CH over 60 years has shown that, in aggregate, intergroup contact reduces prejudice, even when the four ideal conditions are not fully met.[19]

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[15] Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Addison-Wesley, 1954), 261–96.

[16] Allport, *Nature*, 267.

[17] Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, *When Groups Meet: The Dynamics of Intergroup Contact* (Psychology Press, 2011), 61.

[18] John Dixon, "Concluding Thoughts: The Past, Present and Future of Research on the Contact Hypothesis", in *Intergroup Contact Theory: Recent developments and future directions*, ed. Loris Vezzali and Sofia Stathi (Routledge, 2016), 169.

[19] Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2006): 751–83.

While this finding is encouraging, it comes with several caveats. Before being adopted as policy, further research is needed to determine the optimal conditions for contact in different social contexts,[20] especially because negative contact experiences can exacerbate intergroup tension and prejudice.[21] There is also the concern that contact can work upstream rather than downstream. In other words, the effect of contact on marginalised groups can result in a hesitance to address structural systems of injustice, thus contact can be a way for the privileged to ignore the systems that benefit them.[22] Clearly, contact is not a panacea for all societal ills,[23] but when it comes to reducing hostility between groups, it has been proven to be a useful starting point. For example, the CH is the theoretical underpinning of the largely successful move towards integrated education in Northern Ireland.[24]

The example of Ananias, suffering, and a Christian approach to contact

The Ananias-Saul encounter reflects all the core conditions of the CH (equal status, common goals, cooperation, and institutional support) yet it also introduces three distinctively Christian elements that can both enrich and complicate the model.

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[20] Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Seth A. Green and Donald P. Green, "The Contact Hypothesis Re-evaluated", *Behavioural Public Policy* 3, no. 2 (2019): 129–58, https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2018.25.

[21] Rose Meleady and Laura Forder, "When Contact Goes Wrong: Negative Intergroup Contact Promotes Generalized Outgroup Avoidance", *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 22, no. 5 (2019): 688–707.

[22] John Dixon, Linda R. Tropp, Kevin Durrheim and Colin Tredoux, '"Let Them Eat Harmony": Prejudice-Reduction Strategies and Attitudes of Historically Disadvantaged Groups', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19, no. 2 (2010): 76–80; cf. Nils Karl Reimer and Nikhil Kumar Sengupta, 'Meta-Analysis of the "Ironic" Effects of Intergroup Contact', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 124, no. 2 (2023): 362–80.

[23] Research shows that intergroup contact can reduce hostility, though effects vary; e.g. Salma Mousa, "Building Social Cohesion between Christians and Muslims through Soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq", *Science* 369, no. 6505 (2020): 866–70.

[24] Bernadette C. Hayes, Ian McAllister and Lizanne Dowds, "Integrated Education, Intergroup Relations, and Political Identities in Northern Ireland", *Social Problems* 54, no. 4 (2007): 454–82.

(1) Acts 9 begins not with the arrangement of contact but with a resolute acknowledgment of suffering. Contact is preceded by moral clarity. The Christian approach to contact, if it follows this pattern, is ethically bound to proclaim the reality of wrongdoing and suffering before any reconciliation can be sought. Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim and Tredoux have described this as the 'ironic effects of contact on disadvantaged groups',[25] where positive interpersonal relationships can inadvertently blunt the urgency to address systemic injustice.[26] In the Ananias narrative, recognition of evil is not glossed over; nor is it an excuse for retribution. Ananias approaches Saul in obedience to Christ's command, but with the understanding that Saul's past has consequences that will result in suffering. Christian contact, then, is not a sentimental glossing-over of suffering, but a courageous movement toward the offender with truth-telling and the expectation of transformation.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that Ananias begins with a prejudice against Saul. Justified though it may be by Saul's history, it still functions as a pre-judgment that defines Saul solely by his past actions.[27] Willie James Jennings describes this eloquently:

> Yet this is where discipleship, truly being a follower of Jesus, presses us to reorder our knowledge. The truth we know of a person or people must move to the background, and what we know of God's desire for them must move to the foreground. The danger we imagine inscribed on their bodies must be read against the delight we know God takes in their life. That same divine delight covers us. […] We cannot say that Ananias no longer sees Saul as dangerous or a killer. We must say that he indeed acts in faith, touching and believing in the power of God to heal and transform.[28]

[25] Dixon et al., "Let", 76–80.

[26] '… this transformation may often come at a cost: It may lead the disadvantaged to underestimate the injustice and discrimination suffered by their group, diminishing their support for action to challenge inequality' (Dixon et al., "Let", 76). Cf. Reimer and Sengupta, "Meta-Analysis", who argue 'ironic effects' of intergroup contact are overstated.

[27] Willie James Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (WJK Press, 2017), 95.

[28] Jennings, *Acts*, 95.

The Christian approach to contact does not erase the memory of harm or deny danger. It means letting God's vision for others take precedence over our fears and trusting the Spirit (Acts 9:17b) to bring transformation.

(2) The example of Ananias demonstrates that interpersonal reconciliation is only part of a wider process. Saul's restoration is not complete in the private exchange with Ananias. Luke records that after his baptism, 'for several days [Paul] was with the disciples in Damascus' (Acts 9:19b). His healing and reception into the community are inseparable; the personal encounter expands into a shared life with the very group he once attempted to destroy. Moving from individual to communal contact is essential. For lasting reconciliation and mutual trust, contact must be part of the ongoing life of the community, not just one-off encounters. Such hospitality is reciprocal: the guest becomes part of the life of the host, and the host is, in turn, shaped by the presence of the guest. As Christine Pohl observes, hospitality is 'simultaneously costly and wonderfully rewarding', often involving 'small deaths and little resurrections.'[29] Welcoming the other always involves vulnerability, as Ananias and the disciples in Damascus discover when they risk receiving Saul into their fellowship. It is in this very risk that the community embodies God's reconciling welcome, allowing relationships to grow beyond the safety of distance.

(3) The Ananias narrative offers an additional, theological 'condition' for a distinctly Christian praxis of contact: allegiance to Jesus, including his teachings and example. This is the decisive factor in Ananias' ability to meet Saul. Without the divine commission in Acts 9:15, Ananias has neither good reason nor the courage to approach someone who poses such a threat. This 'fifth condition' might seem counterintuitive in the context of intergroup dialogue because it is, in one sense, an exclusive allegiance. Yet confidence in one's own faith is essential to genuine contact.[30]

Examples of contact from practice: Refugee work in Glasgow

To give flesh to the theoretical discussion of the CH above, I now turn to examples drawn from my own past work with the Community Football

[29] Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Eerdmans, 1999), 186–87.

[30] Andrew Smith, *Vibrant Christianity in a Multifaith Britain: Equipping the Church for a Faithful Engagement with People of Different Faiths* (BRF, 2018).

programme at the St Rollox Community Outreach in Glasgow.[31] This programme began as occasional five-a-side matches with a group of Afghan men but soon expanded to include white Scots as well as refugees and asylum seekers from a range of countries. When forming teams without guidance, players often grouped themselves along ethnic or linguistic lines. To encourage integration, programme organisers deliberately mixed teams. Mixed teams generally produced more constructive dynamics, though there was some initial resistance. The matches also revealed divisions within the groups themselves. For example, some white Scots were from opposing sides of Glasgow's sectarian divide, and some Iraqis came from different factions within Iraq's sectarian conflict.

Many of the players had experienced significant trauma and now found themselves alongside individuals from groups they either perceived or knew to be responsible for their pain. In some cases, participants had personally suffered violence at the hands of those associated with groups the others represented. In some cases, there had been no direct experience of suffering, but a deeply rooted *perception* of threat shaped attitudes and interactions.[32] These layers of distrust, rooted in both direct experience and group perception, meant the programme could not simply be unstructured or casual.[33]

To manage these cross-cutting complexities, several ethical guidelines were established. These included transparency about the programme's Christian basis, a zero-tolerance policy on racist or prejudiced language, a shared commitment to sportsmanship, and a rule that no one could participate under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The programme developed over time into something much more than a game, and several practical lessons emerged (a–e are largely positive; f–g negative):

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[31] I admit that these stories are anecdotal, but they reflect many of the findings of research on CH. All the accounts are shared with consent, with identifying details removed.

[32] Lauren M. McLaren, "Anti-immigrant Prejudice in Europe: Contact, Threat Perception, and Preferences for the Exclusion of Migrants", *Social Forces* 81, no. 3 (2003): 909–36.

[33] Dominic Abrams and Anja Eller, "A Temporally Integrated Model of Intergroup Contact and Threat (TIMICAT)", in Vezzali and Stathi, *Intergroup Contact Theory*, 72–91.

a) *Boundaries are often necessary for genuine inclusion*.[34] Though the programme aimed to foster welcome and connection, this did not mean tolerating every behaviour. These boundaries were not punitive, but necessary to protect the integrity of the space and the safety of those within it.
b) *Pastoral support is necessary*.[35] Participants were routinely offered access to pastoral care. One local pastor began attending simply as an observer but gradually became a trusted confidant to several players; his presence also helped bridge the gap between the football programme and its connection to local churches. This could have been better reinforced with cooperation and training of sports chaplaincy groups.
c) *Contact requires quality and frequency*.[36] While football provided the main contact point, the depth of relationship often came through supplementary activities. Regular meals, celebratory events, and informal social gatherings gave players time and space to connect beyond the intensity of the matches.
d) *Equality must be intentionally structured into the programme*.[37] Left to themselves, players often gravitated towards ethnically or linguistically homogenous teams. Organisers responded by deliberately mixing teams each week, which usually produced more constructive

[34] The breaking down of boundaries, ironically, requires the identification of 'good' boundaries, see: John Dixon, "Contact and Boundaries: 'Locating' the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations", *Theory & Psychology* 11, no. 5 (2001): 587–608.

[35] Note the importance of pastoral care in Trelawney J. Grenfell-Muir, "Minefield Prophets: The Methods and Effectiveness of Clergy Peacebuilders in Northern Ireland", *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 27 (2019): 35–57, https://irstudies.org/index.php/jirs/article/view/389.

[36] Quality of contact is however more important than frequency, see David De Coninck, Isabel Rodríguez-de-Dios and Leen d'Haenens, "The Contact Hypothesis during the European Refugee Crisis: Relating Quality and Quantity of (In)Direct Intergroup Contact to Attitudes towards Refugees", *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 24, no. 6 (2021): 881–901.

[37] Rupert Brown and Miles Hewstone, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Contact", in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 37 (Elsevier Science & Technology, 2005): 255–343; Jerry W. Robinson Jr and James D. Preston, "Equal-status Contact and Modification of Racial Prejudice: A Re-examination of the Contact Hypothesis", *Social Forces* 54, no. 4 (1976), 911–24.

dynamics – though not without some resistance. Team leadership was also distributed and rotated across participants from different backgrounds, reinforcing shared ownership and mutual respect.

Still, sometime tensions arose. One significant conflict occurred during a friendly match with an external team. A Scottish coach selected a starting line-up composed almost entirely of white Scots. While the coach defended his choices as based on past performance others understandably perceived this as ethnic bias. In the fallout, the leadership of the group made the decision that competitive standards could not come at the cost of inclusion.

e) *Interpersonal contact does not always generalise to the outgroup*. One participant, despite enjoying the company of refugees and forming friendships with them, shared xenophobic content online. He considered it harmless 'banter', but it caused deep offence, renewed distrust, and led to several refugees withdrawing from the programme for years.[38] Although he later apologised and returned, some relationships were never restored.

f) *Growth can dilute the quality of contact*. As the programme became increasingly popular, the larger numbers at times weakened relational depth and made it harder to maintain the agreed ethical guidelines, which resulted in more instances of damaging negative contact. The most effective seasons were often those with smaller, more manageable groups, where trust and accountability could be sustained.

Conclusions and suggestions

In all the projects described, creating space for quality contact was central. Equally important was what I have called the 'fifth condition' for a Christian approach to contact: rooting this work in kingdom ethics and the spiritual disciplines of the church. This included regular prayer for the programme and the presence of pastoral support. Over time, some refugees began attending local congregations. For those from contexts where conversion is controversial or dangerous, this created new layers of social and emotional dislocation, requiring careful, sustained pastoral care.

[38] Fiona Kate Barlow et al., "The Contact Caveat: Negative Contact Predicts Increased Prejudice More than Positive Contact Predicts Reduced Prejudice", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38, no. 12 (2012): 1629–43.

Contact, in such settings, is not merely a social experiment but a participation in the church's ministry of reconciliation, one that must be attentive to the depth of suffering.

A corrective the CH offers to Christian praxis is how these studies insist on the necessity of institutional support. Sociological research consistently demonstrates that institutional structures are necessary for the sustained reduction of prejudice.[39] To be clear, personal commitment is an essential part of reducing prejudice, but it is ethically naïve to assume that it can be reduced without meaningful intervention. For the church, this means rejecting popular individualistic truisms that suggest simply 'knowing' or 'accepting' the gospel will mean that ethical action will, *de facto*, follow.[40] Yes, transformation of the heart, but knowledge that the heart needs to be transformed does not happen in isolation, but through contact. The challenge is for church leaders to actively support and create opportunities for meaningful contact across lines of division in their communities, even when this meets resistance. This requires adjusting structures and deliberately making space where meaningful contact can be coordinated. A preparatory phase of actual contact can be complemented by organising 'extended contact', such as workshops and seminars designed to reduce prejudice and myths.[41] A practical idea is that churches should platform those who are working at the interface of situations of prejudice (e.g., supported mission partners working with outgroups).

To be clear, following the example of Ananias is not a safe or risk-free endeavour.[42] Meaningful contact often brings us into proximity with people we might otherwise fear, and this requires robust safeguarding, wise boundaries, and the courage to persevere when relationships are

[39] Paluck, Green and Green, "Contact Hypothesis Re-Evaluated".

[40] The is issue is well articulated in Jon Kuhrt, "What Evangelicals Have Done to Sin", *Fulcrum* 21 March 2006, https://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/what-evangelicals-have-done-to-sin/.

[41] The potential effectiveness of 'extended contact' is discussed in: Roberto González and Rupert Brown, "The Influence of Direct and Extended Contact on the Development of Acculturation Preferences Among Majority Members", in Vezzali and Stathi, *Intergroup Contact Theory*, 31–52; Shelly Zhou et al., "The Extended Contact Hypothesis: A Meta-Analysis on 20 Years of Research", *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 23, no. 2 (2019): 132–60.

[42] Pohl, *Making*, 93–98, 176–77; on the risks and limits of hospitality, see: Jessica Wrobleski, *The Limits of Hospitality* (Liturgical Press, 2012).

complicated or painful. Ananias, compelled by Jesus, steps into a dangerous situation to meet Saul face-to-face; suffering is not minimised, but addressed at the outset. His action is shaped by initial truth-telling, sustained by obedience, and open to mutual transformation. Christian praxis of contact is not about avoiding suffering but recognising that, in Christ, we are called to address it with both moral clarity and hopeful hospitality through contact with the 'other'.