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A Global Forum



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Evangelism in a Changing World

The American evangelist Dwight Lyman Moody (1837–1899) was known for his straightforward, sometimes abrupt methods in personal evangelism. Once, when questioned by a critic, Moody is said to have asked whether the critic was engaged in evangelism. Upon receiving an answer of no, Moody stated, ‘I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.’

Christians today face the challenge of keeping evangelism central and doing it effectively amidst a changing, overwhelmingly secular, often unfriendly environment. This issue of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* highlights some thoughtful, cutting-edge responses to that challenge.

Evert van de Poll’s insightful article, first published in the *European Journal of Theology*, considers ways to approach the evangelistic enterprise in Europe, a continent widely viewed as secularized, postmodern, and post-Christian. His sensitive analysis is accompanied by practical ideas on making the Christian faith relevant to Europeans’ lives, whether through personal conversations or tourism endeavours highlighting the continuing impact of Europe’s Christian heritage.

Elmer Thiessen and Thomas Schirrmacher’s essay has grown out of discussions within the Global Christian Forum on proselytism—i.e. the evangelizing of people already somehow connected to a Christian tradition. In this context, they have emphasized that reaching out to people who lack a vibrant faith is not only ethical but urgently needed, even if those people were baptized and received early instruction in some church. They also of-

fer valuable guidance to avoid causing unnecessary offence.

Peirong Lin, incoming human resources director for the World Evangelical Alliance’s Department of Theological Concerns, provides a probing study of how our evangelistic imperative can be undermined. Lin’s dissertation research on the work of World Vision in Nepal and Papua New Guinea showed how in both countries, though for different reasons, ‘mission drift’ caused the agency’s relief work to become increasingly detached from the Christian message.

The essays by Israel Olofinjana and Samuel Cueva make an interesting pair, as both focus on the relationship between migration and mission. Olofinjana summarizes the impact of Christians of African origin in Great Britain, a case of ‘reverse mission’ relative to the earlier phenomenon of European missions to Africa. Cueva rigorously considers diaspora mission, or opportunities for collaborative mission arising from the large-scale migration of peoples affected by economic crises, poverty, war or unstable governments.

The last two articles shift to considerations of this age and the next. Richard L. Smith, who masterfully analysed the limitations of Christian political engagement in our January 2018 issue, provides a sequel on biblically grounded approaches to the economic realm. Joshua Wise takes an unusual path to arrive at stimulating reflections on the nature of our eternal hope, considering the eschatological implications of the work of contemporary theologian Kern Robert Trembath.

Bruce Barron, editor

Evangelism and the Paradox of Europe and Christianity

Evert Van de Poll

According to Swiss theologian Christine Lienemann, mission is ‘the theory and the practice of the Church meeting strangers’, that is, people who are strangers to the Church and the Christian faith.¹ This simple and modest definition is very appropriate for the mission of the Church in Europe, because it makes us aware that a large part of the population in our countries has indeed become alienated from the Christian world view and religious practice. So much so that one could turn this definition around and say that communities of practising Christians have become minorities, and even strangers, in the modern world.

We can observe this situation all around us, but the perplexing element of the matter is that this happens in Europe of all places, the most Christianized of all continents, where the message of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed for many centuries, in many forms. This makes Europe such a specific context for evangelism.

Our subject is evangelism in Europe as a whole—that is, including the countries outside the European Union. When we look at such a vast field, our approach can only be a generalist one. This is a deliberate choice, for I am persuaded that when we try to see the overall picture of Christianity and religion in Europe, we will gain a better understanding of what happens in each particular country on this continent. Together they constitute a specific context for the communication of the Gospel.

This is a vast and fascinating field of study. Those who reflect on evangelism in Europe have different angles from which they try to understand the characteristics of this context. In this article we shall shortly discuss the three most frequently used ones. We will then propose another approach, one that does not replace the three preceding angles but rather places them in a particular perspective and should be useful to understand our European context.

I. Why Europe?

Before we go into the subject, we have to answer the preliminary question:

¹ Quoted by Benedict Schubert, ‘Témoigner: responsabilité personnelle, communautaire, ecclésiale’, public conference, Association Francophone Œcuménique de Missiologie, Paris, 21 June 2014.

why look at Europe as a whole? What justification is there for taking this frame of reference? I will give three reasons.

First, on a sociocultural level, the peoples and the countries of Europe are very similar. I agree with social scientists like Pamela Sticht that these peoples constitute a cultural zone, or a family of cultures that have common roots, a common history and to a certain extent common values.²

Second, sociologists of religion have characterized Europe as 'the exceptional continent'. In Europe, the rise of modernity (the dominance of rational science and technology) has been accompanied by secularization of the public sphere and the decline of religious practice, but this is not a universal phenomenon. In other parts of the world, the development of a society along the lines of Western technology and rational science does not seem to hamper religious practice, as can be seen in the United States, Canada, Korea, China and Latin America. So the European combination of modernity and secularization is the exception to the rule.³

Third, there is the missionary experience. One cannot just adopt approaches and methods simply because they have proven to be successful in other countries with similar Western cultures. Many who try to do this dis-

cover that for some reason or another, things work differently here.

II. The Angle of Secularization

The first angle from which we can look at Europe as a context for evangelism is secularization.

The terms *secular* and *secularization* can have several meanings. Here I will use them in the sociological sense: the decline of the social and political influence of the church and Christian institutions and the public sphere becoming secular, i.e. neutral, a-religious.

Since the twentieth century, 'secular' has referred to people who have no religious affiliation and hold no 'religious' beliefs. So secularization is the decline of church membership. All this has given rise to a secular worldview, which often becomes an ideology called secularism. According to this view a universal, neutral rationality is normative in politics, science, economics and society.

Only a minority of secular people are convinced atheists; most of them are agnostics who just don't know, or who suppose that there is something like a divine being or force, but generally speaking they are not interested in relating to that 'something'. Practically speaking, they live as if there is no God. They manage their lives without religious practice related to a transcendent being.

1. The major barrier: a worldview without God

When secularization is seen as the main characteristic of European societies, in terms of culture and religion, then the major barrier for evangelism

² Pamela Sticht, *Culture européenne ou Europe des cultures? Les enjeux actuels de la politique culturelle en Europe* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

³ Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007) 137, 145.

is unbelief in the existence of God—or, to put it more generally, a worldview and a lifestyle that do not take into account any divine or transcendent reality.

The secularization of Europe partly explains why some evangelism models that have worked well in Latin America or in Africa do not yield much fruit in Europe. In those parts of the world, the Gospel is communicated among people with some kind of religion: Roman Catholic, animistic or others. They already believe in God, or at least in a divine reality. There is no need for them to change this religious worldview in order to accept the Gospel and become a Christian. What changes for them is their image of God, their doctrinal convictions, religious practices and spiritual experience. Perhaps they only change denominational attachment.

For secularized Europeans, the situation is completely different. Before they can even consider the invitation of the Gospel, they should become religious, have their secular worldview transformed into a religious one. The question is not which God or which religion, but why God, why religion in the first place? Does God exist? What does the word 'God' mean, and to whom or what does it refer? Are you talking about a force, a person, an idea, a projection of a human father figure? Can we experience this God? And if so, why is this important? What is the relevance of religion anyway? When I'm not poor, depressed, lonely, ill or jobless, what would I need a religion for? What does this 'God' add to my life?

Moreover, many secularist intellectuals maintain that religion is a past stage in the development of humanity. Viewed from such a perspective, secu-

larization is a stage that comes after Christianity. What is the next step? There is no next step, at least not a religious one, because secular humanism considers itself to have advanced beyond all religions. As Marcel Gauchet put it, 'Christianity is (or was) the religion of the end of all religion.'⁴

This view is based on the evolutionary development of cultures, already put forward by Herbert Spencer, Lewis Morgan, Edward Tylor and others towards the end of the nineteenth century. Although this is an old theory now disputed by scholars, it is still widely held and propagated, for instance by the French philosopher and former cabinet minister of education, Luc Ferry. He argues that the God of the Bible is a human creation: 'In the past, people needed this imagined divine being, but we have to do without, and we can do without.'⁵

For a secularized European to become Christian really amounts to a conversion in the truest sense of the word; a complete turnaround in direction, which goes against the thrust of history, against the whole cultural and intellectual development of our world! Embracing a religion, even Christianity, is seen as a step backward.

4 Marcel Gauchet first presented this argument in *Le désenchantement du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) and repeated it in several subsequent publications, lastly in *Le religieux et le politique, Douze réponses de Marcel Gauchet* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, collection Religion & Politique, 2010).

5 Luc Ferry, *La révolution de l'amour* (Paris: Plon, 2010) 7.

2. 'Secular-3' and the challenge of exclusive humanism (Charles Taylor)

Sociology, theology and missiology have been discussing secularization for several decades now. Charles Taylor took this reflection a step further in *A Secular Age* (2007), analysing at length and in great detail how secularization has come about in history.⁶ Although Taylor is Canadian, his analysis is particularly relevant to the European situation because secularization is a European 'invention', a phenomenon that has arisen on our continent. In fact, Taylor pretty much writes and argues like a European, for Europeans.

Taylor makes an important distinction. What people have been discussing so far, he says, is the worldview and lifestyle of nonreligious or unchurched people, as well as the idea of a secular science or secular politics, in the sense of a-religious, neutral, unbiased, 'objective'. He calls this 'secular-2'. Then he introduces another sense of the term, 'secular-3'. This stands for a society in which religious belief or belief in God is understood to be one option among others. Moreover, many secular people find the option to believe quite contestable and they strongly contest it. The major problem of our secular age, says Taylor, is that our religious beliefs are considered unbelievable. Under such conditions, it is difficult to believe in God.

Believers are continually challenged by the alternative of not believing. Taylor speaks of an 'exclusive humanism, a radically new option in

the marketplace of beliefs, a vision of life in which anything beyond the immanent is eclipsed'.⁷ In other words, our neighbours and colleagues are coping with the difficulties of life without looking to God for help. They find our convictions simply unbelievable.

Taylor describes several 'conversion experiences' of people who have abandoned religious beliefs and turned to atheism. Many of them say that this felt like 'becoming an adult, coming of age, getting rid of childish Sunday school images'. Such stories make Christians look like naive people who still believe in some sort of fairy tale.

3. Response: show the plausibility of believing in God

The usual response of Christians to secularization is to make a case for believing in God. This is the apologetic attempt to remove the barrier of a worldview without God by showing the 'plausibility of the Christian worldview', as David Brown puts it.⁸ A recent example of this approach in the Netherlands is a book by Stefan Paas and Rik Peels entitled *Proving God*.⁹ Apologetic arguments may not convince others, but they certainly have an important function in reassuring

⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2–3.

⁷ Summary of James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 22–23.

⁸ David Brown, 'Les difficultés particulières qu'ont nos contemporains français dans la compréhension et l'acceptation de l'Évangile', lecture at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Network in French-speaking Europe, 23 February 2015.

⁹ Stefan Paas en Rik Peels, *God bewijzen: argumenten voor en tegen geloven* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2013).

believers that what they believe is not irrational or childish.

4. Where can we start to build bridges?

However, apologetics is not enough. We should find points of contact and common ground on which we can build bridges of understanding. As Elaine Storkey puts it, building bridges 'enables us to cross over into a non-Christian cultural context and begin to understand it from within, [to gain] some knowledge of who we are speaking to, and what matters to them'. And it also provides ways for non-Christians to 'cross the great cultural chasm between the worldview of Christianity and the worldviews of our contemporary world, so that the Gospel can be heard for what it is'.¹⁰

The question is how to build bridges in what Taylor called a secular-3 situation. What starting points do we find there? Taylor himself shows the way. He makes every effort to place himself in the position of an exclusive secular humanist. How does it feel to live without God, to have a closed worldview, to live with the idea that death is the total extinction of life? In anthropology, this would be could an *emic* approach.

Taylor examines what he calls the 'unquiet frontiers' of secular people: 'Our age is very far from settling into a comfortable unbelief. The secular age is deeply cross-pressured.'¹¹ This means that people experience a kind of emptiness that makes everything look

useless. They are frequently haunted by the happy memories of religious belief.

In particular, many moderns are uncomfortable with death, 'the giving up of everything'.¹² Secular belief is a shutting out: 'The door is barred against further discovery.' But 'in the secular waste land ... young people will begin again to explore beyond the boundaries'.¹³ And so there is an explosion of all kinds of spirituality, of quasi-religious experiences.

Here we have many starting points to build bridges of understanding. An interesting example of such a bridge is the television documentary *Heureux naufrage* ('Happy shipwreck'), produced by a team of French-speaking Canadians and Europeans. Several philosophers, journalists, educators and writers talk about how they manage in a world after faith in God. As one author put it, 'I do not believe in God but I miss Him.' Others talk about their way to faith, as a post-secular experience.

III. The Angle of Post-modernity

The second angle from which we can look at Europe as a context for evangelism is post-modernity.

1. Postmodernism, philosophical and popular

Numerous descriptions and definitions of postmodernism have been given and there is considerable debate on which one is right. Let me just give some key

¹⁰ Elaine Storkey, 'Bridges to the Gospel', 2015, www.bethinking.org/apologetics/bridges-to-the-gospel (consulted 1 August 2015).

¹¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 727.

¹² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 725.

¹³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 769, 770.

elements. Postmodern means that you are critical towards the pretention of rational science that it knows the truth about reality itself. This truth is hidden from us; we can only see parts of it. Postmoderns mistrust any religion or political ideology that presents something like the final truth for everybody. Such 'metanarratives' are used as a mask for a power play.¹⁴

Besides this philosophical stream, there is a more widespread postmodernism on a popular level. People with a postmodern mind-set or outlook are 'sceptics about technology, objectivity, absolutes, and total explanations'. At the same time, they highly value 'image and appearance, personal interpretation, pleasure, and the exploration of every spiritual and material perspective'.¹⁵

2. Major barrier: unbelief in absolute truth

Some consider postmodernism as the main characteristic of our societies. Of course, not everybody in Europe has a postmodern outlook. But when you see postmodernism as the major cultural characteristic of European societies, the main obstacle for evangelism is unbelief in absolute truth. This includes the message that Jesus is 'the truth'. As a human being, Jesus is highly esteemed, but the postmodern outlook finds it difficult to admit that he could be the Christ, the unique Saviour of mankind.

¹⁴ E. David Cook, *Blind Alley Beliefs*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1996).

¹⁵ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL and Leicester, UK: IVP, 1997).

3. Response: dialogue and respect for others

Lesslie Newbigin comes to mind. In his writings he has dealt with the pluralist society, in which religious truth is separated from the truth claims of rational science. In a pluralist world, religion is a matter of values and personal experience, and no one can pretend that their religion is superior to that of another. This is the major challenge for evangelism in Europe, says Newbigin.¹⁶

He counters this by arguing that scientific truth is as much based on presuppositions as religious truth is based on faith. So we should not accept the pluralist idea that scientific reason stands above all religious affirmations, as their ultimate arbiter. On the other hand, we cannot convince others by our rational arguments either. We can and must speak the truth only in the humble confidence that the Spirit convinces the heart of the hearer.¹⁷

In his writings, Newbigin did not use the term *postmodern*, but what he described is indeed a major element of post-modernity. Many churches, mission organizations and theologians see post-modernity as the key characteristic of Europe today. For instance, in 2008 the German *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für evangelische Missiologie* organised a colloquium on mission in Europe, at which the main angle of approach was postmodernism.¹⁸ Similarly, the 2010

¹⁶ Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989).

¹⁷ See Leslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (London: SPCK, 1995).

¹⁸ See the publication based on this colloquium: Klaus Müller (ed.), *Mission im postmodernen Europa: Referate der Jahrestagung 2008*

international mission conference in Edinburgh, which marked the centenary of the historic world mission conference of Edinburgh 1910, placed post-modernity in the centre of its theological deliberations.

At this point I also want to mention Marie-Hélène Robert. In her recent book on the theology of evangelism, she analyses the documents of the Roman Catholic Church on 'new evangelism', as well as the European context in which this takes place. In line with these texts, she too defines this context in terms of post-modernity.¹⁹

The main thrust of all these conferences and publications is a call for a new kind of evangelism, in the form of dialogue, based on respect for the opinions and lifestyles of others. The issue of absolute truth cannot be avoided, but we should make it known in ways that allow others the freedom to respond.

Another important element of our witness is acts of charity, as concrete signs of God's love. Marie-Hélène Robert combines that with the notion of respect, which she defines as granting other the liberty to respond as they desire. She writes:

Postmodern cultures adapt easily to charity and liberty, but they do not consider the truth as Christianity presents it, neither the objective truth (its divine origin and universality), nor the subjective truth (its human reception and translation). Evangelism is the proclamation of a

real liberty: man is free to respond in love to the offer of love.²⁰

On the basis of charity (practical love) and granting others this liberty we can speak the truth of salvation, says Robert.

4. Where can we build bridges?

What points of contact do we find in the postmodern world to build bridges for communicating the Gospel? Elaine Storkey identifies the following ones:

- A new involvement in spirituality
- Fascination with the narrative
- Cultural openness to worldview questions—film, novel, music
- Shared issues of justice, meaning, compassion and suffering²¹

Postmodernism is not a reaction to any religious experience and practice. It is not against religion, nor does it present itself as an alternative religion. People with a postmodern outlook are not closed off to religious belief and spiritual experience; quite the contrary. One can be postmodern and practice a religion—as long as one remains tolerant of other forms of 'truth'. Tolerance is the key postmodern value, including tolerance of Christian religious experience. So this openness provides many points of contact.

IV. The Angle of Post-Christendom

The third angle from which theologians, and missiologists in particular, look at the Europe context is that of post-Christendom. This term needs

des Arbeitskreises für evangelikale Missiologie, Mission Reports 16 (Giessen: Edition Afem, 2008).

¹⁹ Marie-Hélène Robert, *Pour que le monde croie: approches théologiques de l'évangélisation* (Lyon: Profac, 2014).

²⁰ Robert, *Pour que le monde croie*, 297, 300.

²¹ Storkey, 'Bridges'.

some clarification. Christendom is not the same as Christianity (the religion, the faith) but denotes the Christianized society in which the state church is closely connected with the political powers. Another term for this is Constantinianism, because it was the Roman emperor Constantine who, in the fourth century, introduced the alliance between the political powers and the established Christian Church. In *Evangelism after Christendom*, Bryan Stone gives the following description:

In the Constantinian state of affairs, which is also called Christendom, church and state are fused together for the sake of governance in such a way that Christianity becomes a project of the state, or an appendage to the state, subject to its violent ends.²²

This situation has come to an end with the separation of church and state, although there are many vestiges of the old system in every European country. We are now in a post-Christendom, post-Constantinian situation as Christianity is no longer the dominant religion, practising Christians have become a minority and the churches are pushed to the margins. The problem is that the many forms of church life from the old situation are retained.

Stuart Murray is a typical example of those who look at Europe from the post-Christendom angle. He describes this situation as follows:

Post-Christendom is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society

that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story, and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.²³

In short, post-Christendom means that Christians are moved from the centre to the margins. From a majority, they have become a minority. They have lost privileges and have become a community among others, in a plural society.

The shift from Christianity to another religion is not new in history. It has happened in several regions of the world, such as North Africa, but in Europe this shift was different. Murray explains:

Here the Christian story has not been replaced by another [religious] story but [by] the scepticism about all explanatory and culture-shaping stories. In this sense, post-Christendom in Western Europe is different from earlier versions: we really have not been here before.²⁴

1. Major barrier: the Church

When we look at Europe through this angle, than post-Christendom is considered to be the main characteristic of our societies, in terms of culture and religion. Viewed from this angle, the major problem, or barrier, is the Church. People have been given a wrong picture of the Christian faith, which really is quite different from the Christendom kind of religion.

²² Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 118.

²³ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), 19.

²⁴ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 19–20.

2. Response: other kinds of churches, new forms of evangelism

The response, then, is to do something about the Church. The emphasis should change from maintenance, keeping what you have, to mission; from being an institutional church to being a movement of followers of Christ. Stuart Murray is an example of this approach because he analyses the current situation and proposes new ways of communicating the Gospel, as well as new forms of church life. His work has inspired a whole network of so-called 'new expressions'.

Murray agrees with those who find that post-Christendom is not an easy environment for discipleship, mission or church. He notices that post-Christendom can easily be perceived as a threat and associated with failure and decline, but he himself takes a different perspective:

[This response] celebrates the end of Christendom and the distorting influence of power, wealth and status on the Christian story. It grieves the violence, corruption, folly and arrogance of Christendom. It rejoices that all who choose to become followers of Jesus today do so freely without pressure or inducements. It revels in a context where the Christian story is becoming unknown and can be rediscovered by Christians and others. It welcomes the freedom to look afresh at many issues seen for so long only through the lens of Christendom. It anticipates new and liberating discoveries as Christians explore what it means to be a church on the margins that operates as a movement rather than

an institution. And it trusts that history will turn out how God intends with or without Christians attempting to control it.²⁵

Post-Christendom also implies that Christians have to evangelize in a new way, not through control as in the old days but through the witness of our lifestyle, through personal testimony and through the communal witness of churches that are signs of the new society that only God can build. In the words of Bryan Stone, another author who has reflected on evangelism in the post-Christendom situation:

The most evangelistic thing the Church can do today is to be the church, to be formed by the Holy Spirit through core practices such as worship, forgiveness, hospitality and economic sharing into a distinctive people in the world, a new social option, the body of Christ. This is ... the witness to God's reign in the world. [Mission] is neither the individual, private, or interior salvation of individuals nor the Christianisation of entire cultures, but the creation of a people. ... The church does not really need an evangelistic strategy, the Church *is* the evangelistic strategy.²⁶

V. The Paradox of Europe and Christianity

As far as we can see, there is no one angle that suffices to give an overall picture of religion and society in Eu-

²⁵ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 21.

²⁶ Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 15 (emphasis added).

rope; the three angles discussed so far are complementary. So I propose to place them, and other possible angles, in a wider framework, which I call the paradox of Europe and Christianity. One could also call it the love-hate relationship between these two.

Clearly, Europe is the most Christianized continent; no other part of the world has been exposed to the message of the Bible for such a prolonged period of time and in such a consistent way as this continent. Nowhere else is there such a rich Christian heritage. Its cultures are still rooted in Christian values and symbols, and Christian institutions were at the basis of the current social benefit systems.

Without the spread of the Gospel, the impact of the Bible, and the influence of institutional churches, Europe as we know it today might never have come about. A sweeping statement indeed! But a justified one, given the crucial role of Christianity in the political and cultural development of Europe as a whole, and of each European country in particular. Several historians and political scientists bring this out.²⁷

At the same time, Europe is now marked by the abandonment of Christianity, more than any other part of the world. Nowhere is the desertion of the Christian faith and the retreat from in-

stitutional churches as widespread as in Europe, and nowhere else has this been going on for such a prolonged period of time. It is here that a secularized worldview, atheism, secular lifestyles and secular political ideologies have emerged—so much so that Europe is now called ‘post-Christian’, although it is much more precise to say ‘post-Christianized’.

This is the paradox of Europe. Its societies are marked as much by the Christian faith as by its abandonment and rejection; by an enormous variety of expressions of Christian faith and a rich heritage of historical European Christianity—and by a variety of alternative, secular worldviews and ideologies, a secularized public sphere and the spread of secular lifestyles. Failing to take into account both sides of the coin leads to misrepresentations: either we draw a picture that is too optimistic with respect to the influence of the church or we depict an image that is too much the opposite.

From whatever angle we look at Europe as a context for the mission of the church, we should take into account this paradox, namely that our societies are marked at the same time by Christianity and by the abandonment of Christianity. This approach does not replace the angles mentioned above. It should rather refine our perception, as we realize that there is always the other side of the coin. The contradicting aspects of the same reality fall into place.

When studying the context in which we as a church are called to bear witness to our faith, I find this paradox of Europe and the Gospel a helpful tool to come to grips with the different characteristics and apparent contradictions of our societies, in relation to Christi-

²⁷ Several historians and political scientists take this view, e.g. Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent. Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford University Press, 1996); Urs Altermatt, Mariano Delgado, and Guide Vergauwen, *Europa. Ein christliches Projekt? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Religion und europäischer Identität* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008).

anity and the Gospel. So let us take a second look at the other angles.

1. Much Christianity in secularization

First, there is so much Christianity in secularization. This is not only a barrier for the Gospel. Secularization has not simply replaced the religious practice of Christianity, but it is at the same time very 'Christian' because it is permeated by originally Christian ideas and values. Secularization, to be precise, is the secularization of Christianity.

Some Christian elements are retained, such as the idea of the intrinsic value of humans, individual responsibility, freedom, and social and cultural values. Secularization is 'post-Christian' but only in a partial manner. People take the humanist values of Christianity out of their original religious envelope.

This means that secular humanism is not only a barrier but also provides common ground to build bridges of understanding. Take for instance the issue of which values are to be considered foundational to create cohesion in our multicultural societies. This is a matter of ongoing debate, and the interesting thing is that the values in question are to a large extent secularized biblical and Christian values.²⁸ What will become of them in the long run if they are cut off from their origi-

nal religious foundation? Here is where Christians come in and take part in the debate.

Look for instance at what happened to Jean-Claude Guillebaud, a leading left-wing intellectual in France. He set out to define the basic values needed to restructure our multicultural societies. Listening to a host of secular philosophers and social scientists, he came up with a list of six values, which he described in a lengthy book, *La refondation du monde*.²⁹ Towards the end, he came to the surprising conclusion that five of the six foundation values had biblical, Christian roots. This was the beginning of an intellectual pilgrimage that led him a few years ago to publicly embrace the Christian faith.

Another example is Luc Ferry, mentioned above. In his recent book *The Revolution of Love*, Ferry develops what he calls a 'secular spirituality' based on the biblical concept of love. He thinks highly of Jesus, qualifying him as 'the supreme example of an altruistic lifestyle'. He takes the teachings of the church seriously when it comes to the practical application of the commandment to love your neighbour, and he summarizes them in the principles of solidarity, the primacy of the common interest, and the value of selfless service.³⁰ What he says about love would largely fit in a manual on practical Christian discipleship. However, contrary to Guillebaud, he did not turn to the Christian faith. So here we have the paradox again.

Human rights are another exam-

²⁸ Here I follow the lead of several historians, such as the contributors to Francis Jacques (dir.), *Les racines culturelles et spirituelles de l'Europe: Trois questions sur la place de la source chrétienne* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2008).

²⁹ Jean-Claude Guillebaud, *La refondation du monde* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

³⁰ Luc Ferry, *La révolution de l'amour* (Paris: Plon, 2010) 7.

ple. They are key values in European societies, but it is not without coincidence that they have emerged in the history of European Christianity, not elsewhere. How many secular people (or Christians for that matter) realize that Baptist and other non-conformist leaders were the first to define the universal right of religious freedom and freedom of conscience? This was the starting point of a process that led to the declaration of universal human rights. Some atheist philosophers admit this. As Michel Onfray says, 'Their language is rational, but their quintessence is Judeo-Christian ethics'.³¹ John Gray calls them 'a hangover of Christianity'.³² This again provides an interesting point of contact for introducing the biblical message.

2. Postmodern critique and Christian experience

Second, our paradox shows another side of the postmodern outlook. The Christian community, particularly in evangelical circles, often takes a suspicious, negative stance towards this mode of thought, because of its critical attitude towards the message that Jesus is 'the' truth and 'the' way to fullness of life. Yet at the same time, Christians can join postmodernism in its critique of totalitarian regimes such as Nazism.

Reacting against social structures and ideologies that claim to represent absolute truth, postmodern thinkers

argue that such claims for absolute loyalty really were (and are) instruments of power. Following the line taken by Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard and others, they set out to deconstruct these systems to bring to light the political and economic interests behind them. By excluding all rivals, these 'great stories about reality' lead to oppression of individual freedom. This critique of the terrors of atheistic, totalitarian regimes such as Nazism and Soviet Communism reminds us of the biblical critique of any Tower of Babel kind of system based on human pride.

Postmodernism is not only suspicious of religious claims to knowing the only way to salvation and happiness, but in a similar vein it also criticizes the dogmatic attitude of secular rationalism. It deconstructs the idea, based on the Enlightenment, that modern science leads humanity on a triumphant march towards a brave new world.

In fact, it asks, what are the grounds of this belief in progress? What kind of knowledge do scientists have of reality? Are there no other things to know than phenomena that meet the rational eye? And are there no other ways of obtaining knowledge than rational enquiry? Human beings are fundamentally a mystery even to themselves, so instead of relying on the limited power of reason, this mystery can often be better explored by means of music, aesthetics, intuition, religion and other rich worlds of experience.

We can take up these postmodern questions and bring to light the pretensions of secular scientific rationalism as it tries to impose its worldview. This creates an opening for Christians to come up with plausible answers to the questions people are posing today.

³¹ Quoted by Frédéric Lenoir, *Le Christ philosophe* (Paris: Plon, 2007), 262.

³² John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

A religious answer is not by definition less valid than a secular one. On what grounds can secular rationalists absolutely exclude the existence of God, the validity of religious experiences, and the biblical story of the origin of humankind?

Moreover, postmodernism is not in opposition to religious experience and practice. The postmodern outlook is not an alternative to religion as such, but a reaction to the dominance of truth systems. From the Christian standpoint, the great problem of postmodernism is its pluralism, which leads to relativism.

3. The heritage of European Christianity

Third, let us look at the legacy of European Christianity. Surely, established churches have a very dubious historical record because of their implication in power politics, wars, oppression and so on. Moreover, they suffer from a negative image among a considerable part of the population. At the same time, they enable us to build bridges to make known the Gospel today.

For a start, the message of the Bible has permeated every sector of our society. As Indian author Vishal Mangalwadi puts it in his masterly study, 'This is the book that shaped European culture, indeed the soul of the whole Western civilisation'.³³ Mind you, this came to pass not only through Christian counter-movements and apostolic preachers, but to a much larger extent

through established churches and their social institutions.

Moreover, European Christendom has left us with an enormously rich heritage: art, music, paintings, cathedrals, monasteries, universities, social customs, festivals, names, symbols. This heritage abounds in all European countries; it is there for everybody to see and hear, read about, touch and visit. The question is: who will be a guide? Many people visit cathedrals without understanding their symbolism. They enjoy sacred music and admire famous paintings of biblical figures without understanding the real meaning. They use the benefits of hospitals and schools that were once Christian institutions, but they have no idea of why and how they came about. They give their children names of Christian saints while ignoring their history.

Finally, there is a growing interest in the roots of our culture. As Christians, we represent the major religious root of Europe, and this provides us with countless occasions to build bridges for the message. We only have to explain general culture, quite simply. Because we are familiar with the Bible, we have the key to unlock the meaning of this rich cultural heritage to our contemporaries. As Christians, we are ideally equipped to explain European culture to our contemporaries who are ignorant of its background.

Christian heritage centres have been developed in several locations, and they organize lectures and heritage tours. This is not a difficult endeavour, and every church can try to see what Christian heritage is in their city and in the region and make efforts to study it. Before long, they can offer city walks, guided tours and heritage

³³ Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 2011).

talks. Throughout Europe, people are generally fond of discovering culture, ranging from local music to local cuisine and local customs, and also natural sites with history, architecture and so on. In most cases, there is a link with the history of the church. Find out about it and transmit it to others. One just has to explain the meaning of this painting, that building, a popular custom, or tell the story of a famous person in the past, and there is a natural occasion to explain the Bible.

4. Two sides of the coin: attachment, indifference and incomprehension

Are we not drawing a much too optimistic picture of the socio-religious context of Europe with respect to the communication of the Gospel? This would indeed be the case should we forget the paradox. The long history of Christianity in Europe, and all the efforts of evangelization that have been going for ages, have led to a paradoxical situation that I would summarize in three words: attachment, indifference and ignorance.

The Bible and its moral values and picture of God, the Gospel stories of Jesus and the cross, the names of the apostles, and countless traditions of the Church have become part and parcel of European cultures. Although many people feel attached to this heritage, they are often indifferent and ignorant with respect to what it means to be a Christian. We observe this in particular among the electorate of patriotic political parties that are on the rise all over Europe (also called far right or populist).

High on these parties' agenda is the

defence of the 'European' identity, that is, the culture of the autochthone people against multiculturalism and immigration. It is commonplace that these movements appeal to the Christian or Judeo-Christian roots of our societies, but, as political scientist Pascal Perrineau points out, 'they attract more non-religious voters than practicing Catholics.'³⁴ What Perrineau, a noted observer of the phenomenon of right-wing populism, writes about the Front National in France can also be said of similar movements in other countries:

The Front National (FN) ... penetrates all categories of society, but practising Catholics are less touched than others. The strongest penetration of the FN is among non-practising Catholics, and among the non-religious category that has been a key left-wing electorate for a long time.³⁵

This ambivalence can be observed on a wider scale in the whole society. Benedict Schubert, inner-city pastor (Reformed) and lecturer at the Theologisches Alumnium in Basel, summarizes it as follows:

In our country, there is an extraordinary inhibition to speak of faith in public. This leads, in fact, to a particular ambivalence. To begin with, this reluctance does not mean that people want to do away the visible

³⁴ Pascal Perrineau, 'Le FN est désormais présent dans toutes les catégories', interview in *La Croix*, 11 December 2015, 5. This phenomenon is further developed in his book on right-wing populist movements, *La France au Front: Essai sur l'avenir du FN* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

³⁵ Perrineau, *La France au Front*.

signs of Christian presence that are everywhere around us: the crosses on the mountain tops, chapels beside the trail and churches in the village centre. On the contrary, people seem to be attached to them. In the debates on migration, there is much emphasis on the fact that we are a 'Christian country'. However, and this is the other side of this ambivalence, this does imply an openness to publicly discuss the meaning and the scope of such a statement. Asking someone what faith and religion mean to him usually causes discomfort.³⁶

Readers all over Europe will recognize this combination of cultural attachment to the heritage of Christianity and indifference to the message of this religion for today. The two phenomena are intertwined. Since churches have been around for ages, how can their message still surprise? How can it be heard as good news? People certainly need to hear it as something 'new' to be willing to change their minds, but precisely because of our 'Christian' history it is not easy to present the Gospel as good news. When people hear about it, their first and automatic reaction is 'We know all that.' The problem is that they think they do, while in fact false presuppositions, preconceived ideas and traditional misrepresentations abound. They are much harder to correct than ignorance.

Most people are superficially familiar with the person of Jesus. From what they know, they will generally have a positive impression of his ethical conduct, and as such Jesus enjoys

a certain popularity, but being a disciple of Jesus is quickly associated with not-so-attractive images of the institutional church. Some associate Jesus with outdated songs, long sermons, prescribed rituals and a whole list of forbidden pleasures; others with a child in the arms of Mary and a dying man on a crucifix. This also pertains to the influence of historical Christianity, with its paradoxical mix of Bible truth and human traditions.

We can take our paradox even further. Precisely in Europe with its rich history of Christian practice, where Christian symbols still abound, more and more people no longer understand religious language for what it really means. Everyday language owes much to the Bible and Christian tradition, but today, the language in which Christians express their faith often meets with incomprehension. Generally speaking, people are indifferent to what is abracadabra to them. Benedict Schubert hits the nail on its head when he says that in Europe of all places (!) we are faced with the tremendous challenge of making new translation efforts:

Find phrases, metaphors, illustrations, lines of argument that allow us to express our faith, to talk about our experiences with God in a way that is meaningful for our secularised contemporaries. This begins with listening to them, their songs, their books, their films. In what context and with what connotations did you recently come across the word 'sin' for example?³⁷

For those who are involved in evangelism, this other side of the coin is all

36 Schubert, 'Témoigner'.

37 Schubert, 'Témoigner'.

too familiar. However, if we look only at that, we can draw a very pessimistic picture of the religious state of Europeans, to the detriment of the other side of the reality, i.e. the far-reaching influence that this same message has exerted and still exerts on the cultures and social institutions of our continent. These two sides of reality should not

be treated as mutually exclusive.

Everywhere in Europe we see signs of the impact of the Bible and the Gospel—even in the ways in which it has been rejected and abandoned. May churches, organizations and individual believers today find ways to add new chapters to this ongoing story!

An Evangelical View of Proselytism

Elmer Thiessen and Thomas Schirrmacher

Evangelical Christians have begun to pay attention, in the past decade, to an issue that was sadly often neglected in the past—the ethics of doing evangelism. For example, the World Evangelical Alliance joined the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to produce a joint statement entitled ‘Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct’.¹ This

document spells out the ethics of mission, stressing that Christians are not only bound to the Great Commission but also to any other ethical command of Jesus, as is suggested in the Great Commission itself. This document is also our starting point for the following discussion.

The World Evangelical Alliance has also participated in discussions concerning a related issue—proselytism, understood as ‘sheep-stealing’. Most recently, an international consultation of some thirty theologians and church leaders from a wide range of Christian traditions gathered in Accra, Ghana, to explore perceptions of proselytism in the exercise of the universal mandate to share the good news of Jesus Christ.²

1 ‘Christian Witness’ is available at www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian_Witness_in_a_Multi-Religious_World.pdf. See also the following articles by Thomas Schirrmacher: ‘Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World—Three Years On,’ *Current Dialogue* 56 (Dec 2014): 67–79, www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/current-dialogue-56; ‘Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World’, in Richard Howell, ed., *Sharing of Faith Stories: A Methodology for Promoting Unity* (New Delhi: Caleb, 2018), 345–70; ‘The Code “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World”—Its Significance and Reception,’ *Evangelical Review of Theology* 40 (2016): 82–89; ‘“But with Gentleness and Respect”: Why Missions Should Be Ruled by Ethics—An Evangelical Perspective for a Code of Ethics of Christian Witness,’ *Current*

Dialogue (World Council of Churches) 50 (Feb 2008): 55–66. See also Elmer John Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion* (Crownhill, UK: Paternoster; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), as well as his more recent book, *The Scandal of Evangelism: A Biblical Study of the Ethics of Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).

2 This gathering, held on June 8–11, 2017,

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The issue of proselytism is best understood as a subset of the wider issue of evangelism. The following statement seeks to clarify the evangelical position on proselytism, as understood in the special and narrow sense of sheep-stealing.

I. Evangelicals, Evangelism and Proselytism

Evangelism is part of the DNA of evangelicals. Evangelism is typically understood in terms of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Of course, there is more to the mandate of the church than evangelism. We are also called to demonstrate the good news of the kingdom. But the focus here is on evangelism as verbal proclamation of the gospel.

Concerns about proselytism often arise in connection with efforts at evangelism. Evangelical Christians are the group most often accused of proselytism, given their passion for evangelism.³ Evangelicals believe in

proclaiming the gospel to all who are lost. They believe in sowing the seed of the gospel everywhere and to everyone, even though they cannot know in advance how receptive people will be to the proclamation of the gospel.⁴

Evangelical efforts at evangelism could therefore include reaching out to people who were once Christians but who have strayed from the faith and who as a result are no longer attending church, though they might still be on a church membership list. Such evangelistic efforts (described in Orthodox and Catholic terminology as ‘re-evangelism’) can lead to proselytism, because a recommitment to faith on the part of those being re-evangelized often results in a change in church affiliation.

Although most Christians agree with the mandate to evangelize those who have never heard of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is strong disagreement about extending this mandate to lapsed or nominal Christians. Evangelicals are committed to both evangelism and re-evangelism. The key question here is whether re-evangelism that leads to proselytism can be done in an ethical manner.

was convened by the Global Christian Forum, whose purpose is to provide space for Christians from a wide variety of churches and traditions to meet, foster mutual respect and address common challenges. The planning and implementation of this consultation were undertaken by the Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance.

³ We use the word ‘evangelical’ here to refer to those who are committed to the following theological tenets: a high view of the authority of the Bible, a belief in the historicity of the gospel accounts of Jesus, a belief in Jesus’ death on the cross as the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of sin, a com-

mitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and a commitment to evangelism. We use the term in a broad sense, noting for example that most Pentecostals are evangelicals and are therefore included here as such. We distance ourselves from any political misuse of the term ‘evangelical’, as occurs all too often in the USA today.

⁴ Such indiscrimination would seem to be part of the thrust of the Parable of the Sower, especially when Jesus explains this parable to his own disciples (Mt 13:18–23).

II. Definitions

Much confusion surrounds the definition of the word *proselytism*. Historically, this word was understood in a positive sense, equivalent to evangelism—proclaiming the good news. Today, and especially in ecumenical circles, the term has acquired strongly negative connotations. For example, in a statement by the World Council of Churches (WCC), ‘Towards Common Witness’, proselytism is defined as ‘the encouragement of Christians who belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance, through ways and means that contradict the spirit of Christian love, violate the freedom of the human person and diminish trust in the Christian witness of the church’.⁵ The WCC continues to be in dialogue with various Christian bodies regarding the definition of proselytism, but we use this text as a starting point as it describes a very common usage of the term. There are four problems with this and similar definitions of proselytism.

First, such definitions are confusing because they collapse into one concept two quite different meanings of proselytism: (a) unethical or unfaithful practices in evangelism that violate the freedom of the person, and (b) encouraging those who are already members of other churches to change their church affiliation. Clarity demands that

we separate these two very different meanings.

Second, such definitions are arbitrary. Clearly, if proselytism is loaded with the negative implication of unethical practices, then all proselytism is unethical. But this is to make proselytism unethical by arbitrary definition. Again, we need to separate actions that might cause people who already belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance from adopting unethical means of doing so.

Third, such definitions are unfair when applied to evangelicals. Evangelicals are in principle strongly opposed to any forms of unethical evangelism, re-evangelism, or proselytism. They have joined other Christian denominations in condemning such activities, as noted above. Evangelism and re-evangelism must always be done in ways that are faithful to Jesus Christ and the norms of Scripture.⁶

Fourth, such definitions can lead to dishonesty. Sadly, some opposition to proselytism as defined above is in fact rooted in opposition to evangelism in general.⁷ It is a betrayal of forthrightness to hide one’s opposition to evangelism behind objections to so-called proselytism.

⁶ See especially Luke 9:51–55; 1 Cor 2:1–5; 2 Cor 4:1–2; 1 Thess 2:1–6; 1 Pet 3:13–17.

⁷ This point is made by Lawrence A. Uzzell, ‘Don’t Call It Proselytizing’, *First Things* 146 (Oct 2004): 14–16. For a forthright claim that opposition to proselytism is really opposition to evangelism, see Petros Vassiliadis, ‘Mission and Proselytism: An Orthodox Understanding’, *International Review of Mission* 85 (Apr 1996): 257–75, esp. 260–61. Vassiliadis suggests that this assessment is common both in the Orthodox Church and in ecumenical circles.

⁵ World Council of Churches, ‘Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism’, *International Review of Mission* 86 (1997) 463–73, also available at <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/towards-common-witness>.

Evangelicals are committed to evangelism, and therefore they reject any attempts to stop their evangelistic efforts under the guise of opposition to 'proselytism' understood as evangelistic malpractice. At the same time, they are very much committed to following all biblical commands that concern presenting the gospel in an ethical manner.

III. Exaggerated Charges of Proselytism

Charges of unethical proselytism are often exaggerated in various ways, partly due to the vagueness surrounding terms specifically associated with proselytism. The WCC statement 'Towards Common Witness', for example, associates proselytism with unfair criticism or caricaturing of the beliefs and practices of another church, offering humanitarian aid or educational opportunities as an inducement to join another church, using psychological pressure to induce people to change their church affiliation, or exploiting people's loneliness, illness, distress or even disillusionment with their own church in order to 'convert' them.⁸

The problem here is that many of the terms used to identify unethical means in proselytism are vague. When is the criticism of another church unfair? At what point does psychological pressure to change churches become excessive and unethical? Is offering humanitarian aid to someone in need always an inducement to join another church? What does exploitation of illness or loneliness mean? These questions are not easy to answer because

of the vagueness of the descriptions of unethical methods. Critics of proselytism should spell out exactly what they find objectionable and then be prepared to defend their position that the practice is indeed unethical.

Many Christians today change their church affiliation entirely on their own, often after a long period of deliberation.⁹ Here it is completely inappropriate to charge anyone with proselytism in the pejorative sense. Many people change their affiliation because they were not happy with their previous church. Surely it is unfair to charge a church that welcomes such people into its midst with unethical proselytism. (One could say that the best way to avoid losing members in this way is to make your own church vibrant and healthy.)

Other people leave a church because they experience love and caring from members of another church.¹⁰ Surely it is not wrong to show love and caring to members of other churches. In such cases, the charge of unethical proselytism is quite inappropriate. Those making such allegations should show greater charity.

Many people change their church affiliation after moving to a new location.¹¹ The number of interconfessional

⁹ This point is acknowledged in 'Towards Common Witness', 468.

¹⁰ Evangelicals themselves often change churches because they find another church to be more attractive or even faithful to Jesus Christ.

¹¹ In Germany alone, about 150,000 people a year switch between the two major faith traditions, Catholic and Protestant, without either side raising concerns or doing anything about it.

⁸ WCC, 'Towards Common Witness', 468.

marriages is also growing steadily. Theology students frequently spend a semester or two at seminaries of other confessions. In our globalized world, more Christians than ever are in contact with churches that have a different history and confession and, as a result of such contact, become interested in them.

All these trends are part of a broader international development: lifelong loyalty to institutions, including churches, is in decline worldwide. Globally, young people are increasingly leaving the religious affiliation of their parents in the same way in which they feel free to choose another profession, political party, music style or fashion.

One other caution is in order. It is incumbent on churches making the charge of proselytism to investigate carefully who is doing the proselytizing. All too often, accusations are made against evangelicals when the actual groups involved are Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses or others who are not in fellowship with the global evangelical community and would not listen to us in any case.

We also urge all churches to make a distinction between active church members (who rarely change their affiliation anyway, even if approached to do it) and those Christians who are lapsed or who have never had any further contact with their original church beyond their infant baptism. We will return to this issue below.

The problems of definition and application discussed above suggest that should be very cautious about how we describe proselytism. Perhaps it would even be better to call a moratorium on the use of the word in Christian circles.

In the following discussion, we will

continue using the word, since we are trying to address an issue that is described in this way in ecumenical circles and that is creating problems in relationships between Christian communities. But henceforth, we will characterize proselytism, within a Christian context, in a morally neutral sense, as simply referring to *activities that contribute in any way to people's decision to change their church affiliation*. We are not arbitrarily loading the term with the additional assumption of unethical means. In other words, we are leaving open the possibility of an ethical form of proselytism.

IV. Who Is a Christian?

A basic question underlies the concerns about proselytism: who is a Christian? The WCC statement 'Towards Common Witness' defines proselytism as 'the encouragement of *Christians* who belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance' (emphasis added). For evangelicals, the reference to Christians in this definition can beg the question, leading once again to an arbitrary definition of proselytism.

Evangelicals take seriously the frequent biblical warnings about Christians losing the faith, forsaking their first love, being led astray, falling away or drifting from the faith (Amos 2:4-5; Hosea; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tim 6:3-10; 2 Tim 4:3-4; Heb 2:1; 3:7-11; 5:11-6:6). Jesus told parables in Luke 15 to illustrate the possibility of God's people getting lost: sheep that were once part of the sheepfold wander away on their own, and a son leaves a loving household only to squander his life in wild living.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who makes every effort to find lost sheep, the loving father who runs out to meet sons and daughters who have left the family and squandered their inheritance. Christians should follow the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in caring about lost sheep and making every effort to bring them back to the sheepfold.

Accordingly, evangelicals are committed to proclaiming the gospel to all who are lost, including those who were once Christian but have strayed from the faith, those who have been baptized and might still be on church rosters but who never attend church, and those who are only nominal, lapsed or inactive Christians.¹² As such, evangelicals are committed to both evangelism and re-evangelism.

Evangelicals also interpret the return of the lost son or daughter as essentially a return to God the Father and to Jesus the Good Shepherd, not necessarily to a church or denomination. Our guiding motivation is to do what is best for the sheep, not for us. The goal of all churches should be to transform lives and see people become like Jesus. Indeed, this goal is expressed in different ways in different confessions: the

Orthodox call it theosis, Catholics and Evangelicals call it holiness (with perhaps slightly different meanings), and Pentecostals call it a Spirit-filled life.

Beyond all theological differences, however, the DNA of Christianity is that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit want to transform lives and bring them into communion with other believers in the church. All churches should also agree that baptized 'Christians' who do not confess their sins and live transformed Christian lives, and who have no communion with other Christians, are an anomaly. No church or confession should accept as normal a situation in which millions of baptized members have lost contact with their Christian communion and show no growth in faith and holiness. All should be happy if God uses other Christians to revive their nominal members.

Along with the issue of lapsed and nominal Christians, this serious theological question that merits further discussion. But regardless of how we address these theological questions, we need to treat each other in an ethical manner.

V. Ethical Proselytism

Evangelical Christians maintain that ethical proselytism is possible, provided that it is consistent with biblical norms. Here it is helpful to focus on what is surely the paradigm case of proselytism: evangelism or re-evangelism of people who have drifted away from the church or have even rejected the faith they once espoused. What does ethical behaviour look like in this

¹² Some of these church 'members' do not even know that they were baptized as children; they find out only after their conversion to Christ and then have to wrestle with their status as Christians. If we would abstain from evangelizing these people, we would have to put a stop to public evangelism in countries like Germany or Russia altogether, because a majority of people belong to this category. It sometimes seems that these nominal church members are of interest to their established churches only after they have come to Christ and show interest in attending another church.

paradigm case²¹³

First, and of primary importance, the dignity and freedom of the individual must be respected (Gen 1:28; 2:15; Ps 8; Josh 24:15). Coercion must be avoided.¹⁴ Any form of inducement to convert or to change churches is wrong. Exploitation of vulnerability must be scrupulously avoided.

Of course, as noted earlier, these general guidelines are somewhat vague, but the general principles still stand. God does not coerce, and we should not engage in coercion when interacting with someone considering a change in church affiliation.

Ethical re-evangelism and proselytism are always careful to speak the truth with love. Truthfulness is repeatedly held up as an ideal in the Scriptures.¹⁵ Making false claims about other churches is unethical. It is wrong

to misrepresent the doctrines of other churches when engaging in re-evangelism or proselytism.

Ethical re-evangelism and proselytism must also display tolerance. Although tolerance is not an explicitly biblical idea, the concept is certainly mandated in Scripture.¹⁶ Tolerance, when properly defined, means treating persons who hold beliefs different from those of the evangelist with love and respect.¹⁷ Ethical proselytism, while not precluding truthful and fair critical comments about the beliefs of other churches, makes such comments in a way that shows love and respect for people of other church traditions.

Attitudes and motivations are also important. Those engaged in evangelism or re-evangelism must display humility and a servant-like attitude.¹⁸ Selfish motivation is ruled out for

13 Here we need to distinguish between secular or legal rules and Christian ethics. The laws of the state, international law, and statements of human rights sometimes can allow or forbid certain actions that are contrary to Christian ethics. For example, freedom of speech might allow us to say things about other Christians that we would not say if we followed Christ's commands. In this discussion we are concerned with Christian ethics, or those things that bind us because we are followers of Jesus Christ, not because we are citizens of the state.

14 See Lk 9:51–55 and Mt 10:12–15, where Jesus gives his disciples a 'theology of failure'; also 1 Pet 3:13–17 where evangelism follows an invitation to speak.

15 Jesus is the embodiment of truth (Jn 1:14; 14:6) and encourages truthfulness (Mt 5:37). Repeatedly he introduces his teachings with 'Truly, truly, I say to you' (Mt 5:18, 26; Mk 3:28; Lk 9:27; Jn 3:3, 5, 11). Paul also encourages us always to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).

16 The Old Testament contains calls to love one's neighbor, including the alien and the stranger (Ex 22:21; Lev 19:18, 33, 34; Deut 10:19). Paul introduces the notion of forbearance, which is closely related to tolerance (Col 3:12–14; Rom 2:2–4; 15:1–2).

17 Paul and his co-workers, facing the outbreak of a riot in Ephesus, were defended by a city clerk who said that 'they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess' (Acts 19:37). Peter too exhorts us to 'show proper respect to everyone'. This exhortation appears in an epistle that teaches Christians to respond to hostility with love and gentleness when defending their faith (1 Pet 2:17; 3:15–16).

18 The Bible frequently applies humility to our interpersonal relationships (Mt 18:2–4; Jn 13:1–17; Phil 2:3–11; Col 3:12). Jesus objects to 'lording' it over others and admonishes us to be a servant as he was (Mt 20:24–28). Peter specifically talks about meekness, gentleness, and humility with regard to evangelism (1 Pet 3:15–16; cf. 5:5–6).

Christians, and thus preoccupation with growing one's own church is also inappropriate (Ps 119:36; Prov 18:1; Phil 1:17; 2:3). The fundamental motivation for re-evangelism and proselytizing is love for God and for neighbour (Deut 6:5; 10:12, 19; Mt 22:34-38; 2 Cor 5:14).

As should be evident, the guidelines for re-evangelism and proselytism are really the same as those for evangelism. We can generally describe them as specific applications of the Golden Rule (Mt 7:12; Gal 5:14). Put yourselves in the other person's shoes and try to imagine someone trying to persuade you to change churches. What would you find acceptable? Do the same when you engage in re-evangelism and proselytism.

So far, we have been looking at the re-evangelism of lapsed or nominal Christians. But another scenario deserves attention. Suppose that we are dealing with a genuine Christian who is deeply committed to and active in his or her church. Is it wrong to try to persuade such a person to change churches? This clearly violates the spirit of ecumenism, and such proselytism should not be a priority for any Christian.

However, one can easily imagine a scenario where this form of engagement might come about quite naturally. For example, friendly exchanges between two Christian friends might include frank discussions about the theological differences between their churches. One friend might even suggest to the other that his or her church is more faithful to Jesus Christ. This might result in the exploration of each other's churches, and in the end someone might change churches. Surely

nothing inherently unethical is occurring in this scenario. However, once again, the ethical guidelines discussed earlier in this section would apply.

VI. Proselytism and Religious Freedom

Evangelical Christians are committed to respecting, affirming and promoting the religious freedom of all people.¹⁹ This is not just a positive legal or political concept for evangelicals, but part of their theological DNA.²⁰ Men and women were created in the image of God, but with the freedom to obey or disobey him. God does not force anyone to accept his revelation or his offer of salvation. Jesus and the apostles always allowed people to reject the good news they were proclaiming.²¹

Religious freedom is central to human dignity. Therefore evangelical Christians support the definition of religious freedom as found in the Univer-

19 See the Resolution on Religious Freedom developed at the 2008 General Assembly of the World Evangelical Alliance in Pattaya, Thailand: https://www.iirf.eu/site/assets/files/112304/wea_res_eng-1.pdf. For translations of this statement in other languages, see <https://www.iirf.eu/about-us/wea-rlc/>.

20 See Thomas Schirrmacher and Richard Howell, 'Freedom of Religion or Belief from a Biblical Perspective', in *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* (Oxford: Regnum, 2015), 18–29.

21 See for example Jesus' response to his disciples when they wanted to call down fire from heaven on those who rejected his message (Lk 9:51–55). Often we read of two quite different responses to the proclamation of the gospel in Acts: some believed and some did not (Acts 2:13, 41; 14:1–7; 17:32–34; 18:8, 12; 19:9, 19).

sal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes the freedom to change his/her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, to manifest his/her religion or belief, in teaching, practice, worship and observance.²²

Religious freedom also entails that Christians should be free to change church affiliation. We thus need to be careful about language suggesting that church members are somehow owned by their churches. From this viewpoint, there is something odd about understanding proselytism in terms of stealing sheep from another church. Jesus bought every believer with his blood, and ultimately we belong to the church through the blood of Jesus, not by anything a church or other Christians have done.

²² WCC, 'Towards Common Witness', 467. For a review of international covenants regarding liberty of conscience, religious pluralism and equality, free exercise of religion, nondiscrimination on religious grounds, and autonomy for religious groups, see Nathan Lerner, 'Proselytism, Change of Religion, and International Human Rights', *Emory International Law Review* 12 (1998): 477–563. See also Thomas Schirrmacher and Jonathan Chaplin, 'European Religious Freedom and the EU', in Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton, eds., *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 151–74; Thomas Schirrmacher, 'Mission und Religionsfreiheit—eine evangelikale Perspektive', in Marianne Heimbach-Steins and Heiner Bielefeldt, eds., *Religionen und Religionsfreiheit: Menschenrechtliche Perspektiven im Spannungsfeld von Mission und Konversion* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2010), 113–33.

VII. Some Practical Suggestions

1. Evangelism or re-evangelism cannot avoid the issue of church membership for the newly converted or re-committed, because being a committed Christian entails belonging to a church. If, upon conversion or re-commitment, persons indicate that they were once baptized or previously members of another church, ethical proselytism will first encourage these persons to re-connect with their original church. If there are major theological differences between the churches, these should be explained in a fair and open manner that helps persons to make their own decision on church affiliation. If such persons indicate that they do not want to return to their original church, great care must be taken to proceed in an ethical manner in advising these persons with regard to church membership. Everything possible should be done to ensure a peaceful relation with the original church (see the prior section, 'Ethical Proselytism', especially the guidelines on truth and tolerance).

2. When someone changes church affiliation as a result of evangelism or re-evangelism, every effort should be made to notify the pastor or the priest at the person's original church of the person's desire to change church affiliation, thereby also giving the pastor or priest a chance to contact this person if he or she wishes. We should not be afraid that such contacts might lead people to change their minds. The aim is to help people to make a considered and mature decision that they will not regret in the future. We should also help people to maintain peace with relatives and friends from the original

church, rather than creating unnecessary tensions in existing social relationships.

3. It is of utmost importance that the conscience and decision of the person changing church affiliation be respected. All too often, discussions of proselytism focus on the two churches involved, and the person involved becomes merely a pawn in the conflict. In reality, it should be the other way around: the person's wish or decision should be respected, and if we want to respect the dignity of this person, then we need to keep uppermost in our minds what is best for this individual person.

4. Evangelical Christians at local, national and international levels should develop a code of conduct regarding how pastors, priests and leaders of various church communities will handle individuals who want to change their church affiliation.

5. Evangelical Christians will be sensitive to the problem of encroaching on someone else's territory in the task of evangelism, especially if an established church is actively engaged in programs of evangelism or re-evangelism. Here we follow the example of the apostle Paul, who in his letter to the saints in Rome wrote that his ambition was always 'to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation' (Rom 15:20; see also 2 Cor 10:12–18).

We must be careful, however, not to overextend this principle of sensitivity to the problem of encroaching on someone else's territory. For example, the notion of canonical territory to which the Orthodox Church appeals is not

only difficult to define but flies in the face of Orthodox principles of catholicity and unity, as well as the globalization of the modern human community. Where there is great need, and where the Orthodox Church is not evangelizing in its own country (which might be largely secularized), evangelical Christians will not be bound by the notion of canonical territory, which effectively exists only within the canon law of the Orthodox Church.²³

6. Wherever possible, evangelicals will seek to cooperate with other churches in the task of evangelism or re-evangelism.

7. We must be very cautious about charging proselytism when clergy or other leaders or theologians change from one church or confession to another. With rare exceptions, such changes are not the result of any immoral offers or even activities by the receiving church, but of a long process of deliberation by the clergy themselves. Where the people involved have studied the matter thoroughly, we need to respect the theological reasoning behind their decision.

²³ We humbly request that churches with a concept of canonical territory apply it only to their own church; i.e. a Catholic bishop may not act in the diocese of another Catholic bishop without his consent, and an autocephalous Orthodox Church may not become active in the territory of another autocephalous church without permission. But why should this bind other confessions? If it did, then it would also apply to the Orthodox Church's evangelistic activities in countries that are not Orthodox, such as Italy. This inconsistency suggests again that in a globalized world, the very notion of canonical territory should be re-evaluated.

VIII. Common Witness

Many of the concerns surrounding proselytism centre on the need for the church to bear common witness to the world. Though sympathetic to this need, evangelicals also caution against an over-emphasis on common witness. In a post-Babel world, complete unity is impossible and perhaps even undesirable. There is something healthy about diverse theological emphases among differing Christian commun-

ions. We can learn from each other as we seek to serve and to proclaim the good news of our common Lord and Saviour. Re-evangelism and proselytism can be conducted in 'the spirit of Christian love' and in such a way as to enhance 'trust in the Christian witness of the church'.²⁴

²⁴ These phrases come from WCC, 'Towards Common Witness', 467.

The Case for Practical Theological Interpretation in Faith-based Organizations

Peirong Lin

Faith-based organizations have been known to struggle with mission drift, or the tendency to 'inevitably drift from their founding mission, away from their core purpose and identity'.¹ Mission drift has been a concern for both practitioners and scholars.²

Since mission drift is influenced by an organization's environment, disciplines such as organizational studies and sociology can contribute to an understanding of it. At the same time, in a Christian context theology will contribute to understanding of the intended mission and its sender. Practical theological interpretation looks for a theological interpretation of the situation and the process of arriving at the solution.

The practical theological approach recognizes theology as 'an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in the task of critical and constructive reflection on the beliefs and practices of the Christian church for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their missional vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context to which they are situated'.³ This understanding of theology actively engages and reflects on Christian beliefs and tradition for the purpose of supporting the Christian community. It engages with the various theological sub-disciplines as well as with other relevant academic disciplines.

In this paper, I consider how the tasks involved in practical theological interpretation, as well as the appropriation of different academic disciplines and theological sub-disciplines, be used to strengthen the Christian identity.

¹ Peter Greer and Chris Horst, *Mission Drift* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2014), 15, 18.

² See Anselm Reimer, "How Do We Maintain a Credible Diaconia for the Future? Some Thoughts from a German Protestant Perspective," *Diaconia* 2, no. 2 (2011): 170–74, and Johannes Eurich, "Diaconia Under Mission Drift," *Diaconia* 3, no. 1 (2012): 58–65.

³ John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 44.

tity of an organization, thereby countering mission drift.

I. Practical Theological Interpretation

Richard Osmer's framework of practical theological interpretation is well established and broadly received within the field. It consists of four distinct but interrelated tasks: descriptive empirical, interpretative, normative and pragmatic application.⁴

This framework intentionally engages and dialogues with different theological sub-disciplines as well as with other academic disciplines. Such broad engagement opens up the potential of developing new approaches to 'defining and analysing a research problem that more closely represents the reality in which such problems are situated'.⁵

The particular way in which the different disciplines interact with each other follows Hans Frei's tradition of 'ad hoc correlational model of cross-disciplinary dialogue'. Appropriating this tradition, theology enters into a dialogue with other fields. 'It transforms their insights as they as they are placed in the altogether different language game of theology.'⁶ In this paper, the academic disciplines appropriated include organizational studies, sociology and Reformational philosophy.

II. The Descriptive Empirical Task

Faith-based organizations have been defined as 'any organization that derives inspiration and guidance for all its activities from the teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within that faith'.⁷ Such organizations normally exist in a broader context, categorized as civil society. The term 'civil society' is a popular catch-all term for the broader civic action performed by institutions or networks that advances the common good of society, independent of the state and the market yet at the same time closely related to both and at times even permeating them.⁸

As faith-based organizations depend on their understanding of their faith in their expression of the common good, it is important to understand the process and extent of the influence of faith on the organization. This factor can be discussed in two different ways: how identity is formed in organizations and how faith is measured.

1. Identity formation in organizations

An organization's identity is not constructed purely by management or by the staff members' perception. The theory of the tacit identity of an or-

⁴ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

⁵ Patricia L. Rosenfield, "The Potential of Transdisciplinary Research for Sustaining and Extending Linkages between the Health and Social Sciences," *Social Science and Medicine* 35, no. 11 (1992): 1343.

⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology: an Introduction*, 169.

⁷ Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings, *Development, Civil Society and Faith Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.

⁸ Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2011), 9.

ganization understands that ‘identity formation is both culturally embedded in complex and taken-for-granted ways and undertaken as part of organizational practice.’⁹ This implies that identity formation is both the ‘narrative unconscious in the stories that people live by’ as well as the ‘formative organizational practice’.¹⁰

The process and content of an organization as a collective ‘self’ can be viewed from three perspectives: object, subject and stories. The self as object and story together form the *content* of identity, whereas the self as subject is involved in the *process*. This theory presents a more comprehensive way of looking at how identity is formed in the organization.

a) The process of identity

Two main processes are related to the social construction of organizational identity: self-authoring and self-enacting.¹¹ Authoring relates to the selection of organizational experiences and the attributing of meaning in the form of self-conceptions and self-stories; enacting refers to the living out of these self-conceptions and stories.

To focus on the process requires focusing on the stakeholders involved in the different organizational proc-

esses and the plausible management implications that result. Such a focus recognizes the importance of practices related to the construction of organizational identity.

Experiences within an office context provide the opportunity for staff members to frame meaning based on their own self-conception of the organization. From this point of view, ‘the processes of self (as the organization) are processes of participation in and performance of embodied, valued producing activity (by the staff members).’¹² These practices described as ‘formative practices’ are influential for the overall understanding of self as subject.¹³

b) The content of identity

As already noted, the content of identity can be investigated through the study of the organization as an object or through the story or narrative lived by the organization.

Self as object was the primary focus in early organizational identity research.¹⁴ This approach asks how the organization wants to be perceived and views identity construction as involved in creating such an image.¹⁵

Self as story takes seriously how the organization is situated in its loca-

9 Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 9.

10 Arne Carlsen, ‘On the Tacit Side of Organizational Identity: Narrative Unconscious and Figured Practice’, *Culture and Organization* 22, no. 2 (2016): 107.

11 Carlsen incorporated the work of William James, ‘A World of Pure Experience’, in *Writings of William James, a Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), vol. 2, chapters 9 and 10.

12 Carlsen, ‘On the Tacit Side’, 116.

13 Philip Selznich, *Leadership in Administration. A Sociological Interpretation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1957).

14 See K. Corley et al., ‘Guiding Organizational Identity Through Aged Adolescence’, *Journal of Management Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (2006): 85–99.

15 M. Hatch and M. Schultz, ‘The Dynamics of Organizational Identity’, *Human Relations* 55, no. 8 (2002): 989–1018.

tion, its temporality, and its purpose within society.¹⁶ It affirms the importance of narrative in providing continuity and purpose in human experiences. People continuously construct and reconstruct to make sense of their past and anticipate their future. In the same way, organizational members look at the situatedness of the organization as they try to understand the organization's identity. Looking at the narrative clarifies where the identity arises from. The sources can include the culture of the organization or specific events considered important in its story.

c) Forming a tacit religious identity

Together, the organization as content and process interact with each other to form the tacit identity of the organization. This identity captures more than the management control activities that occur within the organization; it also takes into account the staff members' interpretations and the story of the organization. All these factors create a mediated religious identity.

2. Measuring faith in organizations

Organizational literature has typically examined how different organizational variables are influenced by religiosity.¹⁷ In addition, typologies have been

created to indicate the role of faith within various organizations, ranging from faith-permeated organizations to secular organizations.¹⁸ Such typologies generally focus on explicit variables that are outwardly measurable. This assumes a direct causal relationship between the explicit variables that leaves out the impact of the people in the organization. To include the staff members' perceptions within an organization is to recognize the organization as the 'product of beliefs held by members of society'.¹⁹ Staff members can influence the overall expression of the organization's expression in society.

Organizational culture is a good tool to understand the perceptions of staff members. It is composed of the unconscious assumptions shared by members of the organization. Organizational culture has been defined as 'a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct ways to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems'.²⁰

Measuring the organizational culture supplements available explicit information about the role of Christian

16 Carlsen, 'On the Tacit Side', 129.

17 See for example Thomas H. Jeavons, 'Identifying Characteristics of "Religious" Organizations', in N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt and Rhys H. Williams, eds., *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations* (New York: Oxford University Press,

1998), 79–95.

18 Rick James, 'What Is Distinctive about FBOs', *INTRAC* 22 (February 2009), www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/482/Praxis-Paper-22-What-is-Distinctive-About-FBOs.pdf.

19 Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42.

20 Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 18.

faith in an organization as described in typologies, as well as identifying religious characteristics. This provides a fuller picture of the impact of faith within the organization.

3. Data collection

My case study examined the international Christian organization World Vision in two locations, Nepal and Papua New Guinea. I asked the following questions:

- How has World Vision's collective Christian understanding been expressed in its organizational variables and how has this Christian understanding evolved in the development of the organization?
- Using the framework of organizational culture dimensions, what Christian values and assumptions are espoused by World Vision based on its core documents?
- What actual values and assumptions are held by members in each of the two country offices based on the dimensions as determined in the first question?
- What is the state of relationships held by different internal stakeholders of the organization?

The first of these questions focuses on the organization as object as well as subject, considering World Vision as a single entity. The next two questions take seriously the experiences of different offices by uncovering the organizational culture in these locations. Question three recognizes the experiences and interpretation of staff members as indicative of the overall religious identity of the organization. Finally, question four takes seriously the relationships within the office. These

relationships mediate the overall dialectic process in the identity formation model between process and content within the organization.

I applied a mixed-methods approach in my data collection. I used qualitative research, examining archival records and policy documents, to interpret World Vision in its entirety. I also used focus group discussions and interviews to validate measurements of organizational culture at the two country locations, engaging in open, deep discussion of specific cultural features.

I also used a questionnaire to address the last two questions in a quantitative manner. The questionnaire was designed to study respondents' attitudes, values, beliefs and motives. I asked questions about organizational cultural dimensions, as well as about relational proximity so as to understand the state of relationships in offices.

My respondents included staff from various functional units across World Vision, including Operations, Christian Commitments, Administration, and People and Culture. They encompassed members from different levels of the organization. Key discussion points included (1) determining World Vision's Christian values and practices based on its core documents alongside the organizational cultural dimensions, and (2) reviewing research tools—namely the questionnaire, focus group discussions and interviews.

III. The Interpretive Task: Appropriating Organizational Studies

The next key task in practical theological interpretation is the interpretative

task, which takes into consideration (1) relevant particulars of specific events and circumstances, (2) discernment of the moral ends at stake and (3) determination of the most effective means to achieve these ends in light of the constraints and possibilities of a particular place and time.²¹ In the following discussion, the analysis of each organizational self is outlined.

1. Summary analysis of self as object, story and process

With regard to organizational self as object, World Vision is clear and consistent in its Christian understanding, as expressed in the different organizational variables as well as public documents. It has intentionally considered what it means for Christian faith to permeate through organizational variables. This commitment is held at the highest level of the organization, where policies dealing with this Christian understanding are approved by World Vision's international board.

World Vision's 'Witness to Jesus Christ' policy is an example of how the organization has been intentional in its Christian understanding on various organizational variables. These include clear elements within the policy on what witness looks like in its programs, in activity systems related to different stakeholders, or in external partnerships.²²

With regard to self as story, it is clear that World Vision has evolved since its early days. What began as an

evangelical missionary organization 'to meet critical needs of the Orient' has since evolved into an ecumenical organization with clear operating structures, working in relief, development and advocacy. It no longer exists primarily as an intermediary organization with the focus on churches and their involvement in the mission field, but rather is aligned with known players in the wider development and humanitarian sectors, drawing funds from a wider base than the church.

In addition, who works for World Vision has changed. Once the staff were predominantly evangelical Christians; now they include people from many denominations and even from other faiths. At present, there is an intentional effort to communicate World Vision values to staff members through the mission statement, core values and vision statement of the organization. These are included in orientation practices for new recruits. However, these efforts seem to be less than fully successful, as staff members describe other priorities as more important than the organization's Christian values.

Finally, with regard to the self as subject, there has been a reported increase in the complexity of processes as the overall operations of World Vision have increased. Originally an American organization, it has since expanded its operations in many different contexts with diverse cultural and religious groups. Much has been done to organize the work of World Vision as well as to manage its decision making. Resources have been invested periodically to structure the organization in light of these changes.

One early initiative in structuring the different offices of World Vision

²¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 84.

²² World Vision, 'Witness to Jesus Christ Policy', Partnership Policy and Decision Manual (16 September 1995).

was the covenant of partnership. This construct has since been further clarified, with World Vision structured as a federal model, accommodating diversity yet at the same time giving reserve powers to the Global Centre.

This increase in complexity of processes resulted in rational bureaucratization. Policies and systems were drafted for smooth operations of the organization. At the same time, policy documents were drafted to articulate how World Vision understands its Christian faith in different areas of its work, such as inter-faith participation, partnerships with churches, and children's well-being.

Another obvious phenomenon with regard to the processes was the increasingly diverse influence from the external environment, driven by the increasing number of diverse stakeholders. As World Vision spread across different cultures and in different sectors, there were more decision makers within the organization with different agendas. These agendas pull the organization in different ways, depending on the needs and particularities of World Vision in a given time and place. As a result, the organization has evolved differently in various contexts. It can be argued that the organization's Christian identity has been relegated to a supporting role that is not always prioritized.

2. Uncovering tacit Christian identity through study of the organizational culture

Measurements of the organizational culture give further insight into the interaction between the different organizational selves that result in the tacit religious identity.

As we have seen, Christian values were clearly articulated in World Vision's core documents. These values were, however, not forthcoming as resultant values among the staff members at the Nepal and Papua New Guinea offices.

In Nepal, the non-Christian context was identified as the main reason for difficulty in the transmission of Christian values. There was evidence of management activities (such as a deliberate internship program from churches, an appointed spiritual point person for each office location who was responsible for regular devotions, updates, etc.) that tried to foster Christian values. However, these activities did not seem to translate into a deep embrace of Christian values at World Vision Nepal.

In Papua New Guinea, the grant-funded context was considered the primary reason for difficulty in the transmission of Christian values, despite statistical indications that Papua New Guinea is a predominantly Christian country. The organization emphasized the need to focus on the project plans, strict budgets and timelines. Working in such a context, staff members emphasized the clear regulations that viewed religious activities as forbidden.

3. Relationships as key in mediating content and process

In both offices, field staff felt the most distance from senior management. This is noteworthy as senior management has the most links to other parts of the organization. Access by other staff members in a country office to information on the partnership with the central office is often dependent on

senior management. A distant relationship could result in limited access to and therefore diminished influence of partnership information, including the World Vision emphasis on Christian understanding as intended to be part of the daily operations implemented by field staff.

In addition, perceptions between different stakeholders were not necessarily reciprocal. When one stakeholder deemed a relationship as close, the response of the other stakeholder was not always the same. This was particularly true for the senior management team, who reported a closer relationship to staff members than those staff members reported about their relationship with the managers. As a result, actions authored by the senior management team might not be enabled among the staff as readily as they expected.

Most stakeholders indicated that their closest relationships were with other stakeholders in the same category. This could imply that field staff, who formed a majority of employees at each location, are significantly influential in shaping the organizational culture of World Vision, in that a greater frequency of authoring and enabling takes place amongst them.

Finally, external stakeholders were held at a greater distance compared to relationships in the local office. This can be problematic for the transmission of Christian values as these external stakeholders, such as the Global Centre or the Regional Office, are key offices responsible for the reserve powers of World Vision. Reserve powers include decisions that are considered both high-risk and broad in scope. The reserve powers include the need to 'promote the World Vision way', which

is where the content and accountability of Christian identity lie. Given the distant relationship, external stakeholders have little influence in the overall organizational culture in these locations.

It can be concluded that the current state of relationships is not conducive to promoting Christian values. We move now to the normative task involved in practical theological interpretation.

IV. The Normative Task: Appropriating Reformational Philosophy

The normative task involves the direct dialogue of the situation, seen from a particular point of view. It focuses on what 'ought to be going on' with the situation at hand. Osmer outlines the normative task in three different ways: theological interpretation, ethical reflection and deriving norms from good practice.²³

I approached this normative task through the lens of Reformational philosophy, a branch of philosophy that is clearly rooted in the Christian faith. Reformational philosophy stresses that reality is not neutral but always has a starting point. Reformational philosophy takes its starting point from the Christian God, the creator.

This normative practice model has been developed as an alternative to applied ethics, in which ethical principles are applied to ethical dilemmas. The model takes actual practice seriously, recognizing a specific practice as constituted by a constellation of norms. At

²³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 132–60.

the same time, its normative structure resists the tendency of blindly following popular ethical trends within the social, scientific or economic domains.

The key concepts that underpin the normative model include the concept of practice, whereby the understanding of practices refers to categories of human activity that exist in society, the understanding of meaning in practices as found in structures with different constellation of norms, and finally, the understanding of plurality.²⁴

The normative practice model has three components: structural, directional and contextual. The structural side focuses on the nature of practice as related to the constellation of norms of practice (in World Vision's case, its development practice). The directional, or regulative, side of the practice describes worldview-based ideas of the practitioners that give the actual performance its specific character. Finally, the activity always occurs in a specific context with its specific restrictions and opportunities (i.e. the contextual side).

The analysis of the structural side found clear evidence that the core documents of World Vision were in alignment with the normative structure of the development practice. Operationally, it was also clear that World Vi-

sion's development program approach was in tune with wider development practice. What remained unclear was how together the three pillars of World Vision—development, relief and advocacy—would work together to fulfil the mission of 'human transformation'.

On the directional side, World Vision has evolved in its Christian understanding since its founding. Despite the official preference for Christian staff members, employees stated that the Christian values of the organization were not prioritized in the organizational culture and did not have significant implications for their daily work.

Finally, on the contextual side, World Vision had a clear understanding that beneficiaries influence the work that it carries out. Besides the beneficiaries, the two offices had different influential stakeholders. In Papua New Guinea, donors were considered particularly influential; in Nepal, the local context seemed more influential, with a focus on government relations as well as country statistics. These stakeholders can influence the overall development work done by World Vision in each office.

V. The Pragmatic Task: Appropriating Theology

The pragmatic task consists of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in desirable ways. This task involves practical actions that the organization can undertake, drawing on the analysis of both the process and content of the organization. Before I suggest possible action strategies, I first outline the kind of theological approach, namely constructive theology, that I apply here.

²⁴ The understanding of normative practices detailed in this section is based on Henk Jochemsen, 'Normative Practices as an Intermediate Between Theoretical Ethics and Morality', *Philosophia Reformata* 71 (2006): 96–112, and Gerrit Glas, 'Competence Development as Normative Practice: Educational Reform in Medicine as Heuristic Model to Relate Worldview and Education', *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 77, no. 1 (2012): Art. #411, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/koers.v77i1.411>.

The term ‘constructive theology’, coined by systematic theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, describes theology as ‘an integrative discipline that continuously searches for a coherent, balanced understanding of Christian truth and faith in light of Christian tradition (biblical and historical) and in the context of the historical and contemporary thought, cultures and living faiths’.²⁵

Such an approach is compatible with the context in which a faith-based organization operates because of the key principles involved in this approach. First, it incorporates a non-foundationalist understanding to theology. Theology is envisioned as ‘an ongoing conversation between Scripture, tradition, and culture through which the Spirit speaks in order to create a distinctively Christian “world” centred on Jesus Christ in a variety of local settings’.²⁶ This openness is particularly useful for a faith-based organization that is deeply immersed in a public context.

Second, the theological interpretation that ensues is not rigid, but rather coherent and dialogical. It recognizes theology as a second-order discourse that ‘describes the grammar or internal logic of first-order language and assesses such language critically’.²⁷

Third, an ecumenical approach is also implied in the appropriation of constructive theology. This is particularly useful because it takes seriously the pluralistic contexts in which faith-based organizations work. As these entities work alongside other kinds of

institutions in the public sphere, the finer points of dogma that differentiate denominations take a back seat, since they are less relevant in a pluralistic context.²⁸ A deliberate ecumenical approach categorizes Christian faith-based organizations as a collective category of organizations in their dialogue with the broader pluralistic society.

Finally, a broad engagement of different theological disciplines, described by Kärkkäinen as integrative, is also deliberately included. The integrative aspect refers to the opportunity to ‘utilize the results, insights, and materials of all theological disciplines. This includes fields such as religious studies, ethics and missiology.’²⁹ Together, these different theological disciplines can support each other in forming strategies of action.

I will now present some recommendations, using the framework of the organizational formation model.

1. Strengthening the content of the organization

First, how the Christian faith uniquely influences the development practice that World Vision seeks to express should be more clearly explicated. An intentional reflection of the Christian faith can shed light on the practices and institutions that the particular development practice embodied by World Vision should support. It also clarifies the end goal of the development prac-

²⁵ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 13.

²⁶ Franke, *The Character of Theology*, 79.

²⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 169.

²⁸ Barbara Hargrove, *The Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1989).

²⁹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 14.

tice, adding further information on the direction of the practice. An intentional discussion of the Christian faith indicates continued value for the organization by providing information that is relevant to current challenges.

As faith-based organizations express the public role of faith in society, it is important for them to give due attention to their faith identity. This involves being deliberate in making decisions that move the organization towards its ultimate goal of practice, which is the bringing to pass of the creator God's intent for the world. This means more than having statements of its Christian faith in its policy documents; in addition, it requires staff members to be involved in robust engagement with the Christian content of the development practice.

a) The Trinity as the main theological motif

To prioritize the Christian faith in an organization, one must first have a clear understanding of what the Christian faith entails. For faith-based organizations working in different contexts, a standard understanding of this Christian faith cannot be assumed. It is therefore recommended that the Trinity be used as the main theological motif to describe the Christian faith to which an organization like World Vision subscribes. The Trinity is both unique to and integral to orthodox Christian faith;³⁰ it also unifies the different streams of Christian tradition.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals

God as one divine essence manifested in three divine persons.³¹ One way in which this understanding of the Trinity has been further developed has focused on the sending nature of God. In the classic doctrine of the *missio Dei*, God the Father sent the Son, God the Father and the Son sent the Spirit, and all three send the church into the world.³²

The purpose of this sending was to reconcile the world to God. Instead of leaving his people alone, God sought to redeem them to himself. Although faith-based organizations are not traditional churches, these organizations belong to the Christian sector within society and can be counted as part of the broader Christian family sent by God. One primary way in which such organizations are sent into the world is through their role in social justice,³³ which validates the important role of the Christian faith in addressing social issues. This role involves engaging the wider public, developing intentional coherence and working alongside other partners to uphold justice.

b) Flourishing as the goal of social justice

As a common term in the public sphere, *flourishing* can be useful to help faith-based organizations to articulate

³⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 7th ed. (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994), 69.

³¹ John S. Feinberg, ed., *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 487.

³² David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 390.

³³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10. Here I appropriate Bosch's elements of what mission constitutes within the emerging ecumenical paradigm of missions.

their goals of social justice as they seek dialogue and cooperation within the broader society. From a Christian perspective, we can identify three aspects of what flourishing should look like and their implications for justice.

First, flourishing can be understood as reconciliation to God as God actively relates to human creatures.³⁴ In one way, human beings ‘flourish’ because God relates to us creatively—not through our own efforts, but simply because we are created by God. This truth ‘grounds the conviction that humans have dignity that deserves unconditional respect no matter how diminished’. Therefore, ‘The human being and his or her well-being should be the end of all economic, social and political processes.’³⁵

Another way in which human beings flourish is when they glorify God as they relate to him. This includes ways in which they relate to fellow human creatures and to their shared creaturely contexts so as to be loyal to their well-being.

This understanding of flourishing focuses on relationships: first with God, and then with other humans and with the environment. The relationship with God is a response to the *missio Dei*, God’s pursuit of his people. Besides being God the Father who creates,

he is God the Son, Jesus who relates to created human beings and draws them to himself,³⁶ as well as Holy Spirit, the ‘ever-present, life-giving, life-supporting and energizing spirit of God’.³⁷ To consider the relationship of an individual to this God is to consider flourishing as involving spiritual, not just material needs.³⁸ In the same way, social justice must take into account the relationships involved.

Finally, our understanding of flourishing should consider the relationship among the different divine persons in the Trinity. This focus on relationships within God, as described by Kärkkäinen, has been a focus of communion theology, which looks at God as a ‘dynamic living, engaging community of the three’.³⁹ It is a fellowship of persons, categorized by ‘mutual relationality, radical equality and community in diversity’.⁴⁰

Social justice takes seriously, in its understanding of flourishing, what kinds of relationships exist. Just relationships can be modelled on the example of the Trinity.⁴¹ As people are made in the image of God, the Trinity as the ‘divine society’ can provide a ‘pointer toward social life’.⁴²

34 David H. Kelsey, ‘On Human Flourishing: A Theocentric Perspective’, Yale Center for Faith and Culture Resources, accessed 11 February 2016, http://faith.yale.edu/sites/default/files/david_kelsey_-_gods_power_and_human_flourishing_0_0.pdf.

35 Séverine Deneulin, “Christianity and International Development,” in *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*, ed. Matthew Clarke (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2013), 57.

36 Kelsey, ‘On Human Flourishing’, 3–4.

37 Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, 338.

38 Deneulin, ‘Christianity and International Development’, 58.

39 Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, 320.

40 Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, 321.

41 In making this proposal, I recognize the risk of theological inaccuracy that could result from relating the Trinity to a community’s social program. The divine community is not an equivalent of a worldly society but rather should inspire society.

42 Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, 322–

2. Recommendations related to the organization’s processes

The processes of identity formation include ‘processes of participation in and performance of embodied, value-producing activity’ within the organization.⁴³ The issues raised in the analysis task are the result of the existing authoring performed by leadership and the enabling of the people within the organization. Such acts can be the result of intentional management control, as leaders decide what streams of authoring will be put in place. However, management does not have full control over all the authoring and enabling in the organization. Individual staff members and their perceptions also participate in this process.

The leadership process in an organization involves more than the leader and management control. It involves setting the tone of the organization by establishing its direction, aligning people with this direction and motivating and inspiring the people.⁴⁴ In addition

to the individual leader, the interpretations made by the followers, the goals of the organization and its context are other factors that can influence the overall leadership process.

Taking seriously the different factors in leadership, leadership is understood as a moment, constituted by the ‘things of which they are part’.⁴⁵ These different things or pieces are the leader, context, purpose and follower. As a moment, the reality of leadership is dependent on these different pieces and cannot be separated from them.⁴⁶ ‘Leaders relate to followers and together they interact within a particular context and move towards an explicit or implicit purpose.’⁴⁷ Figure 1 shows the central role that the leadership moment has on the processes involved in the organization, which is the result of authoring and enabling within the organization.

Leadership Differs from Management (New York: Free Press, 1990).

⁴⁵ Donna Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look at Old Leadership Questions* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010), 25.

⁴⁶ Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership*, 26.

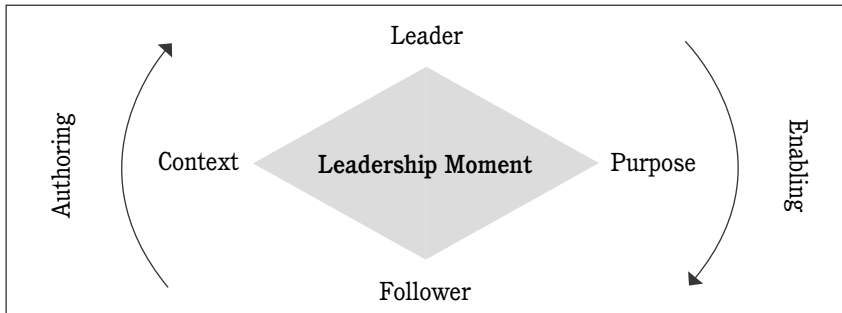
⁴⁷ Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership*, 27.

23.

⁴³ Carlsen, ‘On the Tacit Side’, 107–35.

⁴⁴ John P. Kotter, *A Force for Change: How*

Figure 1 Leadership Moment in Organizational Processes



In addition, understanding leadership as a moment acknowledges that leadership is made concrete in the work experiences of staff members in a specific context, as they work for an organization with a specific purpose. The different pieces of the moment are interconnected, such that changing one piece can result in an overall change in the experience.

It is recommended that World Vision and other faith-based organizations appropriate the theology of work as the hermeneutical lens used to review the existing leadership moment for the organization. This theology emphasizes the Christian presuppositions with respect to work, which influence not only the desired outcome of the work but also the understanding of work itself.

Appropriating the theology of work illuminates the gaps and opportunities faced by the organization from a distinctly Christian perspective. Working through these gaps enables the organization to change the processes introduced by management control, as well as to influence the interpretations made by staff members. These steps can influence the processes involved in the organization, thereby strengthening it and countering mission drift.

Following in the tradition of theologians like Miroslav Volf and Darrell Cosden, the purpose of reflecting on the theology of work is transformative and not merely descriptive. Within this tradition, the anticipated new creation undergirds the broad theological framework of work, providing a clear Christian perspective and norms. 'Work is done under the inspiration of the Spirit and in light of the coming

new creation', Volf observes.⁴⁸ Cosden provides this definition:

Transformative activity essentially consisting of dynamically interrelated instrumental, relational and ontological dimensions, whereby along with work being an end in itself, the workers' and others' needs are providentially met, believers' sanctification is occasioned, and workers express, explore and develop their humanness while building up their natural social and cultural environments, thereby contributing protectively and productively to the order of this world and the world to come.⁴⁹

Cosden's definition illustrates the three dimensions of work: instrumental, relational and ontological. The three are equally important in a proper understanding of work.⁵⁰ They are interrelated and none of them should dominate the others. Interpreting the work experience through these multiple dimensions can be useful in determining how management should influence organizational processes.

For example, consider how this lens can support leadership development in the relational dimension. The findings regarding World Vision revealed different degrees of relationships within the organization. Relationships are also the form by which the tacit identity of the organization is mediated. For an

⁴⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79.

⁴⁹ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 179.

⁵⁰ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 178.

organization to truly express the social justice that it seeks to advance, it should work to foster justice in relationships. This can occur through World Vision's people management activity systems.

A relationship characterized by justice and love recognizes the inherent value of relationships and people. It 'seeks to enhance a person's well-being or flourishing and ... to secure that a person's rights are honoured, that she be treated with due respect for her worth.'⁵¹ This entails looking out for the rights of the other. This is more than a sentiment, but rather a concrete action towards the other's well-being. Such an action seeks to promote what one believes to be that person's good or right.⁵² It is not dependent on the actu-

al success of the concrete action or the plausible benefits of such an action.

Applying this understanding of love to work relationships guides us to consider other people's well-being in the course of completing work tasks. We recognize the importance of caring for others in the workplace as a valid priority. This care is not benevolent and unconditional, but rather an obligation owed to that individual, who is one's 'moral counterpart'. This implies the just treatment of the individual as a way of loving him or her.⁵³ It is about caring for the 'standard of well-being for all parties in a given community'.⁵⁴

51 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 101.

52 Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 103.

53 Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 83.

54 Bruce C. Birch, Rebekah Miles and Allen Verhey, 'Justice', in Joel B. Green et al., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

Reverse Missiology: Mission Approaches and Practices of African Christians within the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

This essay investigates the missiological implications of African Christianity in Britain. It explores the phenomenon of *reverse mission*—that is, the idea that people from former mission fields are now contributing to mission in Europe and North America.

Most studies on reverse mission focus on independent Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations with African roots. These churches with humble beginnings have emerged over time to be some of the largest and fastest growing churches in Britain. For example, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) started in the UK in 1988 and now boasts of having about 864 church plants within the British Isles.¹

Although African Pentecostal churches are growing and thereby attracting both scholarly and public attention, there is also a concentration and growing presence of Africans with-

in historic churches.² For example, the number of Black Anglicans in Britain more than doubled between 1992 and 1998, from 27,000 to 58,200 attendees.³ In addition, the largest Black church concentration as of the year 2000 was the Roman Catholic Church's 61,000 members, as compared to a total Pentecostal population of 70,000.⁴

In this essay, I document the mission contributions and struggles of African Christians within the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB). I highlight the different approaches to mis-

² Historic churches in this context include the Catholics, Church of England, Baptists, Methodists and United Reformed Church.

³ Joe Aldred, 'The Black Church in Britain and Their Relations with the Ecumenical Movement, with Particular Reference to Black Pentecostalism', in Christoph Dahling-Sander, Kai M. Funkschmidt and Vera Mielke, eds., *Beiheft zur Okumenischen Rundschau: Pfingstkirchen und Okumene in Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2001), 184.

⁴ Peter Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out: What the English Church Attendance Survey Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2000).

¹ Peter Brierley, *UK Church Statistics No. 3: 2018 Edition* (Tonbridge, UK: AD BC Publishers, 2017).

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sion taken by African migrants, such as church planting, evangelism, social action and racial justice concerns. In carrying out this research, I have interviewed eleven African ministers within the Baptist Union.

I. The Study of African Christianity

It is important to locate a study of African Christianity in Britain within the context of African theology. Studies of African Christianity consist primarily of contextualization work by African theologians, but also include a host of historical and anthropological treatments.

As African countries gained independence starting with Ghana in 1957, African theologians began to look at the relationship between Christianity and African traditional religions (ATRs). African theology's main preoccupation, as articulated in West and East Africa or Anglophone African countries, was the inculturation of Christianity into African worldviews.

The particular concern of this discourse was the nature of ATRs and their relationship of continuity rather than discontinuity with the Christian faith. Part of the argument was that just as the Jewish religion prepared the way for the gospel to be received, so did ATRs prepare Africans to receive the gospel in their own context.⁵ That claim would make Christianity in effect a continuation of ATRs.

Although various African theo-

logians articulated this point of view, their voices were far from identical. Pioneer exponents of this new contextual theology included Bolaji Idowu (1913–1993), whose works explored the relations between Christianity and Yoruba religion and spirituality, arguing for an indigenous church.⁶ Christian Baeta (1908–1994) studied some churches in Ghana.⁷ Harry Sawyerr (1909–1987) from Sierra Leone contributed to a strong mission theology.⁸ John S. Mbiti, possibly the best-known of all modern African theologians, developed a systematic study of ATRs.⁹ Kwesi Dickson (1929–2005) discussed the theoretical basis for the working out of Christian theology by African Christians with respect of the rise of Third World theologies.¹⁰

Although African theology initially concentrated on the task of relating Christianity to African religions and culture, by the early 1970s it began to consider its mission as the liberation of Africans, in terms of socio-economic development and political emancipation.¹¹ This was especially true in the

⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1992).

⁶ E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (Lagos, Nigeria: Longman Nigeria, 1962); Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁷ Christian Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some Spiritual Churches* (London: SCM, 1962).

⁸ Harry Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* (London: Lutterworth Publishers, 1968).

⁹ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969).

¹⁰ Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984).

¹¹ John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1995), 137.

apartheid situation in South Africa. A South African Black theology of liberation was developed by the likes of Basil Moore, a South African Methodist theologian;¹² Steve Biko, a lawyer and activist who died campaigning for the freedom of South African Blacks; and later Desmond Tutu.

A similar theology of liberation arose elsewhere in Africa, seeking to free Africans not just from neo-colonialism and the effects of globalisation, but also from domination by African dictators. One such voice was the Liberian theologian Burgess Carr (1936–2012), former General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACCC).

Since the mid-1980s we have also seen the explosion of African 'womanist theology' in independent scholars such as the Ghanaian Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musimbi Kanyoro and Isabel Phiri. Other avenues for the expression of womanist theology have been women's theological events, organizations and publications. The main concern of this theology is the liberation of African women from Africa's patriarchal heritage, consequences of which have included female genital mutilation, domestic violence, abuse and rape.¹³

Although previously there was a distinction between African theologies of inculturation and African political theologies, this is no longer the case due to various socio-economic and political changes taking place across the continent.¹⁴ In addition, African

charismatics and Pentecostals have dominated the Christian scene on their continent during the last 40 years, giving rise to a distinctive African Pentecostal theology.¹⁵

One pioneer of modern African theology, Byang Kato (1936–1975), advocated against most of his peers a distinct African evangelical theology. Kato was one of the few voices who argued for a discontinuity between ATRs and Christianity.¹⁶ Although discussions of the nature and scope of African Pentecostals and charismatics' theological contributions are ongoing, with regard to mission, church history and theology in the African context these groups are now accepted as significant contributors to global Pentecostalism and world Christianity.¹⁷

The explosive growth of African charismatics and Pentecostals, amongst other expressions of African Christianity, has driven the phenomenon of reverse mission. These Africans are among the numerous Christians from the majority world who are planting churches and doing mission in

African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century', in Ogbu Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007), 418.

¹⁵ Clifton Clarke (ed.), *Pentecostal Theology in Africa* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 1.

¹⁶ Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangelical Publishing House, 1975).

¹⁷ A. H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); A. F. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity* (New York: Orbis, 2017).

¹² Basil Moore (ed.), *Black Theology: The South African Voice* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1973).

¹³ Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*.

¹⁴ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, 'Half a Century of

Europe and North America. One notable African theologian whose research has examined the explosive growth of African charismatics, as a backdrop to understanding African Christianity in the diaspora, is Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu.¹⁸ I have also described reverse mission in Britain by looking at Nigerian Pentecostal history through twenty of its pioneers.¹⁹

In the British context, African churches are regarded as Black majority churches (BMCs). Studies of BMCs began in the 1970s with research commissioned by the British Council of Churches, which treated Black churches as sects at that time. Clifford Hill's resulting short piece, *Black Churches: West Indian and African Sects in Britain* (1971), was an early survey of Black churches in Britain since the 1950s.

The German Roswith Gerloff authored more mature works on Black majority churches. Her robust scholarship and research spanned the period from 1972 until her death in 2013. Her 2010 text *A Plea for Black British Theologies*²⁰ could be considered the foundational and pioneering text on Black British theology. However, her text pri-

marily explored Apostolic Pentecostal churches and the Sabbatarian church movements. Nevertheless, her extensive writing and research on black Pentecostalism in Britain produced influential work on the social, cultural and missiological significance of the African Caribbean diaspora contribution to the Christian faith.

Roy Kerridge's book *The Storm Is Passing Over: A Look at Black Churches in Britain* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995) examined the beliefs and practices of BMCs such as funerals, wedding ceremonies and the use of traditional music. However, Kerridge did not consider the idea of reverse mission. In the late 1990s, Robert Beckford, building on Gerloff's scholarship, pushed the boundaries further by developing a political theology of African and Caribbean Pentecostal churches, using the Rastafarian ideology of liberation. His articulation of what can be termed a black political Pentecostal theology, or the Dread thesis as it is now known,²¹ can be found in Beckford's first two books, *Jesus Is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998) and *Dread and Pentecostalism: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000).

Whereas Beckford's liberation theology was considered too radical for BMCs, Joel Edwards presented an evangelical theology with an integral mission perspective as he served among British evangelicals. He worked through the ranks to become General

18 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) and *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

19 Israel Olofinjana, *20 Pentecostal Pioneers in Nigeria: Their Lives, Their Legacies* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibiris Corporation, 2011).

20 Roswith Gerloff, *A Plea for British Black Theology: The Black Church Movement in Britain in its Transatlantic Cultural and Theological Interaction with Oneness (Apostolic) and Sabbatarian Movements*, vol. 1 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

21 David Muir, 'Theology and the Black Church', in Joe Aldred and Keno Ogbo, eds., *The Black Church in the 21st Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), 8–27.

Director of the Evangelical Alliance in 1997, becoming the first Caribbean and Black to hold the post since the foundation of the alliance in 1846.

In a book edited by Edwards, *Let's Praise Him Again* (1992), one of the contributors, Arlington Trotman, explored the identity of the so-called Black churches, arguing that the terms 'Black-led' and 'Black church' had been imposed by outsiders and that the terminology does not satisfactorily describe these churches.²² Trotman critiqued these terms sociologically and theologically, contending that they were not adequate to describe African and Caribbean churches. His was an insider's articulation of how African and Caribbean churches perceive themselves. Other contributions in the book explored liturgy, such as the nature of worship, and preaching within African and Caribbean Pentecostalism.

Remaining gaps in the history of BMCs were filled by Mark Sturge's brilliant 2005 book *Look What the Lord Has Done: An Exploration of Black Christian Faith in Britain* (Bletchley, England: Scripture Union). A similar book published in the same year was Joe Aldred's *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity* (Peterborough, UK: Epworth), which explored intercultural ecumenism from a Caribbean British perspective.

Although these two works have contributed to our understanding of the history of Black Christianity in Britain, they both did so through the

lens of Caribbean British Christianity; African Christianity in Britain was not given prominent attention. In response to that gap, pioneering researcher Chigor Chike published *African Christianity in Britain* (Milton Keynes, UK: Author House, 2007) to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade. Chike surveyed the doctrines and practices of African Christians in Britain, but said little about their history and nothing about reverse mission.

In that same year, also to commemorate the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade, *Black Theology in Britain* appeared, edited by two well-known Black theologians, Michael Jagessar and Anthony Reddie (London, Equinox, 2007). The book surveyed the current state of Black British theology, considering the works of some of its exponents such as Robert Beckford. However, this work did not explore reverse mission as such.

One source of robust scholarship on the implications of migration and globalization for the diaspora history and mission of African churches in Britain is Afe Adogame, an internationally known African scholar who has written, contributed to and edited more books and articles than any other African scholar I am aware of in Britain.²³ (Adogame currently teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary in the USA.) Altogether, he has edited more

²² Arlington Trotman, 'Black, Black-Led or What?' in Joel Edwards (ed.), *Let's Praise Him Again: An African-Caribbean Perspective on Worship* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway, 1992), 18–24.

²³ Afe Adogame, 'African Christian Communities in the Diaspora', in Ogbu Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007), 431–45; Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

than ten books and written countless articles in edited books and academic journals on African Christianity in diaspora. Adogame has explored the role of African Christianity in reverse mission, but primarily through Pentecostal and charismatic churches, therefore leaving a gap in terms of African migrants within historic churches.

My first publication, *Reverse in Ministry and Missions: Africans in the Dark Continent of Europe* (Milton Keynes, UK: Author House, 2010), looked at the history of European missions in Africa and then African missions in Europe through the prism of reverse mission. It was the first monograph specifically devoted to reverse mission. It also contained theological reflection by a reverse missionary who serves within a British church denomination. I described reverse mission and surveyed the various mission approaches used by African pastors and leaders. However, more information on BMCs has emerged since the publication of this work.

A fuller treatment of the history and mission of BMCs is Babatunde Adedibu's *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity* (London: Wisdom Summit, 2012). Adedibu's work offers ground-breaking research on the history and diverse theologies of BMCs in the UK, although he did not consider the idea of reverse mission in depth.

II. Blacks within British Historic Churches

Rebecca Catto's 2008 PhD thesis was the first in Britain to explore the subject of reverse mission by considering

various case studies of missionaries from the Global South who were serving in mainline churches.²⁴ The case studies consisted mainly of short-term missionaries serving in Anglican and Methodist churches. Within the Catholic Church in Britain, reverse mission appears to be taking place as a shortage of priests is leading to invitations to bring in priests from Africa, Latin America and Asia.²⁵

Since the 1940s, with the onset of large Caribbean migration to Britain, there has been some African and Caribbean presence within historic churches. The general assumption is that British historic churches rejected Black Christians, causing them to found BMCs. However, this assumption of a blanket rejection by historic churches is not accurate. Other reasons, such as mission commitment to Britain and loyalty to Pentecostal denominations back home in the Caribbean or Africa, led to the founding of some of these churches. In addition, some African and Caribbean Christians remained faithful to their original church affiliations by staying within historic churches. Their story is easily overlooked amidst the successes of BMCs.

Take, for example, the story of Sybil Phoenix, MBE (Member of the British Empire), who came from Guyana to London in 1956. Despite much racial discrimination within and outside the church in Britain, as well as personal

²⁴ R. Catto, 'Reverse Mission: From the Global South to Mainline Churches', in D. Goodhew, ed. *Church Growth in Britain* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 91–103.

²⁵ Harvey Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 123–28.

tragedy, she remained in the Methodist church. Moreover, she worked within the Methodist church structure to create independent agencies such as foster homes, youth clubs and community projects that catered to the needs of young Blacks. In recognition of her community work in south-east London she was awarded an MBE in 1972.²⁶

Why did some Blacks stay within historic British churches? One reason, as noted above, was loyalty to church brands from back home. Many who were Anglicans, Baptists or Catholics in their mother country preferred to remain within the same denomination in Britain. Also, not all Africans, Asians, Caribbeans or Latin Americans (whether they are white or Black) like independent Pentecostal churches. Some consider speaking in tongues and other Pentecostal practices unbiblical.

Furthermore, some Black families attend historic churches because they want their children to be eligible to attend church schools, due to the standard of education within these schools. Some Blacks belong to two churches for this reason, perhaps attending Catholic mass in the morning and going to a Pentecostal church in the evening. As a result, many second- and third-generation Africans and Caribbeans are growing up in the historic churches.

The presence of Africans and Caribbeans in historic British churches has not been an easy journey as there have been issues around race and ethnicity. To remedy the situation, racial justice ministries or agencies were founded

within these churches, to care for minority Christians and to tackle racism. These agencies have also helped to facilitate conversations on the challenges of participating in multicultural multi-ethnic churches.

The Church of England, for instance, established the Committee for Black Anglican Concerns, later renamed the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC). In the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the ministry is known as the Racial Justice Group. In the United Reformed Church (URC) it is called the Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministries, in the Methodist Church the Committee for Racial Justice (CRJ), and in the Catholic Church the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ).

III. Mission Approaches and Practices of African Migrants within the Baptist Union of Great Britain

The ministry of African Christians within the Baptist denomination in England started with an African American, Peter Stanford (1860–1909). Stanford was born a slave in Virginia and became an ordained Baptist minister in 1878 in Hartford, Connecticut, USA. He came to England in 1882 and was invited to become the minister of Hope Street Baptist Chapel, Highgate, Birmingham in 1889, making him the first Black Baptist minister in Britain and an early example of reverse mission.²⁷

²⁶ J. Newbury, *Living in Harmony: The Story of Sybil Phoenix* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985), 14–15.

²⁷ Paul Walker, *The Revd Thomas Peter Stanford (1860–1909), Birmingham Coloured Preacher* (unpublished PhD thesis, Manches-

Other black Baptist ministers who were contemporaries of Standford included the Jamaican-born Joseph Jackson Fuller (1825–1908), who served as a Baptist Missionary Society missionary to West Africa, and the African American Thomas L. Johnson (1836–1931), a Baptist minister who trained at Spurgeon's College in London and served the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in West Africa as well.²⁸

Amongst the first Africans to be ordained as a Baptist minister in the 1960s was William Fransch, who came from Zimbabwe (then Northern Rhodesia) in 1968. Fransch studied at Cliff College (1968–1969) and then at Bristol Baptist College (1970–1973). While studying at Bristol, he became the student minister at Stapleton Baptist Church. His other pastorates were at Frithelstock (a group of Baptist churches) in north Devon (1977–1982), Spurgeon Memorial Baptist Church in Guernsey (1982–1998) and finally Brockley Baptist Church in southeast London from 1998 to 2011.

In 1977, Fransch walked, carrying a cross, with his wife Celia and two children from Aberdeen, Scotland to Lands End (on the southwestern tip of England), sharing the gospel with many people during his 23-day trek. In

1980, inspired by the story of Abram walking the length and breadth of the land God had promised him (Gen 13:14–17), Fransch walked across the breadth of the country (from Hartland Point in Devon to Margate in the east) with some people from Frithelstock Baptist Church in nine days. Fransch's approach to doing evangelism by applying the story of Abram as a migrant serves as an example of reverse mission and challenges the general notion that most migrants are economic migrants.

The 1980s also witnessed the beginning of the story of Kingsley Appiagyei, Senior Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in London. Appiagyei has made immense contributions to the Baptist Union in Britain through church planting and considers himself a reverse missionary. He came to England in 1985 to study biblical Hebrew with the intention of returning to Ghana to teach in a seminary. But while studying at Spurgeon's College, he felt called to stay in the UK.

After completing his studies, Appiagyei started Trinity Baptist Church in his house in South Norwood. Under his leadership, Trinity has planted about 17 churches in Europe and an orphanage home in Ghana, called Trinity Hope Centre. About a dozen of these churches are in the UK, two in Italy, one in Denmark, one in the Netherlands and one in Ghana.²⁹ Appiagyei also became the first male African president of the Baptist Union in 2009–2010. He has helped to raise up many emerging ministers who have gone on to train for the

ter University, 2004); David Killingray and Joel Edwards, eds., *Black Voices: The Shaping of our Christian Experience* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 67.

28 Mark Sturge, *Look What the Lord Has Done* (Bletchley, England: Scripture Union, 2005), 69. On Fuller and Johnson, respectively, see my blog posts <http://israelolofinjana.wordpress.com/2014/02/06/black-baptist-joseph-jackson-fuller-1825-1908/> and <http://israelolofinjana.wordpress.com/2014/02/18/black-baptists-thomas-lewis-johnson-1836-1921/>.

29 Olofinjana, *Reverse in Ministry and Missions*, 46.

Baptist ministry.

On 16 April 2017 (Easter Sunday), Trinity Baptist Church opened its new premises, called Oasis House in Croydon, with local and national politicians in attendance along with many high-profile church leaders from within the British evangelical church and BMCs. The new church building has a seating capacity of 3,000. Many of the second-generation members who had been born and dedicated in the church since its inception in 1987 spoke of how they have grown in the church and have been given space to follow God in their own way. As a result, the young people have their own choir and there are many other opportunities to engage in the church's life and mission through sports, music and social and community action projects. Trinity's engagement with second-generation Africans is quite impressive, considering that many African churches are struggling to engage this generation in Britain.

One of the significant leaders to have emerged from Appiagyeyi's mentoring is Francis Sarpong. In 1995, Sarpong founded Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church in East London, which today is recognized as one of the country's largest Baptist churches. Calvary has about fifty pastors and has planted about twenty congregations all over the world. Sarpong is also president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

Another important African pastor whose leadership emerged during the 1980s is Kofi Manful, senior pastor of Faith Baptist Church in London. Manful has been involved in various conversations and committees among Baptists in London regarding racial justice issues. He and other African

and Caribbean ministers formed the Black Ministers Forum in London in the mid-1990s to respond to the loneliness and isolation felt by Black ministers in the London region.³⁰

Kate Coleman is another significant African Baptist leader. Born in Ghana, she came to the UK at a young age to join her family. She later became the first accredited and ordained Black woman in the Baptist Union (in 1991) and then the Union's first Black female president in 2006–2007. She has served in various national capacities within the wider UK church, such as chairing the Evangelical Alliance Council. Coleman is one of the foremost thinkers in the area of British womanist theology, as she reflects on what it means to be a Black female Christian minister leader within the Baptist context.³¹

One of the best-known African ministers within the Baptist Union—and outside it, for his immense influence and networking particularly among Pentecostals—is the British-born David Shosanya. His church roots are in African Pentecostalism, specifically the Apostolic Church in Nigeria. Shosanya led a Baptist church in London in the 1990s before becoming regional minister for mission there. In this role, he co-ordinated and strategized the

30 Sivarkumar Rajagopalan, 'Racial Justice', in Faith Bowers, Joe Kapolyo and Israel Olofinjana, eds., *Encountering London: London Baptists in the 21st Century* (London: London Baptist Association, 2014), 256.

31 Michele Mahon, *Sisters with Voices: A Study of the Experiences and Challenges Faced by Black Women in London Baptist Association Church Ministry Setting* (unpublished MA thesis, Oasis College), 7.

mission of Baptist churches in London. He is a co-founder of the Street Pastors initiative, formed in 2003 to reduce gun and knife crime in urban spaces in London. This initiative employs a pragmatic approach by sending Christians out on the streets on Friday and Saturday nights to offer practical help to people. Amongst other initiatives he has founded is the annual Ministers Appreciation Ball, which recognizes Christian leaders' contributions to church and public life nationally.

Osoba Otagie came from Nigeria to Britain in 2005 as a missionary. Osoba recalls thinking, 'I love London for holidays but not to live permanently'. But he felt God telling him to give up his corporate business work in Nigeria and to minister in Britain. Osoba had a strong desire to work with locals to spread the gospel rather than joining a Nigerian fellowship. Since moving to the UK, Osoba has pastored three Baptist churches and been active in the local ecumenical scene in London and beyond.

IV. Reflections on the Apology

In 2007, the Baptist Union decided to offer an Apology for the pernicious legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and ongoing racism. Why would it apologize for the slave trade when the Union was not even in existence at that time? The rationale behind the Apology can be gleaned from the following statement:

In a spirit of weakness, humility and vulnerability, we acknowledge that we are only at the start of a journey, but we are agreed that this must not prevent us speaking and acting at a *kairos* moment. Therefore,

we acknowledge our share in and benefit from our nation's participation in the transatlantic slave trade. We acknowledge that we speak as those who have shared in and suffered from the legacy of slavery, and its appalling consequences for God's world. We offer our apology to God and to our brothers and sisters for all that has created and still perpetuates the hurt which originated from the horror of slavery.³²

This Apology was followed by an initiative described as the Journey, a vision strategy by the racial justice group of the Baptist Union to ensure that our structures change to reflect the diversity that God has given us.

African pastors within the Baptist denomination have different views about the Apology. Most of my interviewees welcomed it, while also observing that more work on racial justice within the Baptist Union is needed. One person commented that the Apology came rather late and should have been made ages ago, while a few felt that it was divisive and not helpful.

I participated in a Baptist meeting, held to follow up on conversations about the Apology, on 3 June 2008 at the Museum of London, Sugar and Slavery in Docklands. Different views were presented. Some struggled to understand why a whole new generation who have nothing to do with the slave trade should have to apologize to current descendants of its victims. Others contended that because we still expe-

³² On this project, see Sam Sharpe Project, 'The Journey', www.samsharpeproject.org/about-the-project/the-journey (accessed 9 September 2014).

rience the consequences of the slave trade such as racism, prejudice and neo-colonialism, an Apology is necessary for reconciliation so that we can move forward.

One common question is whether there exists any theological or scriptural justification for the Apology. John Cowell, one of the eminent Baptist theologians who spoke at the 2008 meeting, argued yes, citing 1 Corinthians 12:26: 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.' In essence, if our brothers and sisters of African and Caribbean backgrounds feel oppressed through the pain of racism and marginalization, then as the body of Christ we should feel that pain too and do something about it.

People are still wondering what changes the Apology will effect in the life of the Baptist Union. As noted above, the Journey is a racial justice strategy to move British Baptists from words to actions with regard to issues of integration, inclusion and cultural diversity. The Journey's vision was to set out practical steps to enable the Baptist Union in Britain to become fully integrated in ways that reflect its rich cultural diversity and so live out its core values of being a culturally inclusive community.

This racial justice group is working towards ensuring that Baptist churches, colleges, the Baptist Missionary Society, regional associations and other structures represent and reflect the multicultural, multi-ethnic, intergenerational diversity that exists within the Union. My reflection and observation since 2010, when I became involved with the Journey, is that we are gradually and slowly shifting to-

wards a fuller representation, but that more work still needs to be done. One current concern is the need for our Bible colleges to move away from teaching only Western theology, in recognition of the fact that global Christianity has shifted towards the majority world. Part of this process will be to have tutors and teachers in our Bible colleges who are from African, Caribbean and Asian backgrounds.

In 2017, a decade after the Apology, *Journeying to Justice: Contributions to the Baptist Tradition across the Black Atlantic*, edited by Anthony Reddie with Wale Hudson-Roberts and Gale Richards, was published. This first-of-its-kind publication included contributions from Baptist scholars in Jamaica, the USA, Britain and Africa. In addition, other resources to help Baptist churches reflect on cultural diversity and the issues of migration were produced.

Moreover, a conference took place at Spurgeon's College in London on 8 April 2017, with the theme of *Justification and Justice: The Two Luthers*. The conference reflected theologically on the Apology by looking at the connection between Luther's theology of justification by faith and Martin Luther King's theology of racial justice. It stimulated considerable thinking around issues of racial justice and gender justice as essential categories of mission.

Hudson-Roberts, a racial justice enabler for the Baptist Union in Britain and one of the most senior African ministers in the denomination, has personally facilitated conversations around the Apology. His mission policy and approach has been to pursue integration, representation and diversity at every level of denominational governance

and structure, in conjunction with various executive teams. Hudson-Roberts has been at the forefront of challenging the Baptist Union on institutional racism, because he considers issues of racial justice to be an important part of mission.

V. Struggles and Contributions of African Migrants within the Baptist Union

To obtain a balanced view of the struggles of Africans within the Baptist denomination in Britain, we should start with what they value about the denomination. Most of my respondents value the Baptist Union for its theological grounding, ecclesiological distinctiveness, biblical emphasis, evangelical heritage, training, support for ministers, interdependence of churches, and useful personnel and resources. Some of the struggles and frustrations highlighted are racism, sexism, current debates on same-sex marriage, lack of visionary leadership, lack of Spirit-led

initiatives and leadership, and placing Baptist tradition above the Scriptures.

What have African migrants contributed to the Baptist Union? The London Baptist Association, a regional body of the Baptist Union, has recognized publicly that some of our churches would have closed if not for the presence of people from the majority world, of whom many are Africans. One of my respondents affirmed this point but also mentioned that this participation has sometimes led to mono-ethnic Baptist churches in London due to white flight!

Other contributions by African migrants to the Baptist Union have included confidence and optimism in articulating the gospel publicly, church planting, charting emergent theologies from the Global South, renewed spirituality and cultural diversity. My respondents indicated that Africans have injected passion for prayer, church growth, visionary leadership, vibrant spirituality, dynamic faith, provision of church leaders (especially for the Baptist churches in London), biblical emphasis and—as one respondent described it—blood, sweat and tears!

Reciprocal Mission Theology for Diaspora Mission

Samuel Cueva

The concept of diaspora is not new within the social and political environment, but amidst the increasing movement of people groups today, it is essential to apply this concept to a critical analysis of the global mission of the evangelical movement. For this reason, I am eager to share my thinking on reciprocal mission theology so as to strengthen the process of developing a global diaspora mission for the twenty-first century. I believe that reciprocal mission theology will support any diaspora mission and the formation of any effective networking for the benefit of God's kingdom.¹ Reciprocal mission theology will also provide a positive interaction between mission strategy and the theological framework of any diaspora mission model.

¹ For instance, three hundred leaders attended the Global Diaspora Forum held in Manila on 24–27 March 2015. They formed the Global Diaspora Network and have produced *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium on Diaspora Missiology*, edited by Sadiri Joy Tira and Tetsunao Yamamori (Oxford: Regnum, 2016). The work was sponsored by the Lausanne movement.

I. Foundations of Reciprocal Mission Theology

Reciprocal mission theology² emphasizes that collaboration in mission is mainly a reciprocal relationship involving freedom of sharing, trust, truth in the gospel, togetherness,³ unity in diversity, respect for dignity, and common goals for God's glory. I define 'reciprocal contextual collaboration' as reciprocal relationships of harmonious freedom in creative tension that exist between two or more of Christ's disciples as they seek to accomplish the *missio Dei*. This mission contains two aspects: the dual mandate of evangelism and social responsibility, and commitment to the cosmos and the people

² See the whole examination of mission theology of reciprocal contextual collaboration in Samuel Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension: An Analysis of the Relationships in Mission within the Evangelical Movement with Special Reference to Peru and Britain between 1987 and 2006* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Monographs, 2015), 308–20.

³ Mission reciprocity is developed through trust, truth, time and togetherness. For further discussion of the fourfold 'T' see Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 322–24.

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for the glory of God and the benefit of God's kingdom.⁴

The term *reciprocal* is very closely related to the following concepts: *complementary* (to improve each other), correlation (the relationship depends on one another), *interchange* (exchanging things with each other), *interdependence* (dependence on each other), *reciprocate* (transitive verb, entailing give and take) and *reciprocity* (a noun that denotes interchanging for the benefit of both collaborators). Therefore, we will use these terms in an interchangeable manner so as to avoid a reductionist view of reciprocal mission theology.

Reciprocity, as seen from above, clarifies that the church's reciprocal mission belongs to and is empowered by a Trinitarian God; reciprocity from below affirms that the church's reciprocal mission belongs to Christ's body, which is called to sustain with joy and transparency a reciprocal mission theology of unity in diversity within all varieties of models of the church's mission activity.⁵ Moreover, reciprocal mission from above stresses emphatically that God is the owner of the mission, and that he has made a covenantal plan to include his chosen people within his redemptive mission. Hence, the church is a steward, with the responsibility that goes along with this privilege.⁶ At

the same time, reciprocal mission from below affirms that the church is chosen, equipped and empowered to fulfil God's mission in a covenantal response of humble obedience.

A reciprocal contextual collaboration is to be expressed in the daily life of the church. This Trinitarian ecclesial life is rooted in God's eternal nature of love; in communality (a functional relationship, not a hierarchical one); in transparency (absolute confidence and truth); in humility (recognition of cultural identity by accepting differences), in submission (respect, first to God, then to our fellow mission workers) and in happiness (no one is happier than God, who gives joy to the church through reciprocal co-participation in the *missio Dei*).

Reciprocal mission can be both symmetrical and asymmetrical.⁷ As one example of an asymmetrical approach, one side might give money while the other offers loyalty. Or one participant may provide personnel or buildings while the other provides trust, technology, opportunity or training.

Meanwhile, symmetrical reciprocal mission occurs when we Christians work together within a complementary understanding as the body of Christ, and when everything we have for mission belongs to God's kingdom. Accordingly, an understanding of mission labourers working together, as

⁴ For a fuller discussion of reciprocal contextual collaboration, see Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension* (2015), 68.

⁵ Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 334.

⁶ Calvin B. DeWitt suggests that God's creation is a creation of symphony, with human beings being stewards of this symphonic gift, which has a divine appointment to safeguard the integrity of creation. See DeWitt, 'To

Strive To Safeguard the Integrity of Creation and Renew the Life of the Earth', in Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, *Mission in the Twenty-First Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 85–93.

⁷ See Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 311.

we belong to and work for the same kingdom, grounds a mission theology of reciprocal contextual collaboration. It will help us to find appropriate new models of mission through autonomy (of individuals without individualism), freedom (to be shared, not imposed), and interdependence (in harmony, without domination) of mission co-participants. This mission theology promotes dialogue and reciprocity within a non-manipulative but truthful interdependent communication, consistent with the fundamental character of the Trinity.⁸

Reciprocal contextual collaboration is a kingdom mission, with a mission theology led by the Spirit, through the Son to the Father. This understanding gives the Church a theological view that speaks to the human need for relationships, communication and unity within diversity.

Reciprocal contextual collaboration is manifested in different responses to the mission mandate by the people of God. In this sense, reciprocal mission theology can be understood in the following ways:⁹ (1) partnership, (2) strategic alliance, (3) cooperation, (4) business as mission, (5) evangelism, (6) social responsibility, (7) mobilization, (8) liberation, (9) celebration, (10) building two-way bridges, (11) diaspora mission and (12) training for mission.

⁸ Alistair I. McFadyen speaks of communicative autonomy for independent communication in *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 32; see also pp. 113–50.

⁹ See Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 312.

II. Reciprocal Mission Theology and Complementary Collaboration

Within a theology of mission reciprocity, *reciprocal* concerns complementary functions between two or more persons or institutions, and giving or doing something in return for something else. As an example, the Peruvian Quechua words *ayni* and *minka* relate to reciprocity, in the sense of community work focused on social participation that benefits a society through sharing work with common goals.¹⁰ The emphasis is on working together in harmony, with different purposes such as helping an individual or a family, participating in the harvest of products, or constructing houses and public buildings, but always as a positive response or what I call complementary collaboration with those who help. *Minka* has characteristics of celebration, solidarity, a collaborative spirit and team working philosophy.¹¹

There is an important difference between the concepts of *reciprocal* and *mutual*. Whereas the former involves a complementary action on the part of two or more people or institutions, the latter involves two parties being united by performing the same act at the same time, such as a mutual covenant or mutual love. However, a reciprocal

¹⁰ Reciprocity as *ayni* and *minka* implies maintaining equilibrium. See Deborah Chapman, *Florento Segura: Communicating Quechua Evangelical Theology Via Hymnody in Southern Peru* (doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh), available at www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/1842/1565/2/Chapman+D+07+thesis.pdf.

¹¹ See 'La Minka en Movimiento', <http://lamingaenmovimiento.wordpress.com/la-minka/>.

act is distinct in the sense that one party acts by way of return or response to something previously done by the other party.

Furthermore, reciprocity integrates a theological meaning of sharing (either partaking or participating), which affirms participation with others.¹² It implies 'contribution with' (Rom 12:13) or 'distribution of' (Rom 12:8), such as sharing possessions (Luke 6:38; Heb 13:16; 1 Jn 3:17–18), sharing power (e.g. decision-making authority on priorities, allocating personnel or financial resources), and sharing spiritual gifts.¹³ It is within this reciprocal understanding of biblical collaboration that sharing in mission becomes both natural and possible.¹⁴

Sharing is the organizing principle of the *oikonomia* (administration) and social justice;¹⁵ for Craig Blomberg, sharing material possessions is pivotal in biblical theology.¹⁶ Hence, within

mission reciprocity there will always be tensions about how to put into practice the spirit of reciprocal sharing.

III. Reciprocal Collaboration in Practice

Reciprocal co-participation in mission means that a kingdom action on the part of one member (or institution) receives a positive answer from the other member (or institution). At that point the members arrive at reciprocity in goals, relationships, purpose, motives or strategies. Accordingly, it seems that the emphasis on mutuality in mission (having something in common or shared), developed especially in the missiological thought of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from the 1950s to the 1980s, has lacked a clear explanation of mutual missiology.¹⁷ This is one reason why mission reciprocity, which stresses quality of relationships through making a positive response to help one another as members of Christ's body, is the way forward for a more effective mission.¹⁸

According to reciprocal mission theology, one of God's kingdom co-labourers should start the dialogue or provide

12 Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 345.

13 See Colin Marsh, 'Partnership in Mission: To Send or To Share?' *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 366 (July 2003): 370–81.

14 On biblical sharing, see John Corrie, *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2007), 274. Lee Hong-Jung, 'Beyond Partnership, Towards Networking: A Korean Reflection on Partnership in the Web of God's Mission', *International View of Mission* 91, no. 363 (Oct 2002): 580–81, suggests that sharing involves more than reciprocity of giving and receiving and also more than mutual recognition of needs. See also Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999).

15 Lee, 'Beyond Partnership'.

16 Blomberg suggests that material possessions are a good gift from God, and that sharing is necessarily a redeeming process of

transformation in the area of stewardship. See Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 243–46.

17 Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 314.

18 Although some dictionaries suggest that *mutual* and *reciprocal* are synonymous, I prefer to make a distinction so as to emphasize that in Christ's body, all participants should have something to share with joy. *Mutual* seems more oriented to equality, whereas *reciprocal* is a more relational concept, allowing asymmetrical participation in mission.

a mission proposal, and then others should make a response, which could be negative ('let me think about it', or 'I do not think so') or positive ('I like your project, let's work together').¹⁹

An appropriate mission theology of reciprocity implies that churches belong to one another (1 Cor 12:12–27; Eph 4:1) as they confess Christ as the

only saviour (Eph 4:5), as they are led by the same Trinitarian God (2 Cor 13:14) and by Holy Scripture (2 Tim 3:16) and as they are empowered by the same Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13; 4:4). Based on this theological foundation, mission collaboration therefore sees the Church as an indivisible unity (Eph 4:16), called to proclaim the good news in accordance with the *missio Dei*, God's kingdom and Trinitarian mission theology.²⁰

19 Reciprocity supposes at least two presences relating to each other. Thus, reciprocal communion becomes gradually more perfect, but there will never be complete fusion as each partner retains its identity. See Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Exeter, UK: Burns and Oates, 1988), 129.

20 Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 315.

21 Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 317.

Theology of Reciprocal Mission Collaboration²¹

Elements	<i>Missio Dei</i>	<i>Missio ecclesiae</i>	<i>Missio Context</i>
Reciprocal	Trinitarian theology	Biblical freedom	Interdependent mission theology
Contextual	Supra-cultural principles of freedom theology	Reciprocal Christological relationship	Consider both internal and external factors
Collaboration	'Under God's kingdom' mission theology	Mission theology of compassion and generosity	Prophetic <i>missio imagination</i>
Physical	Freedom, generosity and reciprocity	Multicultural teams and simple lifestyle	Non-territorial, non-denominational
Social	Freedom from personal and social sin	Practising a unity theology	Empowering the new emergent Church
Cultural	Developing a theology of cultural identity	Holistic mission relationship	African, Asian and Latin American
Economic	Sharing the control of power and decision making	Overcoming disparities in economy	Recognition of the immigrant, bi-vocational missionary force
Spiritual	Trinitarian	Diversity submitted to unity	Local and global
Missional	Fulfilment of the double mission mandate	Metanoia relationship	Development of local theologies

IV. Reciprocal Mission Theology and Diaspora Mission

Diasporas are a very important process for the mission engagement of the evangelical movement. Although a basic meaning of *diaspora* is dispersion,²² a wider meaning refers to the scattering of a people who settle for a longer period in a location outside their original homeland.²³

One of the seminal thinkers on diaspora mission, the Peruvian missiologist Samuel Escobar, explains that migration patterns and refugee movements have helped to bring together a multiplicity of cultures, and that this phenomenon has exerted an influence in different forms within Christian mission.²⁴ Along the same line, Matthew Krabill and Allison Norton suggest that diaspora mission was reflected by Lesslie Newbigin when he stated that the Triune God is the missionary sending agent. No longer is mission activity based on professional missionaries in foreign lands, but on individual Christians and their local congregations. Indeed, the main topic discussed at the American Society of Missiology in 2002 was related to migration.²⁵ Krabill and Norton indicate that in fact there is multidirectional mission activ-

ity as a result of the global diaspora phenomenon, and that non-Western Christianity has a pivotal role within mission activity today.

I agree that the global diasporas of the present time are unique in human history. The economic, political and social realities of twenty-first-century globalization permeate these movements of peoples. Communication, travel, and economic and social conditions have created a new environment for migration.

For example, it is estimated that 500,000 Latin Americans live in the United Kingdom and that 200,000 people from Spain have moved to the UK in recent years. Others have come from Eastern European countries, and there has been a massive Syrian diaspora. Amidst such migrations, diaspora mission is a new tool that God is using to promote new models for mission.²⁶

The various case studies presented at the 2015 Global Diaspora Forum in Manila help to show that there are no boundaries for a geographical understanding of diaspora mission.²⁷ People move not only because of their preferences, but also because of external factors mobilizing them—political, economic and social factors that are outside their control. I would propose that God is using these external factors for the fulfilment of the *missio Dei*. More people are on the move than ever

²² See Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2011), 25.

²³ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 74.

²⁴ Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 14.

²⁵ Matthew Krabill and Allison Norton, 'New Wine in Old Wineskins: A Critical Appraisal of Diaspora Missiology', *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 4 (2015): 447.

²⁶ Samuel Cueva, 'Mission, Missionaries and the Evangelization of Europe: Towards an Integrating Missiology from a Latin American Perspective', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 4 (October 2010): 347–57.

²⁷ See 'The Global Diaspora Forum in Manila 2015', <https://www.global-diaspora.com/about-us/>.

before in the history of Christian mission, and God is active in this new mission context.

Another important aspect of the diaspora mission process entails accepting that the global diaspora is largely influenced by the majority world. Major reasons for this are economic crises, poverty and war, which cause people from poor countries to try to move to more affluent countries for a better quality of life. For instance, 800,000 Syrians have recently migrated to Germany, and 350,000 Venezuelans have migrated to Peru over the last five years.²⁸ This is the greatest migration to Peru in the past century.

Our theological and missiological understanding should provide a view of reciprocal mission theology to undergird more effective diaspora mission work. Also, any diaspora mission should observe the foundations of reciprocal collaboration discussed above.

When we look at the New Testament mission diaspora, we see that the basic understanding was adapted from the Jewish diaspora, which had somehow become assimilated within the Greco-Roman world (Greek in culture and Roman in political authority). Following this example, the New Testament believers made an impact within their context as a Christian community.²⁹ These people were mission workers on a daily basis, communicating Christ's gospel to the people of their time. It was a mission of shalom and hope to people facing extreme pressure by the Roman Empire. They communicated

the Good News in the power of the Spirit, trusting that Christ will come soon. They had a clear eschatological understanding of mission, with a diaspora missiology that combined hope and realism. This is the message of 1 Peter 2:9: 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'

V. Reciprocal Collaboration in Diaspora Mission

I support the novel approach of training people as 'collaborators' in diaspora mission, such as refugees and asylum seekers, along with people in the academic environment such as international students. These people will become a mission force to strengthen the fulfilment of God's mission if we provide appropriate theological and missiological training to them. This use of non-conventional missionaries can be expected to increase faster than the traditional model of sending missionaries through a mission society.³⁰

However, diaspora mission also needs the reciprocal collaboration of traditional mission structures (mission organizations), mission networks, and emergent mission structures (indigenous movements of local churches and Christian organizations) to be most effective in global mission.³¹ Furthermore, reciprocal mission collaboration

²⁸ See the Peruvian newspaper *El Comercio*, 1 July 2018.

²⁹ Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 76

³⁰ Cueva, 'Mission, Missionaries and the Evangelization of Europe'.

³¹ Cueva, *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*, 221–22.

must not squelch the spontaneity of what the Spirit is doing.

This diaspora mission should have an intentional approach of collaboration with the broader Church. Therefore, we should acknowledge that God is mobilizing the global diasporas for a great contribution in mission history. In this line, a reciprocal mission theology should be a pivotal theological point for any kind of diaspora mission.

The concept of reciprocal mission theology, with its understanding of complementary functions, helps us to avoid any kind of superior or inferior attitude. Mission reciprocity may be either asymmetrical or symmetrical; accordingly, the concern should be for not the quantity but the quality of mission activity on each side.

Finally, practicing unity doesn't

mean uniformity; rather, it welcomes diversity in mission. We must watch carefully and be open to how the wind of the Spirit is blowing to empower the *missio Dei* at a global level.

VI. Conclusion

Christian mission must respond to the increasing levels of migration in today's world. Without losing the spontaneity of the Spirit, diaspora mission must work in reciprocal collaboration with traditional mission structures, networking missions and emergent mission structures. To ensure the necessary complementarity for carrying out diaspora missions, reciprocal mission theology is foundational and will enable us to fulfil the dual mandate of evangelism and social responsibility.

Economics and the 'Present Evil Age'

Richard L. Smith

I. The Divine Economy

The word *economy* has an ancient pedigree. The equivalent Greek term, *oikonomia*, means 'household administration' or 'the law or management of a household'. *Oikonomia* concerns the mechanisms, logistics, expectations, values, structures and practices that sustain human life and enable it to prosper, as well as the natural environment that supports it.

Oikonomia answers such questions as the following: Does everyone associated with this household have fair and just access to raw materials and services? Are equity, opportunity, justice and compassion available to all? Do order, harmony, satisfaction and fulfilment characterize the social relations of the *oikos* (house)? Do all possess the 'ability to flourish as human beings within the ecological limits of a finite planet'?¹ In other words, is the house managed well, is the householder doing his job, and are the members of the house faithful and productive?

Genesis 1–2 presents God as the

omnipotent economist and divine master builder who called forth the life support systems (air, light, land, vegetation) essential for the sustenance of his house. He commanded the earth to produce 'according to its various kinds' (Gen 1:11). He provided fruits, grains, and an abundant supply of water. He ordered space, separating land, sea, and celestial objects. He ordained time and regularity, calling forth the twenty-hour cycle, the seasons and the sabbath. He established all the necessary conditions that human beings presuppose at all times and in every activity.

Most importantly, in God's primal economy there was an edenic nexus of presence (divine sanctuary), peace (*shalom*), and prosperity. Within God's *oikonomia*, the conditions were in place for all created things to flourish and prosper. Human beings enjoyed all that God provided: dignity, abundance, productive work, intellectual development and meaningful relationships within a secure and sacred environment. They were blessed in every possible way.

II. Reversal

The drastic changes introduced in Genesis 3 as result of sin and judgement

¹ Tim Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* (London: Earthscan, 2010), 16.

amount to a reversal of creation. For this reason, Genesis 1–3 is steeped in contrast and irony. The vice-regent whose sacred duty was to serve and guard the *oikonomia* of God instead brought disarray and turmoil to God's estate.

In place of two trees in paradise, plus abundance and productivity, appeared weeds, thorns and thistles. Instead of fruitful and meaningful work came sweat and frustration. In the place of contentment and *shalom* came dissatisfaction and discontent. As a substitute for peace and blessing, humans experienced curses, hostility and conflict. In place of stewardship came exploitation and excess. Instead of caring and sharing, there was greed and gluttony. Instead of enjoying a homeland with God, humans faced expulsion and exile.

Human existence 'east of Eden' (Gen 3:24) and 'under the sun' (Eccl 1:14), therefore, is conditioned by the fall and its accompanying curse. The cultural mandate (Gen 1:28) is carried out in the context of Adam's sin, Satan's intrigue, and God's curse. Mankind has exchanged the truth of God for idols: images, values, self-identities, myths, worldviews, economic systems and religiosities of their own making, which they impose upon the cosmos to provide meaning and stability (Rom 1:18–25). Cultural and civilizational development is skewed by sin and idolatry.

Humans try to replicate Eden and reestablish a religious orientation, but they often settle for visions of utopia, totalitarian ideology, theocracy or empire. They thirst for *shalom*, but they instead experience alienation, disharmony, corruption and fragmentation.

III. The Earth Mourns

Due to the curse, mankind's relationship with the physical environment was tragically altered. Human livelihood was impaired and threatened. The ground became hostile and yielded fruit only grudgingly. Generally, achieving a livelihood and posterity is a painful experience. Adam, the exulted steward of God's garden, became a common peasant, struggling for subsistence. In the words of the Preacher, life is 'toilsome' and the results of our labour are marginal at best (Eccl 2:20; cf. 1:2).

Since the fall, mankind, imperious and self-referential as the dominant species on earth, has viewed the world as existing for its own sake. In this perception, nature has no intrinsic value and is merely functional, a stage prop for the utopian human project. Because of greed, humans reinterpret and abuse God's mandate. Like a rapacious elite bent on extracting all surplus within its empire, humans exploit the natural world, waste resources, pollute the environment, and drive to extinction other creatures and vegetation. Those with power wage war for natural resources, limit access to raw materials, and hoard for private use.

Because of the fall, mankind's *oikonomia* is flawed, self-serving, and idolatrous. Humans do not equitably maintain the values, structures and practices that enable human life to flourish, or the natural environment that supports it. As Christopher Wright says, 'Trade, distribution and exchange of goods all become distorted by greed, injustice and manipulation of power.'²

² Christopher Wright, 'God or Mammon: Biblical Perspectives on Economies in Conflict', *Mission Studies* 12 (1995): 146.

Because of the curse and sin, the earth lies desolate, stripped bare, in comparison with Eden. In fact, no one really flourishes east of Eden.

So we now live in this 'present evil age' (Gal 1:4), as Paul put it, and the sting is clearly experienced in the economic realm. God, the supreme king and householder of the cosmos, expects his human vice-regents to care for, protect and develop what is still his property, for his name's sake and the benefit of his creatures. Sadly, though, humans often abuse and neglect the natural world and one another.

Men and women use creation to make new things with the raw material God provides. However, they do not extend the benefits of their creativity and productivity fairly to everyone who has the need for or right to them. Humans create cultures that are often cruel, unjust and oppressive.

IV. Four Case Studies from the Bible

1. Egypt: Who is the Lord?

When Pharaoh asked, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go?' (Ex 5:2), he was asking a central, even paradigmatic question. In effect, he was raising the issue of who is the true God and what kind of society is best suited for mankind.

Did Pharaoh provide what the people of his land needed in order to live? In which society, Egypt or Israel, could humans flourish? Which was the true land of promise, Egypt (or any other alternative paradise) or Canaan?

The Egyptians had accepted the idea that Pharaoh was the image of the gods and that their social structure

had been derived from a heavenly model. Pharaohs functioned as mediators of divine blessing and served as manifestations of heavenly reality.

In the ancient world, Egypt was a land of blessing. As a river civilization with access to the Nile, it was the bread basket of the ancient Near East. Egypt was an enlightened nation with power, prestige and a highly developed culture. However, this culture existed for the elite and was sustained by slave labour and justified by religious ideology.

As in other theocracies of the period, the religious, social and economic system was organized to maintain the status quo and to benefit the interests of the powerful, who represented only about five percent of the population. Economic life was centrally controlled to enable the redistribution of the nation's resources.

Iain Provan noted, 'In Egypt Israel endured hard oppression at the hands of a human being who is considered within his cultural and religious context to be a god, Pharaoh, son of the sun-god Re and becoming, after death, the god Osiris. This god-king has acquired servanthood from Israel.'³

The Hebrews, on the other hand, voiced their anguish under Pharaoh's harsh servitude: 'Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression' (Deut 26:7). But Yahweh did not merely listen and commiserate; he intervened. He showed the Israelites the way out (*exodus*, cf. Deut 26:8) and in so doing

³ Iain Provan, 'To Highlight All Our Idols: Worshipping God in Nietzsche's World', *Ex Auditu* 15 (2000): 21.

made 'a distinction' between himself and the Egyptian pantheon, between his people and the Egyptians (Ex 8:23; 9:4; 33:16).

Egypt, once a place of bounty and provision, had become 'creation gone berserk',⁴ an empire of corruption, idolatry and oppression. The plagues and the destruction of Pharaoh's army functioned as a systematic repudiation and deconstruction of Egyptian religion, as well as of its social and economic infrastructure. No one but the very elite flourished in Egypt's apostate *oikonomia*.

2. Israel: 'Like all the other nations'

The establishment of the monarchy in 1 Samuel 8 represented a major religious and socio-economic turning point in Israel's history. Undoubtedly looking towards the great Mesopotamian and Egyptian empires, as well as the ancient Canaanite city states, as models, the Hebrew elders (who made the request and had the most to gain as future royal retainers) expressed their desire to 'be like all the other nations' (v. 20; cf. v. 5). In particular, they wanted a king who would 'go out before us and fight our battles' (v. 20).

From the divine perspective, however, the underlying motive was apostate and not unexpected: 'They have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods' (vv. 7b-8).

The assumption of monarchy was a breach of covenant, a repudiation of

God's rule and an open door to idolatry. It also meant the adoption of new social structures, a new *oikonomia*, a restructuring of God's house with non-Israelite criteria. The 'ways of the king' (vv. 9, 11) were the socio-religious toxin that would poison the entire body politic. With the rejection of divine rule came a host of cultural and spiritual maladies consistent with the curses of Deuteronomy 28, ending in conquest and exile.

For a millennium before David, kings of the ancient Near East served as the emissary of the gods. As the image of deity, kings maintained the divinely underwritten social order and the hierarchy that supported it. Through cult and legitimating ideology, royalty was tasked with holding chaos in check within society and extending civilization through conquest.

This alleged divine right justified the trappings of state and the centralization of power in all realms. A special class of courtiers, advisers, administrators, artisans, clergy and military leadership functioned as retainers, providing goods and services to the elite. A standing, professional army was required, as well as a diplomatic corps. In the economic sphere, redistribution of peasant surplus and the production of commercial crops were centrally controlled. Land tenure was monopolized by the elite and trade routes were controlled by the crown.

For the vast peasant majority, meanwhile, life was onerous, since service to the gods meant service for the king. Labourers were subject to corvée, ponderous taxation and levy, latifundia and debt slavery. Harsh labour and rigid hierarchy resulted in the creation of classes of impoverishment—widows,

⁴ Terance E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 103.

orphans, and poor families—who received at best the inconsistent patronage of crown and temple.

Understanding these ominous aspects of kingship, Samuel ‘solemnly warns’ Israel (v. 9) that a similar result would befall their nation. Chapter 8 describes the royal prerogatives that would prove oppressive to the nation over time: conscription for the chariot corps; induction as professional military officers; agricultural work on the king’s property; manufacturing weapons; conscription of women as perfumers, cooks and bakers in royal service; confiscation of private land for the ‘servants of the king’; ten percent taxation of all production to compensate the royal ‘officials and attendants’; seizure of the best servants and animals, and a tenth of livestock for the king’s personal use (8:11–16). Worst of all, ‘you yourselves will become his slaves’ (v. 17).

This scenario is a depiction of systemic socio-economic change accompanying the centralization of power and wealth. Land tenure would no longer be based upon divine inheritance and kinship, but would be subject to the whims and stratagems of the court. The economy would no longer operate on reciprocity but on forced redistribution of peasant income. Cash crops for consumption and commercial farming for export would dominate economic exchange. A permanent landless class of labourers would develop, dependent upon patronage and the vagaries of the market. On the other hand, a privileged class of royal elite would emerge, along with a preference for urban life and excess.

In short, Israel adopted the world’s *oikonomia* and thereby repudiated

God’s intention for this nation to stand as a distinct testimony to all the earth. As a result, God’s people no longer flourished in God’s land.

3. The Roman Empire: ‘Put an end to war and set all things in order’

Three elements enabled the Roman Empire and produced *Pax Romana*. The first was conquest. The Romans generally did not obliterate entire peoples or places; instead they terrorized populations into economic fealty, enslaving some people while crucifying the leading rebels to intimidate everyone else into submission. Neil Elliot commented:

The peace that Rome secured through terror was maintained through terror, through slavery, defined by conquest and scrupulously maintained through constant intimidation, abuse, and violence ... on the ideological plane through imperial cult and ceremony, the rhetoric of the courts ... and in an educational system that rehearsed the ‘naturalness’ of Rome’s global hegemony.⁵

The second element was the patronage system, a network of economic and political relationships that secured the loyalty of local aristocrats. A patron gained status and praise by engaging in a hierarchical relationship with clients who received benefits. The clients were bound to the patron out of a sense

⁵ Neil Elliot, ‘Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross’, in *Paul and Empire*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 170.

of obligation; the patron maintained the relationship through further giving.

Roman propaganda portrayed Caesar as the ultimate patron and model for all patronage activity. The emperor was understood as a paternal protector, granting communities or individuals their status, privilege, resources and access. Recipients were required to manifest subservience and loyalty to Rome in response to its 'friendship'. In this way, the Roman elite used patronage as an instrument of social control. Everyone found their place within the patronage pecking order.

The third essential element was the imperial cult, which provided the ideological glue that held the social, economic, cultural and religious pieces together by persuasion through image and ritual. According to Roman ideology, the gods had helped Caesar to bring peace, order and salvation to earth. They had created a new eschatological era that flowed out of Rome's bosom, blessing the earth with salvation through the *Pax Romana*. Augustus was the representative of a new kind of human being and brought good news (*euangelion*) to the conquered nations.

4. Israel under Pax Romana

Israel keenly felt the social, religious and economic impact of the *Pax Romana*. From the time of Julius Caesar, Judean peasants paid a percentage of their crops annually as taxes, while also continuing their traditional tithes and offerings to the temple. By the time of Jesus' birth, many Judean and Galilean peasant families had been forced off their land.

Virtually a whole generation was decimated in certain areas by the dev-

astation and enslavement that resulted from Roman and Herodian conquests. Many were forced to borrow at interest from wealthy creditors among the priestly elite. (One of the principal acts of the rebels who took control of Jerusalem at the outbreak of a revolt in 66 CE was to burn the public archives where the records of debts were kept.)

During the first century, a growing disadvantaged and disgruntled peasant population opposed the Jewish ruling class, perceiving these elites as illegitimate, compromised and exploitive because of their economic relationship with Rome. The high-priestly families, who owed their tenure in office to Herod and his heirs, were originally not native-born Palestinians but powerful Jewish families imported from the Diaspora; accordingly, they looked to Rome more than to Jerusalem for direction.

Infamous for their exploitation of the poor, these elite families were held in very low esteem by the lower priestly class. As wealthy landowners and entrepreneurs in commerce and agriculture, they opted for the status quo and preferred *Pax Romana* to rebellion. As a result, social bandits arose who sought to redress peasant grievances by playing the role of Jewish Robin Hoods, raiding the wealthy landowners and the representatives of foreign domination.

The people of Israel staggered under the burden of heavy taxation, unjust government and corruption. The ordinary priests and Levites, sympathetic to the cause of the poor with whom they identified, often worked as day labourers and were inclined to support nationalist movements such as the Zealots.

From 59 CE on, the internecine strife between the different economic and ideological strata of temple clergy intensified. The temple elite retaliated by withholding the common priests' tithes and tried to starve them into submission. In view of this corruption and foreign oppression, many people withheld the required tribute to Rome and the lower priestly orders discontinued the daily sacrifice for the Emperor's well-being. Rome construed this action, which occurred in 66 CE, as overt rebellion. The full-scale insurrection that ensued a few weeks later was directed as much against the priestly aristocracy as against the Romans.

V. Implications

1. Empires today

It is clear from the biblical story that we can never return to Eden as such. Neither will any Babelite attempt to 'make a name for ourselves' succeed (Gen 11:4). A societal vision that 'reaches up to heaven' (v. 4), based on apostate theocratic assumptions (whether of Babel, Egypt or Rome), will not create a sabbath-like environment in which humans can flourish or that honors God. Nor will any Christian imitation or attempt to become 'like the other nations' please God, strengthen the church or serve mankind.

Because human beings retain the *imago Dei*, we are hard-wired for extension, development, growth, even globalization. But because we are fallen, the usual result is conquest, empire, mono-culturalism (consumerism, for example), subjugation, exploitation, plunder and extinction. Culturally and economically, empires consume what

ever is productive (namely, economic surplus) and distinctive in host peoples.⁶

Sadly, history is a litany of tragic quests for paradise lost or for utopia on earth: Babel, Pharaoh's kingdom of the Sun God, Caesar's *Pax Romana*, the medieval Holy Roman Empire, modernity's myth of progress, Nazism, communism and totalitarianism. All of them testify that human beings are created in the image of God but instead worship and serve idols. As a result, we create endless substitute religions and alternative gospels, as well as group identities and economic policies that end up creating a kind of hell on earth, a foretaste of dreadful things to come.

How many millions have perished because of empire and its cousin, colonialism, throughout human history? God alone knows the suffering and injustice inflicted due to the divine right of kings, manifest destinies and myths of progress. How often have lands been acquired, peoples dispersed, access to the sea or trade routes expropriated for purposes of security, gain or glory? How often has mankind raped the earth of its natural resources, failing to steward God's goodness? How many people have been enslaved or exploited

⁶ Empires are inherently totalizing though symbol, ritual and system. Brian Walsh and Silvia Keesmaat observed: 'Empires project an all-embracing normality. Not only do empires want us to think that reality is totally composed of the structures, symbols, and systems that have been imperially constructed, they also want us to believe that the future holds no more than a heightened realization of imperial hopes and dreams.' Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 161.

for want of manpower or greed?

And of even deeper concern to us, how often has Christianity affiliated with the powerful and prosperous but overlooked the victims of empire? Surely, for all this creation groans.

Christians should, therefore, be continuously wary of incarnations of the cultural mandate gone awry. Whenever we hear a neo-Babelite battle cry, 'Let us build ourselves a city ... that we can make a name for ourselves'; whenever would-be Pharaohs exclaim, 'Who is the Lord?' (or 'Who is the true God and the real people of God?'); whenever God's people declare, 'Give us a king to lead us'; or whenever an ideology proposes to put an end to war and set all things in order, the church should beware.

2. A new empire

Since the end of World War II and coinciding with the maturation of capitalism during the second half of the twentieth century, a new kind of empire has emerged: the globalization of consumerism. Mass consumerism is an all-embracing reality with imperial ambitions, seeking to homogenize peoples and cultures into a global civilization of manufactured expectations and engineered through the advent of modern communication. In one sense, it is the Enlightenment's myth of progress in the form of luxury for all. Or, as Simon Patten declared, consumerism provides a 'new basis of civilization', enabled by a 'pleasure or surplus economy'.⁷

⁷ Quoted in Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991): 69. This rosy outlook is

Benjamin R. Barber provides an especially apt perspective on the globalization of consumerism. In an earlier study, he labeled consumerism and its extensions as 'McWorld'—an empire of tastes, images, brands and lifestyles modelled on the fast-food ethos of McDonald's and the vicariousness of Disney World. Consumerism is a shopping fantasy or virtual reality come true, 24/7. Barber explained McWorld as

an entertainment shopping experience that brings together malls, multiplex movie theaters, theme parks, spectator sports arenas, fast-food chains (with their endless movie tie-ins) and television (shopping networks) into a vast single enterprise that on the way to maximize profits, *transforms* human beings. ... McWorld itself is a theme park, a park called Marketland where everything is for sale and someone else is always responsible and there are no common goods or public interests and where everyone is equal as long as they can afford the price of admission and are content to watch and consume.⁸

In a recent book, Barber depicts

contradicted by economist Tim Jackson: 'But those who hope that growth will lead to a materialistic Utopia are destined for disappointment. We simply don't have the ecological capacity to fulfill this dream. By the end of the century, our children and grandchildren will face a hostile climate, depleted resources, the destruction of habitats, the decimation of species, food scarcities, mass migrations and almost inevitably war.' Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth*, 203.

⁸ Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 97, 137 (emphasis added).

consumerism as the process of global 'infantilization', or an 'induced' and 'enduring childishness' packaged and exported as a totalizing narcissism.⁹ Infantilization is an idolizing of dissatisfaction and acquisitiveness, expressed through Western symbols typified by Hollywood mores. Through the lure of celebrity culture and its would-be icons, infantilization has infiltrated every sphere of our existence: personal identity, spiritual aspiration, ecclesiastical life, education, sports, spatial organization, and systemically in social and economic policy.

3. Consumerism and evangelicals

During this formative period, many Christians enthusiastically welcomed the new consumer economy as God's provision for American society. They also promoted and adapted commercial theory and practice to promote their own religious and private enterprises. Evangelicals seemed just as enamored with the principles of corporate management and the quest for efficiency as their more liberal and secular counterparts. Both sought to use business principles to improve the operation and outreach of churches and parachurch organizations.¹⁰

⁹ Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 3–37.

¹⁰ In 1908, the influential text *Principles of Successful Church Advertising* argued that churches should utilize the same scientific advertising principles as business to achieve the same success. In 1917, the book *Church Advertising: Its How and Why* described Jesus as the first 'successful church advertiser'. In 1925, *Advertising the Church: Suggestions by*

After World War II, the relationship between evangelicalism and consumerism (the New Right preeminently) grew synergistically and exponentially. According to Bethany Moreton, the emergence of mass consumption enjoyed the energetic support of conservatives, both secular and evangelical.¹¹ Moreton recounts the intimate relationship between many Christian colleges, the service industry, mass consumption (Wal-Mart in particular) and the emergence of Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE). In 1985, a typical SIFE graduate eagerly testified, 'I feel like I'm ready now to go out and evangelize the country for free enterprise'.¹²

SIFE participants were encouraged to learn that they were the proud disciples of Adam Smith. Paul Harvey, the Christian pundit and radio personality, declared triumphantly at a Wal-Mart gathering that they had created something 'better than communism, social-

Church Advertisers declared confidently that 'Jesus commanded his disciples to advertise. ... Translated into modern terms, he would say put your light on the lamp stand of the newspaper and in the candlestick of the billboard. ... Set your city of salvation on a hill of publicity.' And in 1928, *Moody Monthly* asserted, 'The Holy Spirit was the "Sales Manager", the pastor was the first assistant sales manager, and every church member was a "salesman of greater or lesser efficiency".' See Gary Scott Smith, 'Evangelicals Confront Corporate Capitalism: Advertising, Consumerism, Stewardship, and Spirituality 1880–1930', in *More Money, More Ministry: Money and Evangelicals in Recent North American History*, ed. L. Eskridge, L. Noll, and M. A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 39–80.

¹¹ Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹² Moreton, *To Serve God*, 197.

ism, and capitalism. We have created enlightened consumerism.¹³

It seems, however, that many evangelicals have not yet discerned the idolatry of systemic mammon-worship in our culture—the idolization of dissatisfaction and acquisitiveness. We have not confronted the discontent, greed, entitlement, sensuality and sexuality in the church, infected by the culture of consumerism. We have not discerned the compatibility of mass consumerism and postmodernity. We have not come to grips with the imperialistic aspirations of consumerism as an alternative gospel, a skewed version of the cultural mandate and an apostate utopia on earth. Sadly, we will likely reap 'all kinds of evils' fostered by the 'love of money' (1 Tim 6:10).

VI. Conclusion

The spiritual and ethical context in which we engage in economic activity is indeed complex. Our inner beings are skewed by sin and we cannot truly know ourselves. As Jeremiah wrote, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?' (19:9).

A malevolent supernatural dimension is at work (Eph 2:1–3; 1 Jn 5:19). Satan attempts to create a counterfeit kingdom with himself as the head, ruling over fallen mankind in a curse-filled physical environment. There is also an ethical and social dimension, for this is a 'crooked and twisted generation' (Phil 2:15). Corruption pervades every aspect of our relations and society (1 Jn 1:16). The Bible testifies that 'mon-

ey answers everything' (Eccl 10:19), greed is idolatry (Col 3:5), and that the love of money is 'a root of all kinds of evils' (1 Tim 6:10).

With regard to commerce, John Wesley said it well:

Wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible in the nature of things for any revival of religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches.¹⁴

Yet despite the presence of sin and Satan, the divine economist did not abandon the creation or his mission (Acts 14:17). Thanks to God's common grace, there are opportunities to experience God's beneficence in this world. We must acknowledge, also, all that is admirable and beautiful in culture that exists 'under the sun'. We can praise God for his continuing witness in our fallen *oikonomia*.

For this reason, in the economic realm Christians should pursue the common good as well as the glory of God. We can gladly support and applaud worthy ventures (social entrepreneurship, for example) by those who disagree with us. In fact, even the lust for empire often produces positive ben-

¹⁴ Quoted by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribners, 2003), 175. A similar idea is expressed in the anonymous proverb: 'The gospel had a daughter, prosperity. The daughter ate the mother.'

¹³ Moreton, *To Serve God*, 248.

efits in public health, education, economic development, and transportation and communications infrastructure.¹⁵

Further, because of the transformation brought about by the gospel, economic power and entrepreneurship can produce tremendous benefits. Hospitals, literacy, higher education, social services, micro-finance, economic education, scientific research and high-quality scholarship occur when God's people give generously and wealthy Christians invest liberally in God's kingdom.¹⁶

There are many examples in the Bible of the wise stewardship of wealth, such as David, Job, Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia, and the churches who contributed to Paul's collection. In fact, the Bible is full of economic commentary and wise counsel about money.

Yet at the same time, we must never forget that our cultural aspirations and economic expectations are conditioned by the *eschatological* mission of God. 'We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet 3:13). The prophets spoke about a *future* cosmic renewal characterized by peace, prosperity and a reversal of nature, often introduced by the idioms 'at that time', 'in that day', and 'in the last days' (Jer 31:1–6; Isa 2:2; 11:6–9; 35:1–10; Hos 2:18–23). These promises were cast in terms

of curse reversal, sometimes explicitly using the expression 'like Eden':

On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, 'This land that was laid waste has become like the Garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.' (Ezek 36:33–36)

In other words, God's plan for creation remains undaunted. He will restore his *oikonomia*. He will provide a renewed physical environment in which to tabernacle with his holy people again. He will put Humpty Dumpty back together in all his pre-fall glory—and so much more. One day, God will unveil his cosmic empire, a homeland free of sin and Satan in which human beings can truly flourish.

In the new heaven and new earth, *homo economicus* will be alive and active (Isa 60:4–11, 17–21; Rev 21:24). The 'dismal science' of economics will be transformed to yield dignity, abundance, productive work and meaningful relationships within a secure and sacred environment, just like Eden but even better.

Until that time, we must never forget that anything we do is inherently problematic and that this is manifestly true in the economic realm. In fact, concerning all things economic, we should pray earnestly: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!' (Ps 139:23–24).

¹⁵ Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The Rest and the Rest* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012); Benjamin M. Friedman, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

¹⁶ Stephen Mansfield, *The Search for God and Guinness: A Biography of the Beer That Changed the World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009).

Moral Revelation in the Coming Age: An Eschatological Evaluation of Kern Robert Trembath's Anthropology of Revelation

Joshua Wise

All Christian theological reflection has eschatological ramifications. Inherent in every theology of liturgy, anthropology, revelation, ethics, sacraments, history, church, Christ and the Trinity are implications about the final fate of all things.¹

Indeed, one might say that in all the components listed above, there are only the two parent categories of God and humanity, each secondary item representing a specific blend of the two. Eschatology is the study of the final state of those two categories together, and thus all theology is related in a significant way to this final state.

¹ For a recent example of the application of this observation, see Joshua R. Brotherton, 'Universalism and Predestinarianism: A Critique of the Theological Anthropology that Undergirds Catholic Universalist Eschatology', *Theological Studies* 77, no. 3 (2016): 603–26. Brotherton works in the opposite direction to some degree, evaluating eschatology from anthropology, but his work rests on a solid observation of the relationship between the two.

Although the twentieth century was a time of rampant eschatological reflection for Christian theology, to the point at which the unique character of eschatology sometimes became lost or co-opted by other branches of theological pursuit, there remains a widespread feeling that what John Thiel calls 'thick' eschatological depictions² are speculative curiosities, to be either read as thought-provoking exercises or shunned as mere fantasy and escapism.

Eschatology, however, if it is indeed at the very heart of the Christian witness to the world, must not be relegated to mere curiosity or escapism. If it is the centre, it must bear weight. If all theology has eschatological implications, those implications must be meaningful. Accordingly, this article attempts to demonstrate some of

² John E. Thiel, *Icons of Hope: The 'Last Things' in Catholic Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

the weight that the work of eschatology can bear by evaluating a proposed theology of revelation by Kern Robert Trembath and working out its eschatological ramifications.

I will summarize Trembath's theology of a revelatory humanity, give a general response, and then test Trembath's anthropology against different prevailing understandings of the coming age. My goal is neither to advocate for Trembath's image of humanity, though I believe it has some worthwhile things to say, nor to argue specifically for any model of eschatology. Instead, I seek to show how eschatology can evaluate another branch of theology in a concrete way, revealing its implications. This exercise has value in showing how a particular position may have a compatible or incompatible relationship with the content of other theological commitments.

For the most part, I will not take sides on the issues that Trembath raises. In my final evaluation, however, I will contend that Trembath's picture of humanity is compatible only with an epektatic eschatology and is entirely incompatible with the stasis/eternity model of human eschatological experience.

I. Trembath's Model of Revelation

In *Divine Revelation: Our Moral Relation with God*,³ Kern Robert Trembath presents several different theories of revelation before moving on to his own

construction. His concern is to find a model of revelation that is born out of practical, psychological experience, as well as one that can exist in an ecumenical context, such that the content of revelation does not simply follow necessarily from the model's presuppositions.

Trembath first presents what he calls 'divergence theories', including those of William J. Abraham, Carl F. H. Henry, Karl Barth, and J. I. Packer. Trembath suggests that divergence theories 'cut across' (p. 66) human experience, presenting new claims to divine revelation that are positioned over and against our normal modes of existence. Such a discontinuity with our everyday existence demands criteria of interpretation that these theories do not give—or if any such criteria are given, they presuppose the content of the revelation.

This approach works well, Trembath argues, when confined to existing Christian communities, but he says that it 'is less acceptable, though, if one wishes to think of how God is disclosed to the larger non-Christian world, and I am convinced that the most important distinction between biblical inspiration and divine revelation is that the latter enables us to do just that' (p. 67).

Next, Trembath describes 'convergence theories', considering the work of Avery Dulles, John Macquarrie, Gerald O'Collins, Ian T. Ramsey, and Michael Polanyi. These theories, for which he has greater affinity, 'identify God's revelation *in* the natural and the mundane without identifying it as the natural and mundane. Thus, the revelation of God cooperates with the natural, especially the human natural, neither impugning it nor canonizing it

³ Kern Robert Trembath, *Divine Revelation: Our Moral Relation with God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

in advance' (p. 111f). Trembath builds upon these convergence theories, especially those of Ramsey and Polanyi, in setting forth his own theory of human beings, constituted as divine revelation.

To say that humans are constituted as divine revelation means that the divine self-disclosure forms the background or horizon upon which the very act of being human is made possible. Being human, for Trembath, essentially means existing as a moral being, or a being beckoned to by goodness. The four modes of response to this beckoning are knowing, loving, hoping and being in community. Together, these four modes form what it means to be a human or moral being.

In this conception, God's stance toward the cosmos, one of love and revelation, forms the precondition for humanity and essentially brings humanity into being by elevating it above the rest of creation. Human persons are, for Trembath, divine revelation because they are capable of this fourfold morality. This divine stance of love fulfills each capacity by being its transcendent pre-condition. Each condition deserves a brief review below before we move on to the eschatological evaluation.

1. Knowledge

Trembath's view of knowledge holds that human intellectual seeking finds its natural goodness in what he calls 'Point S', a moment in which the knowable is known by the mind (p. 120). Finite things are knowable and therefore can be the objects of a 'Point S' moment. However, God is not one of the things to be known, as God is the ground of all knowing and therefore

cannot be encompassed by knowing.

All knowing is about God, but no particular datum can be affixed to God as genuinely about God. God is unknowable in the strict sense of the word, and thus Trembath finds himself in agreement with much of the apophatic (i.e. approaching God by negation) tradition. Trembath sees knowledge as fundamentally moral, as it is always enacted in judgement in response to the beckoning of the good of agreement between knowledge about things and the state of things, as well as the context of goodness in which all knowing is performed.

2. Love

Trembath defines love as 'the gratuitous exchange of self-surpassing behaviors and intentions concerning a beloved's concrete existence' (p. 124). It is an exchange into which we can grow, a coupling of eros and agape together. A recognition of personhood, of inherent lovability as a potential bearer of goodness, is necessary for a person to be loved. We are beholden to each other to recognize each other's potential for goodness, and therefore to respond to each other with love. But Trembath insists that if a person rejects that fact in us, we cannot love them. (This point seems demonstrably untrue and would deeply undermine much of Christ's command to love those who persecute us.)

Trembath's account of God as the ground of this anthropology of love is fascinating. He places Christology within a larger soteriology of God's love for the world, which includes human persons. God grasps creation as beloved and therefore makes it

lovable and capable of love. This precondition of human love, namely divine love, changes both the lover and the beloved. Humans are moral creatures because God has first loved them into humanity:

In loving one who was other-than-God, God became other-than-God and thus beckoned that other-than-God to the new kind of existence that we all too blithely call human. The newness of that new existence was precisely the presence of God within it, generating for the first time in the cosmos the historical possibility of material reality able to transcend itself in knowledge, love, hope, and community. That is who Christ was definitely and thus what God intends for all humanity. (p. 157)

3. Hope

Trembath's anthropology of hope has three aspects: memory, a 'relatively indeterminate future', and the ability to commit confidently (p. 131). He understands memory as the function that both collects data as a stream and stores it as a stack (p. 132).⁴ The person then uses that information stored

⁴ It is unclear whether he genuinely intends to use computational terminology here. The reference may be metaphorical, but it is technically incorrect. Human memory does not work like stack memory in a computer (last in, first out), but more appropriately like a memory heap, which does not have this constraint. Although perhaps our minds keep things in chronological order (a debatable fact in itself), they do not require us to sort through each memory back to a specific event in order to access it, which is precisely what a stack requires.

in memory to apply it to the future.

The second constituent, a relatively indeterminate future, necessitates a kind of temporal environment. Trembath even includes an appendix that discusses an appropriate definition of time (p. 133). As we will consider more closely below, an important part of this relationship to the future is the idea that in hoping 'we commit ourselves to a state of affairs that is not *and may never be* but toward which we stand nonetheless as though its coming-into-being were both quite likely and influenceable by our personal efforts' (p. 133, emphasis in original).

Finally, the ability to commit confidently is seen as a response to the idea that 'goodness beckons us' (p. 135), such that we cannot claim to hope and fail to act towards that hope when opportunity arises. Hope is 'the temporally enduring expression of goodness' (p. 135).

Trembath's grounding of hope in the Trinity, and specifically in the Holy Spirit, is rooted in the idea that in love hope moves toward the bringing about of a 'new person' (p. 159). Two persons who love each other therefore disclose themselves to each other for each other's good, and each hopes for the improvement of the other. When this process takes place, two new persons stand before each other, transformed by love. This process finds its fundamental grounding in God's relatedness to the world, a transformative love that also transforms God (p. 162).

4. Community

Trembath locates human morality as community not in its own act, as he has done with the other three constitu-

ent parts of human persons, but as the goal and outcome of human morality in knowing, loving and hoping. His location of knowing as communal is an exposition of trust in the authoritative good work of others in their contribution to knowledge. Drawing an example from Lonergan, he states that we trust the good and truthful work of the community of people who put together a map that we choose to follow (p. 137f.).

Love, as Trembath has already explained, fundamentally functions in community, even a community of two. Finally, hoping, by and large, consists of desires for persons and communities. These interpersonal concerns move toward community itself. Trembath concludes his communal anthropology by stating, "While the community exists on the one hand at a level more abstract than the individual, it is also, and on the other, the most tangible location of all three aspects of moralness and hence the most tangible medium of divine revelation" (p. 141).

His theology of community can be summarized in the statement, "The Trinity is God acting personally and communitarianly within history, not abstractly but concretely, constituting the possibility of the human community's response in faith and commitment, and thus rendering that community a community of God" (p. 164). God as community is the ground of humans as community.

II. Brief Criticisms

I will briefly address Trembath's revelatory anthropology in general terms before moving on to its eschatological applications.

Trebath knows that his explanation of the Trinity goes against the classical distinction between the immanent and economic Trinities. This description of God, however, is consonant with his belief that God is 'in time' and in history. His argument for this state of affairs can be found in his appendix (pp. 178–81).

I cannot fully evaluate here the claim that God should be in time by nature, as opposed to by an act of divine power and grace. However, I fundamentally disagree with this position, partially on the ground of physics and partially on apophatic grounds. Given Trembath's statements about God as the ground of knowledge, incorporating God into time seems difficult and perhaps self-contradictory.

Trebath's method also poses some difficulty when he addresses traditional doctrines. Although no theologian is required to follow any particular methodology regarding traditional doctrines, it does seem problematic to consider traditional doctrines in the context of their own debates and discussions and then claim that one's own perception was the ultimate goal that these venerable minds were only beginning to or falteringly attempting to express!⁵ This is particularly difficult when one's conclusion (that God changes within time) is clearly something that those minds would have rejected.

Further, Trembath summarily dispenses with the Christological debates of the early church, arguing that they were essentially trying to make the point that 'if human beings are essen-

⁵ One sees examples of this tendency on pp. 155f. and 162, but the whole discussion of the Trinity is couched in this approach.

tially open to the possibility of self-transcendence, then it is historically possible for this self-transcendence to be so actualized that one in fact lives a life concretely reflective of everything God both intends for human beings on the one hand and graciously offers them on the other' (p. 156). This may be half of what the Christological debates were addressing, but there is another significant side to those debates, characterized especially by the Logos-centered arguments of Cyril of Alexandria.

Finally, Trembath's construction of hope as requiring our involvement seems difficult. People often hope for things that are entirely outside their control: good weather for their crops, that the pollen won't be so bad this spring, or that Mother's cancer would go into remission. Certainly, if they *could* influence the outcome, they would, and we often attempt to devise ways to do so—bargaining, sacrificing, performing superstitious acts. But the fact remains that there are things that we hope for but can never influence. Consider for example the Welsh insistence on the continued life and return of King Arthur during the Middle Ages,⁶ which no Welshman could hope to bring about but many had great confidence and hope in. This is, of course, to say nothing of the second coming of Christ, which will happen at the behest of the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of mortals.

⁶ For a tangential, but fascinating look at this topic, see R. S. Loomis, 'The Legend of Arthur's Survival', in Loomis, ed., *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 64–71.

III. Eschatological Ramifications

I could find no hint of eschatology in Trembath's revelatory anthropology, so here I am endeavouring to tease out that which Trembath himself did not. It may be that since Trembath's work affirms a God within time, the traditional hope of the culmination of history, its end, and the establishment of a new age related to the past in a mystery of continuity and newness may not be possible within his conception.

However, we need not insist on Trembath's 'God in time' to affirm large portions of his revelatory anthropology. Humans are constituted, Trembath insists, as persons by the Trinitarian actions of God within history. Such a viewpoint does not require the relationship of God to time that Trembath describes. Instead, if we accept Trembath's observations that humans are constituted by revelation and as revelation, it appears that they can quite readily fit into a traditional metaphysics.

If this is the case, then we must ask what it means to be human in an eschatological context, given Trembath's idea of humanity as revelation.

1. Eschatological knowing

Trembath describes the quest for knowledge as that which gives people a 'comfortability in the fit between their inner knowledge on the one hand and the real world on the other'. He perceives two goods in the achievement of 'Point S' where one's observation meets reality. First, an unresolved tension between knowledge and being is overcome. Second, abiding in a 'Point S' for however long or short a

time reveals goodness to be the ultimate ground and goal of all knowing. Trembath sees all statements as moral statements, since they are judgements made in the context of goodness that makes them possible.

Such a construction of human knowledge fits incredibly well into traditional models of eschatology. For stasis models of the coming age, the mind rests entirely at an ultimate Point S. The mind is satisfied with the contemplation of God, seen in God's own essence.⁷ There is consonance between the mind, which understands all it can of God, and God as God is. The human mind, in this model, knows and judges God to be good. It relaxes and rests, no longer seeking and thus happy.⁸

Here, both natural and supernatural knowledge are involved in the graced humanity that participates fully according to its nature in the essence of God. For the natural capacity is at ease with all things as one creature relates to another. But also, there is the ease of knowledge that humans participate in, having been incorporated into the Son of God. Being partakers of the divine nature gives us then the ability to know in a way, not just natural to our biological, psychological and historical settings, but in a way analogous to God's own knowledge. To know things, not just discursively but more deeply and transcendently in a final rest, is a

good description of an eschatological 'Point S'.

So too, in a model of epektasis (i.e. progress even in eternal happiness) the mind strives towards an ever-closer meeting between the reality of God and the mind's perception of God. It is wrong to think of epektatic striving as a striving out of a lack; it should be conceived more as a striving from glory to glory. Gregory of Nyssa writes that the mind 'makes its way upward without ceasing, ever through its prior accomplishments renewing its intensity for the flight'.⁹ Maximus the Confessor, following Gregory, speaks of the mind racing upward without stalling:

Yet the mind who remains faithful in this divine ministry—having gnostic wisdom joined with him like a companion, and having the noble demeanor and reflection that arise therewith—invariably travels in a holy way of life the road of the virtues, a road that in no way admits of any stalling on the part of those who walk in it. On the contrary, this mind runs the ever-moving, swift race of the soul toward the goal of the upward call.¹⁰

⁷ Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus*, 1336 in Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Schunermann, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 46th ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 302–3.

⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, UK: Christian Classics, 1981), 601f. (ST I–II iii.8).

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 113.

¹⁰ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 17; St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, trans. Paul M. Bowers and Robert Louis Wilkin (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 106. For a good discussion of the anti-Origen quality of the rejection of 'stasis' for the mind, see Paul M. Bowers, 'Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of "Perpetual Progress"', *Vigiliae Christianae* 46, no. 2 (June 1992): 151–71.

Like a student who has come to master the first level of a difficult philosopher's thought, one is invited further to understand deeper and deeper levels of complexity. Each has a Point S moment that resides with the person and does not leave. That Point S is carried forward and forms the foundation for further Points S. Again, the natural and supernatural work well together here. The natural knowledge rests and then strives in its new resting towards a further satisfaction. But also, this knowing brings about new creation; indeed, it brings about the situation in which new knowing can take place.

Of these two models, which are both compatible with the Point S focus of knowledge, the epektatic model best aligns with Trembath's understanding of God as mysterious foundation for knowledge. He writes:

The real point behind calling various aspects of theology mystery, or calling God ultimate mystery, is not to imply that someday some sort of messianic detective will uncover the final clues to the Ultimate Puzzle and bring about a Point S condition with respect to our understanding of God. It is instead to remind ourselves that God is the ultimate condition of the possibility of knowledge (hence the intellectual overtones of the word mystery) but not merely as the first mental actor in an entire series of mental acts. As Mystery of the world, God is that which our knowing capacities presuppose as both source and target of knowing itself. (pp. 145–46)

2. Eschatological love

If love is the expression of concern

for another's concrete existence, a coupling of eros and agape, then any eschatological image that is a gracing or crowning of this nature stumbles at the very moment at which it removes all concrete interactions between persons. Here *concrete* means, at the very least, meeting the basic expectations of human existence: physical, emotional, knowing and communicative interaction. The bases for such an interaction, which is not simply a picture or diorama of love, are a common physical nature and a common time in which to interact.

Time, as a central component of Trembath's anthropology (as is seen especially in his discussion of hope), functions of course in both knowing and loving as well. One cannot come to the Point S as a relaxation unless that moment is preceded by points when satisfaction is the goal, not the actuality. Love also seeks the betterment of the beloved.

Trembath never references the theology of George MacDonald in his work, but his ideas are strikingly similar and indeed may serve as a corrective at some points. MacDonald's observation about love is pertinent here:

For love loves unto purity. Love has ever in view the absolute loveliness of that which it beholds. Where loveliness is incomplete, and love cannot love its fill of loving, it spends itself to make more lovely, that it may love more; it strives for perfection, even that itself may be perfected—not in itself, but in the object.¹¹

¹¹ George MacDonald, 'The Consuming Fire', in *Unspoken Sermons* (Whitehorn, CA: Johan-

Love is always seeking the betterment of the object loved. In a static or what has often been called an 'eternal' eschatology, no such desire for betterment is possible. Instead, the highest level of perfection has been achieved. This is true not only where the idea of betterment is most obvious—in fellow humans or the cosmos in general—but in God's expression in those things, his revelation to those things, and the realization of love in those things.

Indeed, in depictions of the static eschaton, one wonders precisely how humans love each other beyond the simple individualistic experience of feeling good about those persons. Surely we will have forgiven each other, but even that remains a past fact in the eternal 'now' of most formulations of 'eternal' life. Divine love as pure act, perhaps the crowning observation of Thomistic theology, brings about a rather incongruous eschatological anthropology in which persons do not act but merely contemplate.¹²

For humans to love, we must love as action. Trembath's anthropology then finds no crowning in a timeless eternity, but instead finds a good partner in the epektasis of Gregory of Nyssa and the Orthodox tradition. This should be no surprise, given that Trembath places not only humanity firmly in time, but also God. But again, one need not take this controversial step to follow Trembath's lead here. Humanity may be planted firmly in time, and its nature may be graced by the eternal life of God, without ejecting either human-

ity from time or God from eternity.

In an epektatic model of the eschaton, just as with knowledge, love can find a full flourishing in a way that both fulfils the natural capacity of humanity and participates in the divine gracing of humanity in Christ. We can love naturally, working towards each other's betterment, not from lack to fulfilment, but once again from glory into glory. And so too can we work towards the betterment of God—not the essence or substance of God, as if it could or needed to be improved, but in God's relationship with creation. The unfolding and unpacking of God's revelation, new every morning, as the loving work of persons for each other and also for God, is a possible and not unfitting crown for the human capacity to love.

3. Eschatological hope

The term 'eschatological hope' tends to mean either (1) the hope that functions in the current age and longs for the coming age, or (2) the faith in the coming age that is experienced now in the form of confident expectation. Here I mean neither of these. If Trembath's construction of the human being as moral because of the human abilities to know, love and hope is correct, then an eschatological construction of humanity must affirm that hope will exist in the coming age.

Once again, a static/eternal model of the coming age simply has no room for hope. All that has been or could be hoped for has happened; all is attained and nothing more can be added. Indeed, one cannot even hope that the same set of affairs will continue as it will not 'continue' to take place at all.

nesen, 2011), 18–33.

¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Charles J. O'Neil (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 346ff.

St. Augustine, whose depiction of the eschaton leaves at least some room for something like time, does not allow for hope but posits a kind of supernaturally infused knowledge as one of the chief joys of the coming age, in which we know for certain we will never lose heaven.¹³ Though I would agree with Augustine that those in heaven must be sure that heaven cannot be lost, there remains no ability to hope for anything else. Meanwhile, Aquinas simply rejects the idea of hope in heaven:

Since then the arduous possible good cannot be an object of hope except in so far as it is something future, it follows that when happiness is no longer future, but present, it is incompatible with the virtue of hope. Consequently hope, like faith, is voided in heaven, and neither of them can be in the blessed.¹⁴

If the heavenly state is atemporal, then there is no orientation towards the future whatsoever. Hope is swallowed up in possession; faith is swallowed up in knowledge. While this might seem to be a neat packaging of the three theological virtues, in which faith, hope and love collapse into each other and become numerically one, it is not the case. Hope does not find its crown in possession; it is eradicated by it. Hope is equally eradicated by the knowledge of victory as by the knowledge of defeat. When the actual comes, hope goes.

If humanity is constituted by its

ability to hope, then such an eternal state of affairs for humanity does not crown but destroys nature. As Trembath points out, time is necessary for hope. There must be something to hope for. Thus, if the atemporal culmination of humanity is true, then Trembath's anthropology falls short. If, instead, Trembath is right that hope is a constitutive part of what it means to be human, then the atemporal picture may still be true, but it cannot be a proper object of Christian hope, which strives to maintain the fine balance between the newness of God's unimaginable gift and the sameness of the ones who receive it from this age to the next.

Once again, an epektatic expression of the eschaton is most consistent with Trembath's anthropology. In such a model, hope, which draws on memory to point towards the future, works towards the goal, and believes that it will take place, can function in its full perfection. As persons go forward, in an unending ascent into the knowledge and love of God, they proceed hopefully, confident and committed toward the betterment of God's expression in the cosmos and between persons.¹⁵

One element of Trembath's construction of hope, however, encounters some difficulty in an eschatological framework: namely, one hopes for something that may not come to pass. In the eschatological world, God's expression in and through people, and people's expressions to each other, can have no doubt of ultimate success. If Trembath's understanding of a future event

¹³ St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 778ff. XXII.30.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2, q. 18 a. 2 ad 1.

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion of the state of hope and memory in the eschaton, see my article 'The Concept of Newness in Eschatology', *Pro Ecclesia* 25, no. 3 (2018).

perhaps not coming to pass means that the original intention of hope may go unfulfilled, then Trembath's concept of hope is simply incompatible with either of the two constructs of Christian eschatology that I am considering here.

However, if his concept of things possibly not coming to pass may be construed otherwise, such an incompatibility may not result. It may be that in an epektatic state one's immediate striving towards deeper understanding may not culminate in precisely the way that one intended.

Perhaps, by sitting down to observe some aspect of nature or contemplate some aspect of God, or by walking with Christ and speaking with him, we will intend to come to a particular insight or joy but may instead receive some different insight. In this case, we have both fulfilled and not fulfilled Trembath's description of hope. On one hand, our pursuit of the secondary object (a specific insight) has failed; on the other hand, our pursuit of the primary object (God) has succeeded. In that sense, we have received precisely what we have sought, without possibility of failure.

The possibility of such failure regarding secondary objects would seem proper in an epektatic state, for if all immediate intentions were guaranteed to succeed as they were envisioned, then the mysterious otherness of God presented to us as future would be domesticated and tame. It seems that the future must remain the future, to some degree unknown. The people of God must go into it not as masters of time, such that time no longer possesses mystery, but divinely infused so that time no longer wounds.

4. The eschatological community

Recently, several works discussing the eschatological community have presented pictures of heaven in which human activity is possible, and in which people relate to each other in loving ways. Paul Griffith's *Decreation*¹⁶ allows for human interaction in a repetitive stasis akin to liturgy. Thiel's book, cited above, presents a different picture of time and forgiveness in the coming age. N. T. Wright's groundbreaking *Surprised by Hope*¹⁷ also depicts the eschatological community in interaction with each other.

Human beings cannot express real community if they are in a state in which they cannot interact with each other in meaningful ways. We may be overwhelmed by the divine presence, and in loving God we love all that God loves. But such an experience of love rises, not to the dignity of Christ's own self-giving love, but merely to the level of an overwhelming emotional and intellectual response.

In a state in which I perceive God, overwhelmed and static, my story ultimately complete, I can feel and know love for all persons in a way that I cannot know now. However, such a state is ultimately one in which we relate to others merely through God. Indeed, if we take God's honesty out of the picture, such a state could be achieved even if I were the only person in perfect joy and all others suffered the torments of the damned. I might experience the

¹⁶ Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

divine presence, love all other persons, and be wrong about their fates. Who, when so overwhelmed, could know or care?

To have real community, however, we must interact with each other. We must care for each other, even when death and sorrow are behind us. We must live together, knowing, loving, and hoping for and in each other. Such a community is, as Trembath argues, the goal and the outcome of revelation. Indeed, it is revelation itself in many ways. To have an eschatological community that is both the natural and supernatural crowning of humanity, time must persist. And in that case, as Trembath observes, new things are made. In the community, all are changed from glory to glory, and indeed the community itself changes from glory to glory, reflecting the divine life into the cosmos, ever new every morning.

IV. Conclusion

I have attempted to briefly consider Kern Trembath's revelatory anthropology and its eschatological rami-

fications. I have not sought to place his work within the larger context of studies of the doctrine of revelation, but instead to show how his observations might work themselves out in a crowned and glorified anthropology in the coming age. Not surprisingly, his picture of humanity finds its fulfillment not in an eternal, static image of finished stories, but in an ongoing expression of humanity epektatically striving deeper into knowledge, love, hope and community.

If the main substance of Trembath's anthropology—that humans are by nature knowing, loving, hoping and communal—is correct, a static and 'eternal' heavenly state is still possible, but not the proper object of human hope in Christ, one that maintains the integrity of human nature. Instead, a heavenly state that perfects and supernaturally glorifies the people of God in their natural capacities must be viewed as the proper object of Christian hope. The reconstituted cosmos infused with the Holy Spirit, in an epektatic ascent into the infinite love of God, fits such an anthropology exceptionally well.

Books Reviewed

Hannes Wiher (ed.)
*L'Afrique d'aujourd'hui et les Églises:
Quels défis?*

Reviewed by Judith L. Hill

KeumJu Jewel Hyun and Diphus C.
Chemorion (eds.)

*The Quest for Gender Equity in
Leadership: Biblical Teachings on
Gender Equity and Illustrations of
Transformation in Africa*

Reviewed by Richard Steubing

Myles MacBean
*Preach the Word: Towards Effective
Grassroots Pastor Training in Sub-
Saharan Africa*

Reviewed by Jem Hovil

The reviews by Steubing and Hill are adapted by permission from the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (Kenya)

Book Reviews

ERT (2018) 42:4, 377-379

*L'Afrique d'aujourd'hui et les Églises:
Quels défis?*

Hannes Wiher (ed.)

Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library,
2017; Pb., 249 pp

*Reviewed by Judith L. Hill, professor of New
Testament, Faculté de Théologie Évangélique
de Bangui (FATEB), Yaounde, Central
African Republic*

In a new collection published by Langham in the UK, the Evangelical Network of Missiologists for French-speaking Regions (Réseau évangélique des missiologues pour la francophonie) presents here its first volume (in English: *Africa Today and the Churches: What Are the Challenges?*). Seven authors from West and Central Africa, each with an advanced degree in missiology, have collaborated on this tome. The thirteen essays (one theological, three historical, three on the current situation, and six on missiological challenges) have been edited by a Swiss missiologist, who has also contributed two syntheses and a concluding essay.

Some helpful tools included in the

volume are the Lausanne statement on the prosperity gospel, the Lausanne Covenant, a short glossary of terms, a topical bibliography, and brief biographies of the authors.

In the theological essay, Fara Daniel Tolno, a Guinean professor interested in Muslim evangelism, contrasts the evangelical viewpoint towards mission with those found in the Roman Catholic Church and ecumenical movements. All three groups consider mission a God-given mandate, but only evangelicals balance church and mission correctly, with neither aspect subordinate to the other.

Tolno begins the historical section with an essay on the background of African evangelization. After a brief introduction to traditional African socio-cultural realities, Tolno traces the continent's history from colonization to the present day, underscoring the need for Africans themselves to be the initiators in evangelistic outreach to their own people.

Next, Moussa Bongoyok of Cameroon compares the advances of Islam and Christianity in Francophone Africa, stressing the need for Christians to

avoid violent confrontations. Chapter 4, 'Independent African Churches: Causes and Missiological Implications', is by Kalembe Mwambazambi, originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), who notes the need for indigenous African churches with evangelical roots to become involved in worldwide mission, following Christ's imperative.

The current situation in African missions is the subject of the third part. All three articles are by Fohle Lygunda li-M, originally from the DRC and currently teaching in Burundi. The first focuses on Africa's unreached people groups. The second describes the contemporary evangelical missionary movement in Francophone Africa, analysing recent statistical changes and suggesting several ways to strengthen missionary outreach through investment in training and in sending missionaries. Third, Fohle examines 'The Contribution of African Missionaries to World Mission', arguing that Africans have been highly mobile due to wartime displacements or educational pursuits and that the vibrant testimony of African Christians living elsewhere in the world, if well organized, can help to reignite evangelical fervor in places like Europe.

The last part, on missiological challenges, begins with Bongoyok's article on seven practical steps to plant churches in each people group or village, along with four standards for judging the accomplishments of such an outreach. Albert Kayuaya Banya, a DRC missiology professor, discusses 'Planting Churches in African Urban Centers', contending that social justice concern, along with clear proclamation of the Gospel message, must be part of any holistic urban outreach.

Next, Simon Pierre Gatera, from Togo, writes on Christian education in Franco-

phone Africa and its relation to traditional culture. Decrying what he sees as a disconnect between packed churches on Sundays and little Christian outreach during the rest of the week, Gatera calls for more gatherings of believers throughout the week, for training and encouragement in practising biblical virtues and sharing the good news.

Kalembe is author of a chapter on the resurgence of traditional African religions, which notes that many Africans seeking affirmation of their cultural identity have turned back to former religious practices. The author calls on missiologists to find ways to demonstrate clearly how Christianity can be integrated with African culture and identity. Next, Congolese native Harimenshi Privat-Biber, now teaching in Burundi, describes the devastating effects of corruption throughout African society and politics, noting that such behavior is not inevitable for Christians and must be eradicated from the Church and from the lives of individual believers.

Finally, Kalembe discusses the powerful impact of HIV/AIDS on African society, with 10,000 new cases diagnosed daily. The author calls on the African church (of all stripes) to educate the population and to insist on biblical behaviours as part of their mission.

Editor Hannes Wiher, who spent many years in Guinea and currently teaches at seminaries in Europe and Africa, highlights in his conclusion the need for evangelical missiological education in Africa to give students a solid biblical and theological base, along with tools for effectively spreading the Gospel in specific cultural contexts.

The Francophone areas of sub-Saharan Africa are awake to their responsibilities in mission. This first volume of a projected series by a network of evangelical

French-speaking missiologists presents a positive contribution to that effort. Christians interested in the successful communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ in Africa will discover useful insights in this volume, including what to avoid (the paternalistic mistakes of the past) and what to practise (wise, holistic contextualization of the Gospel message). We look forward to future offerings from these and other evangelical missiologists who are passionate about winning more people in Africa (and beyond) to faith in Jesus Christ.

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The Quest for Gender Equity in Leadership: Biblical Teachings on Gender Equity and Illustrations of Transformation in Africa

KeumJu Jewel Hyun and Diphus C. Chemorion (eds.)

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016
Pb., 231 pp

Reviewed by Richard Steubing, deputy director, Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA)

Hyun has worked on women's leadership development and economic empowerment in Kenya, and her colleague Chemorion is on staff at St. Paul's University, also in Kenya. Together they have edited a book of well-written essays, most by Africans with earned doctorates, on a topic that has particular relevance to Christians in Africa who are attempting to address the 'natural order' of gender hierarchy in African culture.

The term *equity* is preferred throughout the book to denote equal treatment and opportunity rather than *equality*, a word more common in Western writings. Joseph Galgalo, vice chancellor of St Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya, sets

the tone in the foreword by suggesting that the only way to reconcile the widely varying hermeneutical and theological views on gender equity is to treat the issue as a matter of justice. Since the world of ideal harmony was shattered by the Fall, 'masculine dominance, male superiority, and oppressive submissiveness are a product of a fallen world, and not of God's design or divine will.'

The book's three sections cover Africa's historical and cultural background; the biblical or theological basis for equity; and how gender equity is practised in some African societies. Although women are usually considered inferior in African cultures, the writers see hope in the fact that culture is dynamic, modern governments often support equity, and education and Christianity often bring positive change.

One early chapter provides a case study on how the Anglican Church in Kenya came to its decision to ordain women. The next two, also by Kenyans, address the reasons for the low numbers of female leaders in their country's churches and express concern that women are not being treated as equal before God.

The second section of the book includes overviews of women in leadership in both the Old and New Testaments, taking the position that women should have equal roles in church leadership. The writers suggest at points that culture has wrongly affected interpretation in both Africa and the West. They view the Reformers as having been influenced by their cultural context so as to support the subordination of women.

Relevant biblical passages regarding women in ministry are addressed with balance and sensitivity by Hyun and scholars like Aida Spencer and Lois Semenye. The writers quote prominent egalitarian writers like Catherine

Kroeger and Craig Keener in support of their interpretation. Proponents of other perspectives are not engaged in detail.

The third section offers case studies by several West Africans and one on women in leadership in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe. All contributors encourage the church to incorporate women in church leadership positions, where there are currently very few, partly because of limited training but also due to resistance to cultural change.

One article by a Nigerian deals with African Initiated Churches, using as examples the Cherubim and Seraphim churches, the Christ Apostolic Church and the Church of the Lord (Aladura). The author notes that women's roles in AICs range from full leadership rights to none at all. The following article, also by a Nigerian, includes the Scottish missionary Mary Slessor among examples of women who were effective in church leadership. A Roman Catholic contributor echoes the book's foreword by stating that 'African traditional culture has been the common obstacle and the cause of gender inequity.'

Judy Mbugua, a Kenyan who directed the continental Pan Africa Christian Women Alliance (PACWA) for more than two decades, gives practical advice on how gender equity should affect families (e.g. relationships with spouses, attitudes toward children of both genders, and cultural practices like female genital mutilation). To overcome unhelpful traditions, she urges husbands and wives to share household tasks, speak words of encouragement, deliberately set aside time together at the end of each day, do financial planning jointly and parent the children as a team. She further notes, as do several other authors, that many African proverbs are not helpful for establishing positive gender relationships.

In the concluding chapter, the co-editors reflect the position of most contributors by claiming that 'the equity that God instituted was replaced by a hierarchical model derived from Israel's cultural milieu.' They also contend that the teaching in the home churches of many Western missionaries differed little from colonial tendencies and needed a more biblical foundation. This topic could have benefitted from a separate article.

This book is an excellent addition to the discussion of gender equity in the African context because of its quality and the broad range of topics covered. It is suitable for both scholars and lay leaders and derives special credibility from its mainly African authorship.

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Preach the Word: Towards Effective Grassroots Pastor Training in Sub-Saharan Africa

Myles MacBean

London: Apostolos Publishing, 2017
Pb., 136 pp

Reviewed by Jem Hovil, visiting lecturer in East Africa and associate mission partner for BCMS/Crosslinks

Librarians might be puzzled at how to classify *Preach the Word*. It may sound like a work on homiletics, and indeed the study contains significant insights on preaching (simply follow a single endnote and discover a dozen apt sources on the topic, which is typical of this gem of a book). But as the broader subtitle suggests, the work encompasses Christian education, adult learning, practical theology, action research, inter-cultural studies, anthropology and mission. Placing multiple copies of this interdisciplinary study in different sections of the library would be funds well spent.

Preach the Word is remarkably compact. Its 136 pages include only 80 pages of main text, very helpful endnotes and bibliography, and three appendices. In essence it is a published master's dissertation with the study's implementation forming a postscript. It is of outstanding quality and a model of practical theology for research students.

The book is a closely and carefully constructed case study of the development of a preacher training programme called 'Preach the Word', created for a specific context on the African continent: the Zambezi Evangelical Church in Malawi, Southern Africa. That focus is a great strength. Rather than addressing broadly the ubiquitous challenge of growing leaders at the grassroots level in Africa, it brings inter-disciplinary thinking to bear on a single issue in a single church within a single context. As a result, the conclusions are robust and have wider applicability.

Much of the study's value lies in the perspectives that the author brings from his own experience. MacBean draws on his background as an engineer and businessman, reframing Henry Venn's three-self model to present 'the requirement for theological education programmes to be *contextual*, *scalable*, and *sustainable*' (11). Having also been a long-term, self-supporting lay preacher at the congregation level in the UK, MacBean can identify directly with the target beneficiaries of his programme.

The book opens with a strong conceptual framework which, though necessarily brief, is backed up with a rich variety of sources (some new or unusual). The author's own 'Homiletic Window model', described in depth in a previous issue of this journal (*ERT* 41:3, 2017, 209–21), is a significant contribution.

After presenting the research design,

MacBean describes the Zambezi Evangelical Church, shedding considerable light on the local context and attitudes of and towards preachers and preaching. Information from church leaders is combined with research on training providers (all backed up in an appendix).

MacBean explains why 'Malawi is one of the most challenging contexts in sub-Saharan Africa for any form of church development' (49). Local congregation leaders are generally unpaid and not well educated, with '31% of elders having only primary education, only 18% able to read English language materials, and over half the elders being untrained—and the rest undertrained—in preaching' (51). The section on learning styles and patterns is stimulating, and the discussion around sustainability is important and challenging.

The last two chapters present targeted recommendations for different constituencies, an informative overview of leadership training interventions, and an introduction to the author's 'Preach the Word' programme. The appendices contain more detailed evaluation methodology and results along with sample lesson plans.

Questions will remain around the study's understanding of homiletics training within ministerial formation more broadly, and regarding the place of preaching in relation to other aspects of church ministry. But these and other topics are beyond the scope of the work, which is excellent within its delimited bounds.

In addition to benefitting students of practical theology and action research, this book will also be useful to people developing alternative forms of theological education as well as those in more traditional training schools, particularly as it provides pointers on the integration of new approaches.

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