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Editor's Introduction: The Other

This issue of ERT highlights the theme of 'Engagement and Dialogue with the Other'. The World Evangelical Alliance, as befits any organization that believes in the Great Commission, devotes much of its efforts to caring for 'others'—i.e. people who are not evangelicals. How do we approach people who have the same human rights and needs as ours, who are created in the image of God, who are in need of God's grace just as we are, but whose worldviews differ from ours?

Samuel Saxena opens this issue by highlighting opportunities for Christian hospitality in India, where the traditional caste system has treated the other as untouchable in many instances, yet where Hindus are expected to greet every guest as if welcoming a god. Against this backdrop, he provides an extensive foundation for a Christian emphasis on embracing others.

Saxena's essay has striking parallels to a 2010 *European Journal of Theology* article by Ron Michener, who sympathetically examined the radical understanding of otherness and its implications in the work of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Accordingly, we have paired the two essays, both of which challenge us to what Michener calls an '(ev)angelical' lifestyle.

Indonesian Panca Yahya patiently describes a Javanese practice called *ruwatan*, showing how it yields a worldview that emphasizes maintaining harmony and peaceful order and that softens the contrast between good and evil. He then compares that

worldview to Paul's understanding of the warfare between good and evil as described in Ephesians.

Even though evangelicals consider the Christian gospel to be good news, most of us rarely tell other people about it. David Dunaetz draws on social psychology to consider why we act in this way, how social media have exacerbated the problem, and how we can improve our communication without losing friends or our reputation.

Jim Harries, missionary to Kenya who has devoted his life to rooting out the residue of colonialism from cross-cultural mission, returns to the pages of *ERT* with what we might call his magnum opus, summarizing multiple factors that combine to threaten the integrity and ultimately the effectiveness of Western Christian outreaches to the majority world.

The last two articles turn to other topics. American pastor Nicholas Quient offers a rigorous exegesis of passages in the book of Revelation that present salvation as contingent—i.e. as something that believers can lose if they do not remain faithful. Quient's paper caused the WEA's Thomas Schirrmacher to reflect on the many instances where, to maintain theological balance, Christians affirm what may appear to be two contradictory sides of the same coin. Both papers should make stimulating reading.

See page 125 for our call for papers for the next three issues.

– Bruce Barron, Editor

Otherness and Embrace: Towards a Theology of Hospitality in the Indian Context

Samuel Richmond Saxena

As a sub-continent with more than a billion people, India has great diversity and unique challenges. Christians, a tiny minority in India¹ (2.3 percent of the total population), live amidst many religious traditions. However, Christianity has had an immense impact in shaping India's educational, environmental and health systems.

Although Christianity first came to the coastal regions of South India (Kerala) around 52 AD with St Thomas, it is still viewed in the garb of Western (i.e. foreign) influence. Nevertheless, from the nineteenth century onwards, many prominent Indian Christian theologians have worked hard to interpret Scripture within the Indian context, making Christianity more contextual and relevant to the common people. Much of their work was focused on shaping Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology and pneumatology. Later, liberation theology helped Christians to connect with social issues related to Dalits or

'untouchables', tribes, women, ecology and so on.

But now the time has come for Indian Christians (especially evangelicals) to apply theology to ongoing issues in their country, such as corruption and violence. I believe that one important task is to develop a theology of hospitality in the midst of increasing intolerance, violence, division, terrorism, rage, sectarianism and hatred. Whether one is reading the local newspaper or the global online news, watching the latest film or listening to the newest music, such issues seem to be omnipresent. Embracing and identifying with others, treating them as equals, showing love to another person, or offering simple hospitality or generosity is indeed a big challenge today. Most of the prominent world religions and cultures have something to offer with regard to serving and caring for others.

Indian society is divided into three communities—caste, outcaste (the Dalits) and indigenous (Adivasi). Because of these existing structures, it is difficult, in fact sometimes impossible, for the different communities to interact with each other. What can the church offer to a society that is so seg-

1 The term 'minorities' in India refers to all religious communities that are present in much smaller numbers than Hindus—Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians.

regated because of caste, religion and language? What is the responsibility of Christians in this regard? How can Indian Christians develop a theology of hospitality that is relevant to the Indian context and can provide a vision of serving the Indian society?

I. Understanding Indian Society

Hinduism or *Sanatana Dharma* (an eternal religion not traceable to any founder) has dominated Indian society for ages. According to Hinduism, *dharma* (righteousness) denotes the power or process of sustaining human life in all situations, i.e. in fortune and misfortune, favour and disfavour, prosperity and adversity. Interestingly, *Hindu* is not a religious name but a territorial or geographical reference, denoting the people who lived near the Sindhu River. The term comes from the ancient Persians.

For at least two reasons, the Hindu tradition contains the greatest diversity of any world religious tradition. First, Hinduism spans the longest stretch of time among major world religions; second, it has organically absorbed hundreds of separate cultural traditions, expressed in as many as three hundred languages. The whole *Sanatana Dharma* can be condensed into three sets of four words:

1. Four *varnas* (castes): *brahmana* (priests), *kshatriya* (rulers and warriors), *Vaishya* (business persons) and *shudra* (labourers)
2. Four *purusharthas* (human pursuits): *dharma* (code of righteousness), *artha* (monetary resources), *kama* (work) and *moksha* (redemption)
3. Four *ashramas* (monaster-

ies): *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *garhasthya* (household life), *vanaprastha* (inner refinement) and *sannyasa* (renunciation)

The rules, beliefs, and social laws of *Sanatana Dharma* have powerfully shaped Indian spirituality. As time went on, this spiritual tradition expanded its reach to all parts of India, including indigenous tribes (Adivasi) and other groups who entered the society. Eventually, the concept of untouchables (today's Dalits) was created to refer to people whom the upper castes would not even allow to be near or to touch them.

Hinduism developed into a society in which people became ranked rigidly by occupation. The sacerdotal position, or priestly work, was considered purest. At the opposite extreme, any work that involved dealing with the dead, carrion, cleaning of sewers, sweeping and other such tasks was considered unclean and was performed only by members of the lower caste. These tasks were inherited from generation to generation.²

Another distinctive feature of Hinduism is the four *upayas* (i.e. ways or tactics) through which one can get something from others. The four *upayas* date back to Kautilya, a Hindu statesman and philosopher in the fourth century BC and author of the *Arthashastra*, and they have had a great impact in shaping Hindu thinking. The *upayas* include (a) *sama* (conciliation by negotiation), (b) *dama* (gift or blandishment), (c) *bheda* (sowing dissension in the enemy's

² Constance A. Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), xxii.

camp) and (d) *danda* (punishment or use of superior force).³ Along with the caste system, the four *upayas* have become a key point of reference that has brought division within Hinduism, as they reject the idea of equality among humans and the last two reflect lack of respect for the other.

In such a situation, Christians struggle to share their faith. Relating the gospel to the Indian context requires proper strategies through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not called to condemn or criticize the practices of people of other faiths, but to unveil the hidden streams of living theology that flow in their hearts and minds because of the influence of their traditions. We should carefully scrutinize their practices without diluting the core of the biblical faith, looking for contact points between the Indian and Judeo-Christian traditions that we can explore. The resulting gracious dialogue will mutually benefit both sides.

II. Hospitality in Indian Tradition: Atithi Devo Bhava

Practicing hospitality is an important point of contact between Indian and Judeo-Christian traditions. In Vedic India, hospitality was a duty; a guest had to be honoured and neglecting a guest brought misfortune upon the host.⁴ The Sanskrit word for guest is *atithi*, 'without time', meaning that guests should not be limited to a fixed date or time to visit. Hosting guests

is considered a religious duty in Indian tradition. If a person is refused hospitality, he can 'unload' his sins on the unwilling host. Hindu literature is full of stories about punishments for refusing hospitality, as well as about poor people sacrificing their last possessions for a guest, who turns out to be a god in the guise of a poor man (*daridra Nārāyaṇa*) and who amply rewards his hosts.⁵ Brahmin is called *Atithigva* because of his generosity towards guests.⁶ In general, *brahmins* are to assume the task of hosting the gods on behalf of other castes by offering sacrifices of food. Ironically, according to some of Hinduism's oldest sacred texts, members of one caste may not dine together with those of another.⁷

Atithi Devo Bhava, which is now considered the code of conduct for Indian society, is a Sanskrit phrase taken from *Taittiriya Upanishad*, an ancient Hindu scripture in which a guest is understood as a god and equated with one's mother, father and teacher. It states, 'Never swerve from the rites to the gods and to the manes' (i.e. departed souls).⁸

Hindu texts proclaim that the divine is present in everything and everyone. Hence Hindus are expected to treat every guest with pleasure and

⁵ Jones, *Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 83.

⁶ Jones, *Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 60.

⁷ John Koenig, 'Hospitality', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Lindsay Jones (New York: Thomson Gale, 2005), 4140.

⁸ Swami Sharvananda, *Taittiriya-Upanishad: With Sanskrit Text, Paraphrase with Word-for-Word Literal Translation, English Rendering and Comments* (Madras: Ramkrishna Math, 1921), 43.

³ Pavan K. Varma, *Being Indian* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), 26.

⁴ Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (Oxford: One World, 1998), 31.

delight as if they were welcoming a god into their house. In their religion, there are sixteen steps of *puja* (worship) offered to god(s) when they visit their homes, and similar treatment (worship) is rendered to guests, even to strangers. Guests are offered an honoured place to sit, words of welcome, water to bathe or drink, clothes and ornaments. When the guests arrive at the doorstep, *arati* (a form of Hindu worship) is performed. The *arati* plate consists of a lamp (*diya*), water (poured from a conch shell), cloth, fragrance (*dhup*), and flowers (*pushpa*). The same act of worship is conducted when a new bride first comes to her in-laws' home.

According to Manu Smriti, 'gods, guests, dependents, ancestors, and oneself—when someone does not make offerings to these five, he has breath but no life at all.'⁹ In *dharma shastras*, while hosting guests the hosts should devote their eyes, mind and agreeable speech to the visitors, and they should personally attend and accompany the guests upon their departure.¹⁰

In Hinduism, hospitality is mostly confined to the context of *puja*. The worship includes offering water, fruits, flowers and food. However, hospitality is conditioned by the guest's caste, class and status.

The ancient Tamil scripture (two thousand years old) called the Tiruk-

kural is considered one of the most significant works on ethics in this tradition. It was first translated by the Rev George Uglow Pope, a Christian missionary to Tamil Nadu and a Tamil scholar who fell in love with this regional literature.¹¹ From verses 81 to 90, it contains verses on practical advice on hospitality towards guests:¹²

The whole purpose of earning wealth and maintaining a home is to provide hospitality to guests.

To eat oneself while strangers wait outside, e'en if the food be immortal nectar, undesirable.

The life of those who daily cherish coming guests shall ne'er be wasted by poverty.

He'll be a welcome guest to gods above, who, having cherished the parting guest, awaits the coming guest. (verses 81–83, 86)

I can still remember that when any stranger visited our house, we were instructed by our parents to offer at least a glass of water along with a small piece of *gur* (jaggery, a raw brown mass of sugar). Whenever we invite guests for a meal, in our tradition we feed them first and later the family members eat together. In some Hindu families, women take a portion of their cooked food outside to give it to passers-by or even to animals, particularly cows. In villages, towns and also some traditional Hindu families, hospitality is still practised according

⁹ Patrick Olivelle (ed.), *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmasāstra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 112.

¹⁰ Lavina Melwani, 'Hindu Hospitality: The Glories and Woes of a Gracious Tradition', in *What Is Hinduism? Modern Adventures into a Profound Global Faith* (Hawaii: Himalayan Academy, 2007), 295–97.

¹¹ The Tirukkural, quoted in www.tamilguardian.com/content/thirukkural, 22 January 2008.

¹² Thiruvalluvar, *Tirukural in Ancient Script*, trans. by Gift Siromoney, S. Govindaraju and M. Chandrasekaran (Madras: Tambaram, 1980), 19.

to the ancient scriptures. But nowa-days, due to globalization and urbanization, families living in cities are losing sight of this practice.

III. Identifying Others

India today continues to face challenging consequences of its caste system. Members of one caste tend to treat those of a different caste as 'the other'. Under the existing caste system, people are not treated equally and Indian society is deeply divided.

According to *Dharmasutras*, leftover food should be thrown on the ground 'for dogs, Cándalas [Dalits], outcasts, and crows; and ... to a Sūdra'.¹³ (Sudras occupy the lowest level within the caste system; Dalits or untouchables are considered outside the caste system.) If a Brahmin man marries a Sudra, that man falls from the very rank of Brahmin and becomes impure. According to Manu Smriti's code of laws, 'when such a woman plays the leading role in his divine, ancestral, and hospitality rites, gods and ancestors do not partake of them, and he will not go to heaven.'¹⁴

The caste system has even divided Indian Christians. Pandita Ramabai noticed in the church of Madras that the preachers at a communion service used different cups for the church members of different Hindu backgrounds. Dalits had to sit in a separate enclosed part of the church and bury their dead in a separate

cemetery.¹⁵

The definition and understanding of guests or strangers can vary depending on caste, wealth or even language. Pawan Varma, a renowned Indian author, said that today's 'amorality is based on the pragmatic perception that the power of one's position is more important than the strength of person's convictions.' For him, 'Traditional Hindu society had no real concept of moral problems. Any action considered wrong in a certain context is condoned and even lauded in a different context.'¹⁶

Otherness as a marker of difference is a reality; we encounter people and practices that are strange to us, and this becomes a starting point for asking ourselves how we ought to behave towards people who differ from us. What is our responsibility towards them? The range of understanding directed towards strangers or others oscillates between the ancient notion of 'foreigner' (*xenos*) and the contemporary category of an alien invader. Hence, otherness has usually been understood as referring to people beyond the boundaries of a national territory, but in today's context it is right amongst us. Our behaviour towards others is a worldwide concern that requires a fundamental restructuring of our value system, with the help of Christian spirituality.

'One of the principal ways human beings choose to draw boundaries that secure their safety and identity', says Robert Schreiter, is 'by exclusion; placing beyond the boundary those

13 Patrick Olivelle (ed. and trans.), *Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Apastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana, and Vasistha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2000), 389.

14 Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, 109.

15 Jan Peter Schouten, *Jesus as Guru: The Image of Christ among Hindus and Christians in India* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 239.

16 Varma, *Being Indian*, 30–31.

who are not us and who are “them”. Hence, labelling something or someone as ‘other’ can be the first step in making them other.¹⁷ Much of the problem comes when the other is not recognized and differences are not properly respected.

The Christian tradition places a strong emphasis on confronting and transforming the perception and experience of otherness. In this strand of Christian thinking, the condition of being strangers and aliens is a dimension of our unreconciled state.¹⁸ Schreiter identified seven ways of ‘other-making’:

1. We can *demonize* the other ... considering the other as wicked.
2. We can, on the other hand, *romanticize* the other, treating the other as far superior to ourselves.
3. We can *colonize* the other, treating the other as inferior, worthy of pity or contempt. ...
4. We can *generalize* the other, treating the other as non-individual. ...
5. We can *trivialize* the other by ignoring what makes the other disturbingly different. ...
6. We can *homogenize* the other by claiming that there really is no difference. This is most in evidence in situations where two opposing groups are joined together forcibly. ...
7. We can *vaporize* the other ... by refusing to acknowledge the presence of the other at all. This is often found in cases of racism, where the oppressed people’s existence is not even acknowledged.¹⁹

In winter 1993, Jürgen Moltmann, renowned for his theology of hope, finished a lecture by asking one of his typical questions, both concrete and penetrating: ‘But can you embrace a *cetnik* [terrorist]?’ The *cetniks* had been sowing desolation in Croatia, herding people into concentration camps, raping women, burning churches and destroying cities. After hearing this type of question in a class, Miroslav Volf grappled with various other questions that started to disturb him: Can I embrace a *nik*—the ultimate other, so to speak, the evil other? What would justify the embrace? Where would I draw the strength for it? What would it do to my identity as a human being and as a Croat? It took him a while to answer, though he immediately knew his answer: ‘No, I cannot—but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to.’ Volf’s resulting book, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, is an excellent work that presents the theology of reconciliation and embracing others in the midst of conflict and struggle.

For Volf, in all wars, whether large or small and whether carried out on battlefields, on city streets, in living rooms or in faculty lounges, we come across the same basic exclusionary polarity: ‘us against them’, ‘their gain—our loss’, ‘either us or them’.

¹⁷ Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Cambridge, MA: Boston Theological Institute, 1992), 52.

¹⁸ Jay T. Rock, ‘No Longer Strangers or Aliens: “Otherness” as a Binding To Be Loosed in Christian Tradition’, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 52, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 113–19.

¹⁹ Schreiter, *Reconciliation*, 52–53.

The stronger the conflict, the more the rich texture of the social world disappears and the severe exclusionary division emerges around which all thought and practice align themselves.²⁰ Volf emphasizes that to erase conflict between the two parties, there is a need for peace so that the community may live in harmony. In view of this, the wall of hostility needs to be removed so that self and other may come together.²¹

Overcoming the separation of self from other is at the heart of Christian reconciliation. Ian Barbour, a famous physicist, writes, 'We do not experience life as neatly divided into separate compartments; we experience it in wholeness and interconnectedness before we develop particular disciplines to study different aspects of it.'²²

IV. Hospitality: A Biblical Perspective

Looking for God in the people who come to us on our way is perhaps the key to practicing real Christian hospitality. Another challenge that Indian tradition faces with regard to hospitality is honouring or worshipping a stranger or guest as god, thereby promoting the idea of pantheism. Such false philosophies divert human minds from the true and living God, and the actual purpose of God

is diminished. In such a context, it is important to understand hospitality according to a biblical perspective.

Bruce Malina defines hospitality as the 'process by means of which an outsider's status is changed from stranger to guest ... [and] differs from entertaining family and friends'.²³ It is a set of social instructions, such as providing food and lodging, that are to be applied to outsiders so that potential enemies are transformed into allies, or outsiders into insiders. In our tradition, hospitality is more oriented to friends, rich people, influential personalities and relatives rather than to strangers, beggars or untouchables.

In Matthew 25:35, the Greek word for 'stranger' is *xenos*, which means guest. This guest may be someone from another nation (foreigner), an unknown person, or an alien or sojourner (pilgrim). According to the Old Testament, a stranger was commonly understood as a foreigner settled among the covenant people, without Israelite citizenship, but subject to Israel's laws and having a claim to kindness and justice.²⁴ The Israelites were commanded to extend generous hospitality to the stranger or sojourner (irrespective of social class, religion or nationality) in the Covenant code in Exodus (Ex 22.21; 23.9), the priestly laws of Leviticus (Lev 19.33-34), and the Deuteronomic law code (Deut 16.14; 26.12).

20 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 99.

21 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 110.

22 Alister E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 47.

23 Joshua W. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers in Luke-Acts: An Interpretation of the Malta Episode in Acts 28:1-10* (Boston: Brill, 2013), cited in Bruce J. Malina, 'The Received View and What It Cannot Do: III John and Hospitality', *Semeia* 35 (1986): 171-89.

24 Ex 12:49; Lev 24:22; 25:6; Deut 1:16; 24:17,18,19; 10:18,19; 26:11.

From these scriptures, one may deduce that hospitality was an important custom throughout a significant portion of ancient Israel's history.²⁵ In Jewish sources, we find the claim that when one supports the poor, needy or stranger, it is as if they support the Lord. The prophet Isaiah challenges people: 'Is [the true fast] not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?' (58:7).

John Koenig contends that Jewish hospitality grew out of 'Bedouin traditions having to do with a resident's obligation to nourish and protect travellers who find themselves in hostile environments.'²⁶ Even today, a traditional greeting to guests among the Bedouin people of the Middle East is 'You are among your family.'²⁷

There is an ancient legend that Abraham invited into his tent a man who at mealtime gave no thanks to God for His mercy, whereupon the patriarch drove him forth into the desert unfed and unsheltered. But in the night, God touched Abraham and awoke him, saying to him, 'Where is the stranger?' Abraham said, 'When he did not fear you, nor thank you, I drove him forth.' God rebuked him, saying, 'Who made you his judge? I have borne with him all these years.

Could you not bear with him one night? Have you learned nothing from my mercy to you?'²⁸

In the New Testament, Jesus says, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (Matt. 25:40). Further, the writer of the book of Hebrews urges Christians to take hospitality seriously: 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it' (Heb 13:2).

In Luke 10:25–37, the stranger was stripped, beaten and dumped by robbers and was lying half-dead on the roadside. The priest and the Levite, who were considered to be the agents of hospitality because of their Jewish background, simply passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him, and when he saw him, he was moved with pity and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, admitted him to the infirmary, and took care of him for probably the whole night. The next day he gave two denarii to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Here the Samaritan was not only shown to be a true neighbour, but he also set an example rather than the priest and Levite with regard to our treatment of strangers. Hence, the Good Samaritan stands for all ages as an example of Christian hospitality.

²⁵ Andrew E. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 57.

²⁶ John Koenig, 'Hospitality', in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 299.

²⁷ 'Hospitality' in R. F. Youngblood, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1995) [DVD].

²⁸ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1979), 1069.

V. Christology: Christ as the Model

In Indian tradition, different religious scriptures have various approaches towards hospitality, illustrating a strange combination of plurality and contradictions. In such a situation, Christ becomes the model and Christology gives us a concrete foundation for presenting a theology of hospitality.

Christology is the branch of theology that deals with the person and work of Jesus Christ. This historical Jesus offers a unique model that can fit any culture or tradition through his life, his words and actions, his activity and his praxis, his attitudes and his spirit, his fate on the cross and his resurrection.

Christianity appeared on the stage of history as a movement with a message of salvation. Its preachers announced that God was bringing 'the restoration of all things' (Acts 3:21). This proclamation was rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, who himself proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God.²⁹ His life and teaching both present an exemplary model of hospitality that can aptly address Indian tradition. The mission of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ continues to transform cultures.

In Matthew 25, Jesus identifies Himself with the other by referring to himself as a stranger. Our treatment of strangers is directly linked with our treatment of Jesus in the determination of our reward. Remarkably, Jesus neither considers strangers as 'they'

nor does he treat them as divine. In Jesus, God for our sake became hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick and a prisoner. Paradoxically, the one who claimed Himself to be:

- the bread of life (Jn 6:35) says 'I'm hungry' (Mk 11:12)
- the source of living water (Jn 7:37) says 'I'm thirsty' (Jn 19:28)
- the creator of space and the entire cosmos (Gen 1:1) says 'I was a stranger' (Lk 2:7)
- wearing the garment of splendour, majesty and light (Ps 104) says 'I was naked' (Jn 19:23)
- Jehovah-Rapha (healer, Ex 15:26) says 'I was sick' (Is 53:4)
- the freedom of the prisoner (Lk 4:18) says 'I was in prison' (Mt 27:35)

According to the gospels, several other verses bear witness that Jesus was considered a stranger by many people, even some of his own family members. Luke 2:7 records that when Mary gave birth to Jesus, she laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn (they were strangers). Further, Joseph, Mary and the child Jesus were forced to flee Bethlehem and went to Egypt as strangers because of Herod (Mt 2:13-15). Jesus during his earthly ministry was with the people for three years, but on the way to Emmaus after his resurrection, one of his followers asked a strange question: 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem?' (Lk 14:18). John's gospel declares, 'He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.' At one point, his disciples

²⁹ William G. Rusch and Richard A. Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 1.

thought he was a ghost (Mt 14:26). Simon the Pharisee failed to provide Jesus with the required hospitality as per the custom, which was counted as an insult to him. Shailendra Rodrigues writes, 'It was more a hostility than hospitality that Jesus experienced in Simon's house.'³⁰ In contrast to this, a woman honoured Jesus by washing His feet with her tears.

Why was He a stranger to own people? Or why he is still a stranger to many? Leonard Boff defines a stranger as

one who does not fit into a particular common criterion. Strangeness can be caused by someone's different behavior or by someone's belonging to a different ethnic background that is not present in a society or by someone who speaks a different language or by someone who presents different ideas or understandings of the world uncommon to a cultural group.³¹

Since Jesus came from heaven to earth, his thoughts, teachings, ideas, behaviour and way of working were entirely based on kingdom principles and appeared to others as strange. For example, traditionally Jews were taught to hate their enemy, but Jesus said, 'Love your enemy.' And there was no gap between his teachings and his actions.

Even after the resurrection, Jesus continues to be a stranger for many. Without inviting this stranger into our lives, we cannot love others or give space to other strangers. Al-

though in the state of being a stranger, Jesus also became the host for those who were considered 'others' by the Jews. Jesus broke all the religious and social barriers by extending love and compassion to others. He went to the well and asked for water from a Samaritan (Jn 4). He healed the servant of the Gentile officer (Mt. 8:5-13). He cast out the demon from the daughter of a woman who was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. He shared a table with the tax collectors who were considered sinners by the Pharisees. In John 2, while attending a marriage at Cana in Galilee, from being a guest he became the host.

In Matthew 25:31-36, when Jesus describes himself as a stranger, he calls on the church to follow him in acts of mercy. Christians are measured by the works of compassion that they receive from Christ so that they extend it to other fellow beings. Christian theology has a pleasant task of offering the genuine friendship of Christ in a fragmented world. One way of looking at this is to think of hospitality as grace-driven. Ray Simpson writes beautifully:

Hospitality is a way of life that is due for a comeback. It is the smile that greets friend and stranger. It is the warm embrace, and the welcome of each person as a gift from God, from the new baby in the mother's womb, to the old person nearing their end. Hospitality is the creation of a space in which the other person may feel secure, at ease with himself or herself; it is the encouragement of their gifts and the affirming of their person.³²

³⁰ Shailendra Rodrigues, *Hospitality: A Key to Eternity* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2018), 33.

³¹ Leonard Boff, *Virtues: For Another Possible World*, trans. Alexandre Guilherme (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 68.

³² Ray Simpson, *Celtic Christianity: Deep Roots for a Modern Faith* (Vestal, UK: Anam-

VI. God the Ultimate Cosmic Host

Every culture in the world holds up some standard of hospitality as a basis for civilized behaviour, and every institution has some set norms. Practising hospitality according to the Bible is a major principle of the kingdom of God. The Triune God is the ultimate cosmic host, providing a space for us within the family of the Trinity by creating us in his own image and likeness (which rejects the idea of otherness).

In Genesis 1, God creates an orderly universe out of chaos. As an act of hospitality, he still brings order to our chaotic day-to-day lives by sustaining, nurturing, protecting, providing and caring for us. God as host invites us to partake in his kingdom through Christ. The invitation is for everyone, especially for those who are heavy laden (Mt 11:28). The heavy laden are those who are rejected, neglected, oppressed (this includes the Sudras, Dalits, or backward classes), depressed, suffering from all types of diseases, abandoned, broken-hearted, crushed in spirit, poor or victims of injustice. In his hospitality we find ultimate rest and peace.

King David in Psalm 23 portrays God as the perfect host who makes his guests comfortable in green pastures, quenches their thirst, gives rest to the weary soul, prepares a table, anoints the head with oil, and shows every kindness so that the guest's cup runs over. The psalmist sees the Lord himself as offering hospitality beyond all others.

In God, hostile humanity has found space for divine communion, which

is an ideal model of how human beings should relate to each other. Volf mentions four steps from exclusion to embrace: repentance, forgiveness, 'making space in oneself for the other' and 'healing of memory'.³³ For him, the mutual self-giving love in the Trinity (the doctrine of God), the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross for the 'godless' (the doctrine of Christ) and the open arms of the father receiving the prodigal (the doctrine of salvation) are the important metaphors for this embrace that brings together.³⁴ The embrace requires full reconciliation and cannot take place until the truth has been said and justice is done. Thus, the practice of embrace is accompanied by the struggle against deception, injustice and violence.

Volf suggests that the very idea of forgiveness implies an affirmation of justice. Every act of forgiveness draws attention to justice, precisely by offering to forgo its claims and providing a framework in which the quest for justice can be fruitfully pursued. For Volf, 'Forgiveness creates space'.³⁵

Forgiveness is the boundary between exclusion and embrace. It heals the wound that the power-act of exclusion has inflicted and breaks down the dividing wall of hostility. Yes, it leaves a distance between people, an empty space of neutrality, that allows them either to go their separate ways in what is sometimes called 'peace' or to fall into each other's arms and restore broken communion.³⁶

33 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 110.

34 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 100.

35 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 125.

36 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 126.

Even after two thousand years, the Host still stands outside as a stranger, waiting eagerly to enter the hearts of many. Jesus said, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching, my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them' (Jn 14:23). Hospitality requires conversation, encounter, eye contact and attentive listening. It begins by giving space to the other. Hospitality is not limited to providing food to strangers, giving shelter or washing the feet of guests in order to practise good works; it is more than that. It demands selfless love that offers oneself to the other wholly, making the other comfortable. This is the love we receive from God the Father through his son Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As dedicated servants of God, we ought to reflect Christ's behaviour through our lives. The church in India

and everywhere must think biblically, develop Christologically (i.e. constructing a Christocentric approach) and act contextually (praxis) in such a way as to treat others 'as brothers and sisters created by the same God and living as mutual guests in the same house provided by the same divine host'.³⁷

Our aim is that 'the whole created order may be reconciled to God through Christ' (Col 1:20). We seek to live as one Christian community 'that the world may believe' (Jn 17:21) that we are one. Developing a disciplined spirituality centred on hospitality will make us effective in our witness to Christ in the world, and especially in the Indian context.

37 Amy G. Oden (ed.), *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 27.

Face-to-face with Levinas: (Ev)angelical Hospitality and (De)constructive Ethics?

Ronald T. Michener

The Jewish religious philosopher Emmanuel Levinas is perhaps the most important Continental ethical thinker of the last century. Unfortunately, he is seldom considered by evangelicals. This paper will suggest that an evangelical engagement with Levinas offers resources pertinent to our development of personal and social ethics in our postmodern climate. It will first consider Levinas's post-foundational call to the obligation to the 'face of other' in view of the postmodern deconstruction of moral systems. Second, it will reflect on his proposal of ethics as 'first philosophy' in view of an evangelical commitment to be message bearers of God's redemption and justice in both proclamation and hospitable action within and beyond particular faith communities.

I. Brief Biography

Biographical details are often brushed aside when considering the ideas of various philosophers and theologians. However, it would be unthinkable to do this with Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995). Levinas must be

understood against the backdrop of the horrific despair of the Holocaust and the historic scars it left on Europe after the Second World War. These traumatic events deeply touched this man's life and perspectives.

Levinas was born to Jewish parents in Lithuania in 1906, was educated in both the Bible and Talmud, and experienced the rich legacy of Russian culture and literature. His first reading language was Hebrew, but his mother tongue was Russian. During the First World War, Levinas's family moved as refugees to Ukraine. As a young teen, Levinas witnessed the Bolshevik Revolution in February and October of 1917.

Several years later, he moved to France and studied at the University of Strasbourg, where he was introduced to the phenomenological method of Husserl and Heidegger. Levinas then studied under both Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg before finally settling in Paris—his home for the remainder of his life. Levinas became a French citizen in 1930. He began working on a book on Heidegger, but dispensed with it when Heidegger

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joined the Nazi party.¹ This was obviously devastating for Levinas, as Heidegger had deeply impacted his philosophical formation. As he would later write (in 1963): 'One can forgive many Germans, but there are some Germans it is difficult to forgive. It is difficult to forgive Heidegger.'²

The wounds of World War II ran deep with Levinas, haunted by the atrocities done to his people, his family and himself. As a French citizen, he was drafted into the French army in 1939, but shortly afterwards he was taken prisoner of war and put into a work camp in the forest in northern Germany. Sadly, during this period, many of Levinas's extended family members were apparently murdered by the Nazis in Lithuania. Levinas's life, however, was protected as a French prisoner of war. In 1945 (after five years in the work camp), he was finally able to return to his wife and daughter in Paris, where they had remained safe and under protection in a monastery.³

1 Simon Critchley, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xv–xviii.

2 Critchley, 'Introduction', xviii.

3 Critchley submits that this may have been why Levinas was never hostile toward Catholicism. Simon Critchley, 'Can the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas Change Your Life?' (New York: New York Society for Ethical Culture and Levinas Ethical Legacy Foundation), audio lecture. This is not to say that Levinas overtly advocated Christianity or broke away from his traditional Jewish perspectives. For an explanation of the difference between the Christian Messiah, Jesus, and Levinas's notion of Jewish messianism, see Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, eds., *Re-reading Levinas* (London: Athlone Press, 1991), 99.

Levinas vowed never to set foot in Germany again—an oath he kept for the remainder of his life.⁴ In spite of this promise, he would be, ironically, forever intellectually indebted to these Germans under whom he studied in terms of his philosophical phenomenological method. The phenomenologist, such as Levinas, attempts to awaken us to the shared features that are part of our everyday experience, but that are nevertheless commonly ignored in our everyday life.⁵ Phenomenology concerns itself with our descriptions and experiences of appearances in our consciousness, by observing the reality before us, rather than with predetermined rational theories that we project on reality. Of course, how one constitutes phenomena is always relative to one's horizon and various conditions of perception.⁶

Nevertheless, as Howard Caygill astutely observes, National Socialism's 'murderous rigour' brought an end to modernism's 'project of assimilation' and 'made possible a rethinking of the significance of the diaspora and a regeneration between Judaism and Christianity.' Caygill, *Levinas and the Political: Thinking the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 47. Caygill also references (on page 48) Levinas's article prior to the Second World War, 'The Spiritual Essence of Anti-Semitism (according to Jacques Maritain)' in *Paix et droit* 5 (1938), where Levinas emphasizes shared qualities between Judaism and Christianity.

4 Critchley, 'Introduction', xix–xx.

5 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 283. Critchley provides a lucid description of the phenomenological method, especially as it relates to Levinas.

6 Yair Sheleg, 'Significant Other: Who Would Have Believed That Emmanuel Levinas Would Become an Israeli Cultural Hero?'

Although Levinas became an important spokesman for Husserl's philosophy in France, he was most notably impacted by Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology in the groundbreaking work *Being and Time*.⁷ However, he switched the priority of Heidegger's ontology to that of ethics—which is paramount for understanding Levinas.

II. Ethics as First Philosophy

1. Deconstructing Modern Ethics

Before I go further, allow me to offer a couple of introductory comments about 'deconstruction', due to its importance for understanding Levinas's position. Deconstructionism is often unfortunately seen as the monster of postmodernity—the nihilistic billy club of Jacques Derrida. But deconstruction is not ultimately about destruction or annihilation of meaning. Rather, it is primarily about what happens to texts, ideas and intellectual systems when they are examined with detailed scrutiny, uncovering that which has been lost, neglected or forgotten in ordinary discourse or social practice. It is not about the negation of reality, but about reconstructing the reality in which we live and speaking in the name of justice.

(Department for Jewish Zionist Education, 2003); Kelly James Clark, Richard Lints and James K. A. Smith, *101 Key Terms in Philosophy and Their Importance for Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 66; Edward Moore, 'Phenomenology', in *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, ed. Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist (London: Routledge, 2001).

7 See Critchley, 'Introduction', 10–13.

Stated positively, James K. A. Smith puts it this way:

Deconstruction is a deeply affirmative mode of critique attentive to the way in which texts, structures and institutions marginalize and exclude 'the other', with a view to reconstructing and reconstituting institutions and practices to be more just (i.e., to respond to the call of the other).⁸

It is this sense of deconstruction with which we should seek to understand Levinas.

In the wake of the deconstruction of modernist ethics, Levinas declared the 'essential problem' in the form of a question: 'Can we speak of an absolute command after Auschwitz? Can we speak of morality after the failure of morality?'⁹ It is as if to say, 'reason had its heyday, so what now?' This was the century, according to Levinas, where 'suffering and evil are deliberately imposed, yet no reason sets limits to the exasperation of a reason become political and detached from all ethics.' Modernist systems of totality resulted in war and genocide. The Holocaust was the 'paradigm of gratuitous human suffering, where evil appears in its diabolical horror'.¹⁰

8 James K. A. Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 12; see also 8–11.

9 Tamara Wright, Peter Hughes and Alison Ainsley, 'The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 176.

10 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Useless Suffering', trans. Richard Cohen, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 162.

This haunting memory is what motivated the intensity of Levinas's writings. What is it, after Auschwitz, that will transcend the mess made of modernity's idolatry of reason and the totalizing schemes of Western thought?¹¹ At first it would seem that the massacres of yesterday would provide a fail-safe protection against such atrocities today, but unfortunately historical memories are like cards, according to Zygmunt Bauman, 'reshuffled to suit new hands'.¹² For example, Bauman points out, people can now be killed from afar by using electronic surveillance equipment and smart missiles. The killer remains distant, and the victims remain faceless. Now, the victims themselves may not be morally superior; they simply did not have the opportunity to be first to push the button. Bauman claims that the superior morality is the 'morality of the superior'—the guardians of morality.¹³

The rational foundations of morality conveniently entered the scene on the Enlightenment coattails of Kant. Justified moral actions must be expressed through the universal quality of human reason—a moral imperative—not through the whimsical nature of emotions. Kant's rule-guided deontological ethic and its mistrust of feelings developed into a morality that became a detached 'proceduralism'. It was assumed that rational modern ethics, if rigorously applied

and freed from the impulses of subjective desires, should be able to settle the moral dilemmas we face in the world.¹⁴ Again, Bauman aptly states:

De-substantiation of the moral argument in favor of proceduralism does a lot for the subordination of the moral agent to the external legislating agency, yet little or nothing at all for the increase of the sum total of good; in the final account it disarms the forces of moral resistance to immoral commands—very nearly the only protection the moral self might have against being a part to inhumanity.¹⁵

The abstract totalizing and rational universality of Enlightenment ethics tended to remove the rules of morality from the persons to whom they should be attached.

Levinas spoke out against this primacy of ontology in Western philosophy that characterized modern ethics. Ontology forces pre-determined categories; it attempts to unify at the expense of difference. Reality must be seen as one, rather than multifarious. Everything is understood as an entire comprehensible reality, 'reducing the other by the same'.¹⁶ In fact, he viewed this pernicious influence of Hellenistic ontology as laying the foundation for the entire Nazi agenda and the

¹¹ Gary A. Philips, 'Levinas', in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 154.

¹² Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 227.

¹³ Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 227–29.

¹⁴ Although this may not have been Kant's intention, it is my contention that his thinking greatly influenced this type of detachment to which I am referring. Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 67, 68; Olthuis, 'Face-to-Face', 137–38.

¹⁵ Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 69.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 42; see also 43, 77–78.

Holocaust. Since Jewish people were 'outside' the classifications of the determined identity markers of the powerful, they would not be included. For Levinas, ontology assigns a place for everything, making everything equal, leaving no room for the Other. That which is different must be assimilated and comprehended. There must be control. This type of absolutist thinking is devastating to ethics. Western philosophy's preoccupation with the understanding and classification of being and reality, then organizing that reality by means of technology and economy, is fundamentally *egological* (think 'ego')—suppressing the uniqueness of the other, and hence excluding the voice of God bidding us to love our neighbour.¹⁷

So the starting point for philosophy for Levinas is not found in ontology (i.e. the question of Being, *pace* Heidegger) or epistemology (the question of knowledge), but in ethics. Ethics is first philosophy. Although the autonomous self had assumed centre stage with Descartes, with Heidegger, the self, *Dasein*, became subsumed under the grand umbrella of *Das Man*: the One, the 'They' collective, an ontology which ultimately leads to tyranny.¹⁸ Levinas expelled this full-fledged centred self of the Enlightenment and moved beyond the impersonal col-

lective mass of Heidegger by placing the Other at the centre, not as some impersonal, anomalous horde, but as a personal face with whom I must converse. So he reverses the direction of philosophical thinking from the 'metaphysical to the commonplace', from the opaque question of Being to the question of human being.¹⁹

Now Levinas's move was not simply some theoretical philosophical ideal. For Levinas it was first and foremost experiential. As he writes: 'My critique of the totality has come in fact after a political experience that we have not yet forgotten.'²⁰ The epigraph to his book, *Otherwise Than Being*, expresses this clearly:

To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism.²¹

Levinas scholar Simon Critchley wisely points out that Levinas was not some shallow, liberal pacifist. He had experienced firsthand the horrors of war, suffered its consequences, and understood the ethical demand from the other in the struggle of life and death. The conflict of war placed him before others where the brutality of

17 'Egology' for Levinas is seeking to dominate the other through understanding and comprehension. Ontology is an advanced form of egology, as all being is reduced to a totalizing system with no room for difference. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44. See also Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 265–66.

18 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46–47.

19 Critchley, 'Can the Philosophy'; Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 284–85.

20 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1982), 78–79.

21 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), epigraph.

death was all around him, where the biblical injunction of 'thou shalt not murder' was agonizingly put to the test.²² This is a theme to which Levinas consistently returns. As Levinas puts it:

To approach the Other is to put into question my freedom, my spontaneity as a living being, my emprise over the things, this freedom of a 'moving force', this impetuosity of the current to which everything is permitted, even murder. The 'You shall not commit murder' which delineates the face in which the Other is produced submits my freedom to judgment.²³

It is exactly this confrontation with the face of the other, looking at the other in the eyes, in the engagement of conversation, that confronts us with an exteriority beyond our predetermined concepts of being and knowledge. It is a confrontation of the radical exteriority of the other that completely ruptures our knowledge paradigm. It cannot be mastered or controlled.²⁴

2. The Face of the Other Cannot Be Reduced to Knowledge

The 'big idea' of Levinas is that the other before us cannot be contained or reduced to our comprehension or knowledge. Simon Critchley elucidates Levinas's point through a memorable illustration by the American philosopher, Stanley Cavell, with reference to the philosophical problem of other minds. The question framed by Cavell is: 'How can I know

if someone is truly in pain?' Let us say that I was an incompetent dentist drilling away on someone's tooth and my patient suddenly screams in what seems to me to be obvious torment. I immediately apologize (and perhaps offer more novocaine?). The patient, however, instantly changes composure and replies: 'Oh no, I am not in pain at all, I was simply calling my hamsters!'²⁵ How ridiculous! But how can I know if the patient is telling the truth? The point is that we really cannot know for sure whether this person was in pain or calling his hamsters, unless we see his hamsters start scurrying into the dentist's examination room.

The gist of what Critchley is pointing out in this somewhat silly example, via Cavell, is that for Levinas, there is an interiority of the other, an infinite separateness (what Levinas calls 'alterity') or distinctness, that always escapes my comprehension and cannot be reduced to mere knowledge.²⁶ Our engagement with another person is a unique experience, involving a certain level of engagement that extends beyond our knowledge of objects. Levinas describes it this way:

Our relation with the other (*autrui*) certainly consists in wanting to comprehend him, but this relation overflows comprehension. Not only because knowledge of the other (*autrui*) requires, outside of all curiosity, also sympathy or love, ways of being distinct from impas-

22 Critchley, 'Can the Philosophy'.

23 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 303.

24 Philips, 'Levinas', 157.

25 Critchley, 'Introduction', 25–26. Critchley refers to Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 89. See also Critchley, 'Can the Philosophy'.

26 Critchley, 'Introduction', 26.

sible contemplation, but because in our relation with the other (*autrui*), he does not affect us in terms of a concept. He is a being (*étant*) and counts as such.²⁷

An encounter with the other cannot be reduced to my own analysis, nor assimilated into my understanding or reasoning. The other with whom I am standing face to face beckons me to moral obligation. The call of the other precedes my own will and initiative. It ruptures my own ordered life of *being* (ontology) and morally obliges me to radical 'corporeal' responsibility with sensitivity to embodied persons who become weary, experience pain and have physical and emotional needs.²⁸ Levinas puts it this way with phenomenological clarity: 'Only a subject that eats can be-for-the-other, or can signify. Signification, the-one-for-the-other, has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood.'²⁹

3. The Face of the Other Is Transcendent

This acknowledgement and respect of the other whom we cannot conceptually subsume is what Levinas

calls transcendence. He submits that it is only our relation with the Other that provides a 'dimension of transcendence' which is a relation completely different from our relative egoism typical of the sensible.³⁰ It is a *this-worldly* transcendence, not one lying beyond us in the heavens or akin to the noumenal realm of Kant. Rather it is the *other person* who exceeds myself and obligates me in an ethical relation. It is the distinctness, the 'beyondness', of the other that is transcendent and confronts me with infinite responsibility. The face of the Other who lays claim on me through his transcendence 'is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated'.³¹

Although transcendent, the face of the other also displays the personal; it is where the realm of humanity is revealed, and it is through the face of humanity where we see the trace of the invisible God.³² In the face of the other I become aware of the idea of the Infinite. Levinas contends that the 'dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face' and, he continues, there 'can be no "knowledge" of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God'.³³

But how does Levinas avoid an idolatry of the human person? How does he (or do we) avoid confusion

27 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 6.

28 Olthuis, 'Face-to-Face', 142.

29 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 74. Levinas continues these insights on this same page as he discusses 'the immediacy of the sensibility' towards the proximate other. It is the giving of bread from one's own mouth to the hungry, opening up one's home to the 'wretched other' (he refers to Isaiah 58). See also Olthuis, 'Face-to-Face', 141.

30 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 193; see also 194 and Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 286.

31 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 215.

32 Jens Zimmerman, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 232.

33 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78-79.

of the infinite Other with the Infinite Other of God?³⁴ Levinas does make a distinction. He claims that the Other 'is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed.'³⁵ Noted Levinas scholar Roger Burggraeve points out that God and the other are not identical. It is not that the face of the other who is the Infinite ONE, but through the face I 'hear the Word of God' who calls me to ethical responsibility and points the way to God.³⁶ The ethical call is rooted in the Divine. It does not deny the self but drives the self from the 'myself' to neighbour-centred responsibility.³⁷ God is always beyond me, but the trace of God is manifested through the face and the voice of another human being who calls me to ethical responsibility.³⁸ My understanding of the other will consequently always remain inadequate and incomplete in an asymmetrical relationship.³⁹

34 Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida and Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 120.

35 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 79.

36 Roger Burggraeve, ' "No One Can Save Oneself Without Others": An Ethic of Liberation in the Footsteps of Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Awakening of the Other: A Provocative Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Roger Burggraeve (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2008).

37 Burggraeve, 'No One Can Save', 63–65.

38 Zimmerman, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, 221.

39 Benson, *Graven Ideologies*, 116.

4. The Face of the Other Is Asymmetrical

Levinas's ethic is a radical call to the other in responsibility that does not assume reciprocity or symmetry in any form. As Levinas submits: 'I am responsible for the other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is his affair. ... The I always has one responsibility more than all the others.'⁴⁰ Unlike the horizontal symmetry of the I-Thou dialogical exchange of Martin Buber, Levinas calls for a disinterested, unconditional, asymmetrical relationship without mutuality or the expectation of equal exchange.⁴¹

Certainly, Christians are summoned to follow Christ's example in nurturing an agapeic love for the other without the expectation of reciprocity (see Luke 6:35). One may ask if Levinas is too extreme in this regard. James Olthuis is concerned that such radical insistence on the ethical obligation of the other may end up causing more damage than it does good due to its excessive moralism. If one's personal needs are forfeited, they may reappear in a passive-aggressive manner that may be emotionally destructive.⁴²

Typically, of course, neglecting one's personal needs is not a problem. As I have suggested elsewhere in this regard, it is better to read Levinas as a postmodern ethical prophet who summons us away from the selfish complacency that generally typifies our everyday lives and challenges

40 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 98–99; see Olthuis, 'Face-to-Face', 144.

41 Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 48, 49,, 74.

42 Olthuis, 'Face-to-Face', 143 and n. 31.

us to authentic neighbour love.⁴³ Indeed, this seems impossible, but such impossibility must remain the focus of our moral efforts as Christians. Stephen Webb aptly states that in our world of 'calculative exchange based on self-interest and self-promotion' our 'language of ethics, then, must be couched in the rhetoric of hyperbole.'⁴⁴ Levinas's use of hyperbole in this regard is not simply a rhetorical device used for emphasis, but it is a pointer to the depth of Levinas's call to a radical self-less obligation that will deface my self-love to respectfully face the other.⁴⁵

Philip Rolnick makes some perceptive insights on Levinas in this regard in *Person, Grace, and God* (Eerdmans, 2007). Rolnick suggests, and I agree, that if we read Levinas in a charitable fashion, his hyperbole is 'a performance to protect against the sinfully strong tendency to curve back upon

the self, not unlike Martin Luther's *incurvatus in se*.⁴⁶ Rolnick points out that Luther also made use of hyperbole, illustrating this with a quotation from Luther's *Lectures on Romans*:

Therefore I believe that with this commandment 'as yourself' man is not commanded to love himself but rather is shown the sinful love with which he does in fact love himself, as if to say: 'You are completely curved in upon yourself and pointed toward love of yourself, a condition from which you will not be delivered unless you altogether cease loving yourself and, forgetting yourself, love your neighbor.'⁴⁷

In a similar vein, Rolnick submits, Levinas is attempting a reversal of this curvature by focusing exclusively on non-reciprocity in our relation with the other. Transcendence is always exterior, infinite, beyond my possession and tendency to totalize and control.⁴⁸

I do not wish to disparage Olthuis's uneasiness. Certainly one should not think and act in an excessively agapeic manner that would ignore personal needs altogether and create an abnormal focus on guilt rather than the embrace of God's forgiveness. We are to recognize the other unconditionally in appreciation for God's radically gracious forgiveness and love for us through the atonement of Christ. Hence, our call to the other is

43 Patrick Nullens and Ronald T. Michener, *The Matrix of Christian Ethics: Integrating Philosophy and Moral Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 147.

44 Stephen H. Webb, 'The Rhetoric of Ethics as Excess: A Christian Theological Response to Emmanuel Levinas,' *Modern Theology* 15, no. 1 (1999): 1.

45 I express my thanks to an anonymous referee for this insight. See John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 82; Webb, 'The Rhetoric of Excess,' 9. See also Olthuis's reference to Caputo in 'Face-to-Face,' 142, 143; James K. A. Smith's insights on Olthuis's critique of Levinas in 'The Call as Gift: The Subject's Donation in Marion and Levinas,' in *The Hermeneutics of Charity*, ed. James K. A. Smith and Henry I. Venema, 226–27; Nullens and Michener, *The Matrix*, 143–48.

46 Philip A. Rolnick, *Person, Grace, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 178.

47 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 25: *Lectures on Romans: Glosses and Scholia*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 513, as quoted in Rolnick, *Person, Grace, and God*, 178.

48 Rolnick, *Person, Grace, and God*, 178.

to be a natural response of gratitude rather than psychologically induced guilt-laden obligation.⁴⁹ But for Levinas, a radical forfeiting of the self was ironically a liberation of the self from it-self from which it was imprisoned. For this is where the 'for-the-other' is free from the oppression of ontology and is now open to the transcendence of the other.⁵⁰

Rolnick points out, ironically, that giving of ourselves for the other is not to be seen as a burden in life, but as a blessing. Our times of greatest enjoyment and love are not manifested in moments of self-conscious reflection, but in those times where we have poured ourselves out into the activity at hand. Those who attempt to save their own life will lose it, but those who give their life for the gospel, Jesus, and for the Other will experience a renewed life.⁵¹

III. (Ev)angelical Application

1. The Face of the Other and (Ev)angelical Hospitality

I highly commend Levinas's post-modern criticism of the imperious ontological structures characteristic of Western thought. His ethic rightly retreats 'from the blind alleys into which radically pursued ambitions of modernity have led' and 'readmits the Other as a neighbor, as the close-

to-hand-and-mind, into the hard core of the moral self'.⁵² To truly act as followers of Christ, we must gaze into the face of the downtrodden, the poor and the widows among us, seeking justice and righting wrongs. This is the true religion to which the Epistle of James speaks (Jam 1:26). For whatever is done for the 'least of these' is also done unto the Lord (Mt 25:40).⁵³

A key idea here from Levinas is expressed in French as '*Après vous, Monsieur.*' 'After you, sir.' (By implication of course: 'After you, my dear lady or sir.') 'Please, you go first, before me.' God is not found in the ontological and theoretical sky of abstract Greek metaphysics, but he is found in the concreteness of the person right before us in flesh, through 'everyday and quite banal acts of civility, hospitality, kindness and politeness that have perhaps received too little attention from philosophers'.⁵⁴ This is the wisdom expressed in Jesus' radical call to discipleship, representing the qualities manifested as the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:22). How easy it is to forget or simply neglect to live our theology by consistently manifesting hospitality in the everydayness of life.

2. Our (Ev)angelical Message in Word

As angels are message bearers of God, so this is our call, our purpose and our identity as ev-angelicals. We are 'angelical' message-bearers/messengers of the *euangelion*: God's gospel of redemption and justice found in Jesus, in word and deed. We speak in

⁴⁹ Nullens and Michener, *The Matrix*, 147-48.

⁵⁰ Abigail Doukhan, email message to author, 14 January 2010. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 282. I am grateful to Dr Doukhan for reading a previous draft of this paper and providing specific insights in this regard.

⁵¹ Rolnick, *Person, Grace, and God*, 180.

⁵² Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 84.

⁵³ Nullens and Michener, *The Matrix*, 147.

⁵⁴ Critchley, 'Introduction', 27.

conversation before the face of others and we act according to their needs impressed upon us. As the Samaritan was confronted with the wounds and bruises of the robbed Jewish traveler, so the orphan and the widow beckon us, obligate us to engage them as they manifest the traces of the face of the divine, a face that cannot be seen yet is made visible, an impossible possibility afforded us only by the imago Dei manifested in the Other. This is an obligation, indeed a responsibility, but ultimately it is a magnificent privilege to witness the unveiling of God before us and to participate in divine action towards others in Christian hospitality.

3. Our (Ev)angelical Hospitality in Deed

This hospitality must be expressed among the poor, the downtrodden, the outcast and all who are strangers, in prison and mistreated. By such hospitality, the writer of Hebrews (13:2–3) instructs us, we may have tended to ‘angels unaware’: ‘Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.’

Our practice of hospitality in the margins, to the ‘least of these’, is where the strongest trace of the divine may be found. As angels display a trace of the divine, yet must not be worshipped as divine or equated with God (Rev 19:10; 22:9), so we serve the other, where the trace of God is manifest—angels we serve unaware, unknowing, completely eluding our

comprehension or knowledge.⁵⁵

‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ (Mt 25:37–40)

Yet, these common, ‘banal acts’, as Critchley calls them, cannot be totalized into some simple moral system according to Levinas’s way of thinking. Rather, the moral conscience must remain alive, in-fleshed and fully aware of the unpredictability of life and its many complexities. By no means does Levinas’s deconstruction of the moral structures of modernity lead to some kind of moral paralysis or ethical anarchism. Instead, we learn from Levinas to re-personalize our ethics in the context of authentic relationships.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ David Buschart also points out, referring to Hebrews 13:2, that those who extend theological hospitality realize that, as one stranger serving another, they may be serving a messenger of God. W. David Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 270. Although I fully agree, my point, via Levinas, is that we can never know, nor should we know about ‘angelic visitors’. Rather, the face of the other is already and always where we anticipate the trace of the divine. We do not simply serve the other because he or she may be an angel, but because the other is where the trace of the divine is already made manifest in the privilege of ethical obligation.

⁵⁶ Frank M. Yamada, ‘Ethics’, in *Handbook of*

His call to us, if I may put it this way, is a call to radical ethical responsibility—looking not to some overarching system, but to look into the eyes of the other standing before us. We do not abandon the Law, as John Caputo notes, for the Law must stand strong against injustice. But the Law is blind and universal, and unable to see the particular flesh of the withered hand on the Sabbath.⁵⁷ This is not some wild antinomian protest against rules and commands, but a plea to infuse them with personality before the face of others—as Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount. As evangelicals, as bearers of Jesus' gospel, this is our mission as well.

James Olthuis notes that we ought to thank Levinas for keeping the face of the widow, orphan and stranger before us 'in a world where compassion is too often in exile'.⁵⁸ This is the familiar call to incarnate an (ev)angelical theology of the everyday. Many confessing evangelicals have actively applied these essential aspects of our faith through strategic organizations.⁵⁹ Indeed, we are called to actively seek justice for the poor and oppressed in our midst, using whatever resources the Lord has provided. But we must remember this is not about simply throwing money at systems and organizations that can take care

of this for us, so we can check off the box. Ultimately, Levinas is calling us away from structures and back to the face of the person.⁶⁰ We must stop, pause, and look into the face of the one before us, realizing we are seeing a trace of the face of the God who calls us to himself. This may and certainly should be expressed by helping in homeless shelters, speaking out against racial prejudice and intentionally developing cross-cultural friendships.

4. Hospitality in the Academy?

As evangelical thinkers, *sola scriptura* has often morphed into *sola* text (to put it in the words of Stanley Hauerwas).⁶¹ We can be so text-centred and defensively postured that we forget that there are real persons behind our internal and external disputes. Do I pause to look with compassion into the face of the other looking into mine with whom I disagree? Or is the person now seen as an inconvenient interruption standing in the way of my progress and rightness, reduced to a 'position' to be overcome? This embodied person has strong feelings and emotions. He or she has particular reasons and fears for thinking the way he or she does about life, God

Postmodern Biblical Interpretation, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 82, 84; see also Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 34.

⁵⁷ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 149; see also Olthuis, 'Face-to-Face', 142.

⁵⁸ Olthuis, 'Face-to-Face', 156.

⁵⁹ For example, we have Evangelicals for Social Action, Compassion International, World Vision, the Barnabas Fund and Samaritan's Purse, just to name a few.

⁶⁰ 'Peace must be my peace, in a relation that starts from an I and goes to the other, in desire and goodness, where the I both maintains itself and exists without egoism.' Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 306, cited in George Drazenovich, 'Towards a Levinasian Understanding of Christian Ethics: Emmanuel Levinas and the Phenomenology of the Other', *Cross Currents* (Winter 2005): 52.

⁶¹ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Pharaoh's Hardened Heart: Some Christian Readings', *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 2, no. 2 (2002).

and whatever theological issue upon which we happen to disagree. Behind the arguments are people with hurts and cares and desires for a deep relationship with God just as I.⁶²

How can we show theological hospitality and academic charity to the other in view of this? We often argue for grand schemes of social justice and mercy, but in our posturing and dialogue in academics, the lion's share of pride often reigns. David Buschart has provided some helpful insights in this regard in his *Exploring Protestant Traditions*. He submits, drawing from Augustine, that those 'moved by the love of God that issues in hospitality recognize that they themselves are strangers.'⁶³ Hence, those brothers and sisters with whom I disagree, or those from other traditions, are not my opponents but fellow strangers and pilgrims from whom I have much to learn.⁶⁴ Levinas proposes the fol-

lowing that appears to be in sympathy with this notion:

It may even be that a less naive conception of the inspired Word than the one expiring beneath critical pens allows the true message to come through widely scattered human witnesses, but all miraculously confluent in the Book.⁶⁵

I submit that Buschart's work has broader implications than only those pertaining to cross-denominational dialogue. Such insights should also filter down into character traits in our academic dialogue and posturing. How do we treat our students and colleagues? Are we trying to prove ourselves and subsume others under our categories of exclusion or acceptance? Or do we genuinely recognize the other as other, understanding, as Buschart notes, that the historical and incarnational character of Christianity entails that it will be marked by particularity, reflecting a 'particular people's encounter with Christ and their particular understanding of how one is to live as a Christian'?'⁶⁶

IV. Conclusion

Levinas's deconstructive ethics does

62 This is not to say that disagreement will be absent from our discussions, or that duplicitous motives should not be uncovered in the course of academic dialogue. However, this should be done without de-personalizing the face of the other.

63 Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, 268.

64 This is not to say that all boundaries or particular identifications with communities are eradicated. In response to this, Buschart draws on Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996). Differentiation seeks boundaries, but exclusion removes the other from hospitality through separation or binding. See Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, 265–69. Buschart claims that boundaries and expressions of particularity, however, help to sustain and even make the conditions of hospitality possible. But one's particular faith community or tradition

should not be a 'fortress' but a place from which others may be served.

65 Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 126. This is from his chapter titled 'The Strings and the Wood: On the Jewish Reading of the Bible'. Levinas likens Scripture to a text that is 'stretched over a tradition like the strings on the wood of a violin!' (p. 127). I am again grateful to Abigail Doukhan for pointing this out to me and suggesting the reference.

66 Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*, 259.

not lead us to the destruction of meaning and of ethics. It rather challenges us to deconstruct ourselves, to re-prioritize our ethics, and (as Bauman puts it) to 're-personalize' our ethics both within and outside our communities. As (ev)angelical message bearers, we indeed have a particular message to proclaim with doctrinal purity. Yet with equal passion, we are called to show charity,

compassion and humility, and to engage in seemingly banal acts of simple kindness in the midst of the complexities of ethical decision making. But this only comes as we take the time and make the concerted effort to look into the face of the other before us: the widow, the orphan, the stranger—whether in the soup kitchen or the academy—and say with Levinas: *'Après vous, monsieur.'*

Call for Papers

The Evangelical Review of Theology (ERT) is the WEA Theological Commission's journal. Beginning in 2019, we are more fully synthesizing the content of ERT with the work of the Theological Commission by highlighting, in each issue, a theme related to topics that the Theological Commission is addressing.

We invite articles based on these themes, although submissions on any other topics are still welcome. Submit them to editor Bruce Barron at bruce.barron0@gmail.com. Questions may be directed to Peirong Lin, research coordinator for the WEA's Department of Theological Concerns, at peironglin@worlddea.org.

Theological Anthropology (July 2019 issue)

The Theological Commission is working on clarifying its understanding of human sexuality. A holistic understanding of human sexuality is rooted in one's understanding of theological anthropology. We invite articles that dig deeply into issues of anthropology and human sexuality. How are human relationships characterized? How does sexuality influence relationships? How does culture influence understandings of anthropology and sexuality? *Due date April 2019.*

Engagement in the Public Space (October 2019 issue)

At the WEA, we seek to work with other international institutions like the UN as well as in many different government contexts. One important global trend today is the rise in nationalism in politics. Our faith impacts how we interact with the broader public. What does this mean for our theology? What kind of theological reflection is required in pluralistic, postmodern societies? Does one's theology change in the face of a nationalistic or closed government context? How should Christians live out their theologies in the public space? *Due date 1 July 2019.*

Theological Education (January 2020 issue)

As evangelicals, we pride ourselves on taking the Bible seriously. At the same time, we live in a time that is different from biblical times. The world today is globalized and digitalized. How should these considerations influence our theological education? What is the role of higher criticism in theology? What is the place for contextual or systematic theology? *Due date 1 October 2019.*

Release from Batara Kala's Grip: A Biblical Approach to *Ruwatan* from the Perspective of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Pancha W. Yahya

Ruwatan is a ritual that has been practiced by the Javanese people (the largest ethnic group in Indonesia) for centuries.¹ The word *ruwatan* comes from *ruwat*, which means 'to free' or 'to liberate'. *Ruwatan* is 'a ritual to liberate certain people because it is believed that they will experience bad luck.'² These people are considered unclean and firmly under the grip of Batara Kala, an evil god of gigantic proportions in Javanese mythology. The ritual is practised by every stratum of the Javanese society—wealthy and poor, educated and illiterate.³

Ruwatan is derived from a Hindu tradition and is related to the purification or liberation of gods who had been cursed for making mistakes and changed into other beings (either humans or animals).

Because of the widespread practice of *ruwatan*, a biblical perspective on this ritual would be beneficial to Indonesian Christians, especially those from a Javanese cultural background. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians provides such a perspective, as it directly addresses the evil powers and their ability to bind people.⁴ Ephesus was known as the centre of magic in the Graeco-Roman world.⁵

I will begin by describing the practice and implicit worldview of *ruwatan*. I will then consider this practice from the perspective of Ephesians.

1 The Javanese live in the provinces of Central Java and East Java and also the Yogyakarta special region, all on the island of Java, Indonesia. According to the 2010 census, there are 95.2 million Javanese, which is 40 per cent of the total of Indonesia's population. See Hendri Akhsin Naim, *Sensus Penduduk 2010* (2010 Population Census) (Jakarta: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010).

2 A. Hari Kustono, 'Ruwatan: Tinjauan Alkitabiah' (*Ruwatan: A Biblical Review*), *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 71.

3 Sri Mulyono, *Simbolisme dan Mistikisme dalam Wayang: Sebuah Tinjauan Filosofis*

(Symbolism and Mysticism of Wayang: A Philosophical Review) (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1979), 33.

4 See Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 115.

5 Bruce M. Metzger has pointed out, 'Of all

I. *Ruwatan* and Its Foundational Worldview

Ruwatan consists of three primary elements: a shadow puppet play⁶ entitled *Murwakala* (from the words for 'ancient time'), which recounts the story of the origins of the god Batara Kala; the *sukerta* people who are believed to be unclean; and the need to be freed from bondage via the ceremony of *ruwatan*, which is accompanied by ritual offerings.

1. The Origin of Batara Kala⁷

The myth of the origin of Batara Kala begins with the epic story of Batara Guru, the supreme god in Javanese mythology. One afternoon, Batara Guru wanted to have sexual intercourse with his wife, the beautiful goddess Batari Uma, while they were riding an ox named Andini on their

way to heaven. Batari Uma rejected his advances because she thought that it was not a proper time or place to make love. Nonetheless, Batara Guru could not control his sexual desire for his wife. In his lust, Batara Guru ejaculated, and some of his sperm went down into the ocean and created the gigantic Batara Kala, who subsequently created chaos by eating all the fish in the ocean. In response, another god, Batara Gangga, asked Batara Kala not to eat those fish, since Batara Kala himself had been derived from the ocean.

Batara Kala then asked Batara Guru for permission to eat all the creatures living on the land. Batara Guru permitted him to eat certain people who were deemed *sukerta* (unclean). But because Batara Narada (yet another god) feared that Batara Kala would devour far too many people, Batara Guru sent Batara Narada together with two colleagues, Batara Wisnu and Batara Brahma, to free the *sukerta* from his grip.

There are different opinions in Javanese tradition as to who qualifies as *sukerta*. Various listings identify twenty, sixty, 136, or 147 kinds of people who are considered unclean, but basically there are two general

ancient Graeco-Roman cities, Ephesus, the third largest city in the Empire, was by far the most hospitable to magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts' ('St. Paul and the Magicians', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 38 (June 1994): 27. Some commentators have argued that Ephesians was a circular letter sent to multiple churches in southern Asia Minor, but if so, the church at Ephesus was still probably the first recipient since the city was the communication and transportation hub of Asia Minor. See Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 13.

6 In the Javanese tradition, this shadow puppet play is called *wayang kulit* (puppet skin) because the puppet is made from goat skin and supported by carefully shaped buffalo horn handles and control rods. At least four additional forms of *wayang* can be found in Javanese culture: *wayang orang* (human *wayang*; actually this is not a puppet play but a dance theatrical performance), *wayang golek* (made of wooden dolls/pup-

pets), *wayang karucil* (made of wood but in thin pieces and used as shadow puppets), and *wayang beber* (scroll-painted presentations of the stories being told). Among these kinds of *wayang*, *wayang kulit* is the most popular form. The tradition of *wayang* originated among the Javanese people in the tenth century AD and the stories are taken from well-known Hindu epics, namely *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

7 The story of the origin of Batara Kala is summarized from Mulyono, *Simbolisme dan Mistikisme*, 43–46.

categories. The first contains certain family conditions such as being an only child, a twin, a child born at dawn or dusk, or an albino child. The second category consists of people who have done inappropriate things from the perspective of the Javanese worldview: sleeping on a mattress without a sheet, standing in the middle of a doorway, sweeping the floor without throwing away all the waste, sleeping at dawn, midday or dusk, dropping the rice cooker when boiling rice, breaking a *gandik* (a cooking tool made from stone and used in preparing *jamu*, or traditional Javanese herbal medicine), and cooking rice in a location other than one's home.

2. The Practice of *Ruwatan*

The ritual of *ruwatan* can be divided into seven sequential events. First, the *sukerta* people show respect to their parents by kneeling and pressing their faces to their parents' knees (*sungkem*) to ask their blessing so that the ritual may be successful. Second, a procession occurs as the *sukerta* along with their parents and other family members bring their offerings. The purpose of giving offerings is to worship the Creator, ancestor spirits and local spirits (in their houses, villages and country) and to ask for their protection, peace and salvation.⁸ There are seven main types of ritual offerings: (1) agricultural products such as rice, corn, coconuts, watermelons, and cassavas; (2) agricultural devices such as a farmer's cap and crowbars; (3) utensils such as pots,

pans and spoons; (4) animals such as cows, buffalos, geese, ducks and chickens; (5) fabric; (6) sheets, pillows and bolsters; and (7) food.

After the procession, the *dalang* (a person who performs as the narrator, puppeteer and leader of the ritual)⁹ receives the *sukerta* and begins the first act of Murwakala, the shadow puppet play. Once the puppet play has ended, the *dalang* reads magical spells to liberate the *sukerta* from Batara Kala's grip. Afterwards, the *dalang* cuts some strands of each *sukerta*'s hair. Then the second act of Murwakala is performed. To conclude the ritual of *ruwatan*, the *dalang* ceremonially washes the *sukerta* with water taken from seven springs and with flowers.

3. The Worldview Underlying *Ruwatan*

For the Javanese people, *wayang* represents the depth of their worldview. According to Eka Darmaputera, '*Wayang* can be stated to be the one thing that conveys to the Javanese people an understanding about "the reality behind all realities", about themselves, both as an individuals and as a society, and their ensuing place in the universe.'¹⁰ *Wayang* communicates many Javanese myths including Murwakala, the story of Batara Kala's desire to devour the *sukerta*. As

⁹ On the *dalang*, see George Otis Jr., *The Twilight Labyrinth: Why Does Spiritual Darkness Linger Where It Does?* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1997), 169–70.

¹⁰ Eka Darmaputera, *Pancasila: Identitas dan Modernitas Tinjauan Etis dan Budaya* (Pancasila: Identity and Modernity, An Ethical and Cultural Review) (Jakarta: Gunung Mulia, 1991), 66.

⁸ H. Karkono Kamajaya et al., eds., *Ruwatan Murwakala: Sebuah Pedoman (Ruwatan Murwakala: Guidance)* (Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana University Press, 1992), 5, 48.

Paul Ricoeur asserts, myths 'are not fables but a particular way in which man places himself in relation to the fundamental reality'.¹¹ The myth of Batara Kala and the ritual of *ruwatan* reveal important features of the Javanese worldview.¹²

a) Harmony as the Primary Purpose of the Javanese People

One prominent characteristic of the Javanese worldview is harmony as it relates to their purpose of life. We can see this underlying reality found within the myth of Batara Kala, which began with harmony that quickly turned to chaos when Batara Guru became lustful. This lust resulted in the birth of Batara Kala, who caused chaos both within the ocean and upon the land because of his desire to devour both the fish and the *sukerta*. Furthermore, the *sukerta*, either because of the manner in which they were born or due to their inappropriate conduct, are also considered contrary to established harmony. In response to this chaotic situation, Batara Guru took the initiative to send Batara Wisnu, Batara Narada and Batara Brahma to the earth to conduct *ruwatan* and restore harmony. As Russell L. Staples puts out:

[In a monistic worldview] reality is

regarded as being a vast network of interrelated spiritual forces in which every being and everything is related to every other spiritual force. The good life is the life that is lived in harmony with the moral order of reality. To offend against that order is to bring calamity not only upon oneself, but also upon the whole community. The evil forces of reality must be restrained and rendered impotent, and the beneficent forces must be supported and kept well disposed toward the community. The means by which this may be accomplished is religious ritual.¹³

The Javanese people believe that the ultimate aim of human beings is to create and maintain harmony with God, their neighbours, the spirits and the universe. They also believe that they are an emanation of God and should eventually be united with him. For them, meditation, solitude and learning from a spiritual teacher who is endowed with supernatural power are among the ways to become united again with God.¹⁴

Furthermore, to establish harmony with the spirits, the Javanese people usually practise several traditional forms such as *slametan* (a ceremonial meal to which they invite their neighbours),¹⁵ the giving of of-

11 Quoted in Kabiro wa Gatumu, *The Pauline Concept of Supernatural Powers: A Reading from the African Worldview* (Milton Keynes, UK and Colorado Springs, CO: Pater-noster, 2008), 175.

12 With regard to the relationship between myths and rituals, Gatumu (*The Pauline Concept*, 176) observes, 'It seems then that people and all religions operate in a mythical framework, tell sacred stories and express aspects or meanings of the myth in rituals.'

13 Russell L. Staples, 'Western Medicine and the Primal World-View', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 2 (April 1982): 71.

14 Frans Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa: Sebuah Analisa Falsafi tentang Kebijaksanaan Hidup Jawa* (Javanese Ethics: A Philosophical Analysis of Javanese Life Wisdom) (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1985), 114–16.

15 The Javanese people usually conduct *slametan* during the following events: the

ferings (e.g. at roadway intersections and at cemeteries), the practice of rituals (e.g. before planting rice and after harvesting it), and performing the shadow puppet play.¹⁶ To maintain harmony with their neighbours, they try to avoid conflict by controlling their emotions and not expressing disagreements even though they may not agree with others' opinions. In addition, they show great respect for the elderly.¹⁷

With regard to the universe, the Javanese people try to obey traditional astrology by conduct certain cultural practices such as determining the appropriate time to get married, move into a new house, or perform *slametan*. For them, maintaining harmony with God, neighbours, spirits and the universe is a way to solve and overcome chaos.

b) Evil in the Javanese Worldview

The myth of Batara Kala teaches about the origin of evil within the Javanese cosmogony.¹⁸ In this myth, a gigantic god, Batara Kala, serves as the representation of evil. Ogres appear in

other stories performed in *wayang* as well. For the Javanese people, however, evil is not the antithesis of good since it is viewed as 'being in bondage to a curse or punishment after making a mistake'.¹⁹ They understand a mistake as the result of ignorance or immaturity; it has nothing to do with breaking God's law or opposing God.²⁰ Rather, evil is 'the flaw of the good' or 'less good'.²¹ Thus, evil and good are not contradictory but complementary.

Moreover, the Javanese understand evil as an attitude that is inappropriate for someone's status and that results in damaging harmony and the peaceful order.²² Therefore, both gods and human beings should behave appropriately according to their own status so as to maintain harmony and a peaceful order. When harmony and peaceful order are threatened or evaporate, evil comes. In the story of Batara Kala, Batara Guru, the supreme god, was supposed to control his lust. When he could not control his sexual desire for Batari Uma, evil ran rampant and chaos resulted.

II. Evil Powers and Their Influences according to Ephesians

In the epistle to the Ephesians, the evil powers are understood as per-

seventh month of pregnancy, after delivering a baby, when a child becomes a teenager, getting a promotion at work, moving into a new house, after harvest time, and after one member of the family dies (on the third, hundredth and thousandth day). The ritual is aimed at gaining harmony with both the spirits and neighbours.

16 Philip Van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ: A Study of the Indigenous Church in East Java* (London: Lutterworth, 1970), 26; cf. Mulyono, *Simbolisme dan Mistikisme*, 183.

17 Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 38–69.

18 Armada Riyanto, 'Lolos dari Terkaman Betara Kala' (Release from Betara Kala's Grip), *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 6/1 (March 2006): 2.

19 Riyanto, 'Lolos dari Terkaman', 15. In Javanese mythology, the evil gigantic gods normally are gods that have been cursed due to making mistakes. Eventually, they are changed back into regular gods after they are liberated.

20 Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 210.

21 Riyanto, 'Lolos dari Terkaman', 25.

22 Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 162, 165.

taining to three distinct dimensions: individual, structural-systemic and spiritual. Their personal, systemic and demonic nature is evident in Ephesians 2:1–3.²³ The personal dimension occurs in verse 2c: 'the spirit that is now at work in *the sons of disobedience*'. The demonic force appears in verse 2b, 'following the prince of *the power of the air*', and the systemic element also appears there: 'following *the course of this world*'.

These elements of evil are inseparable. Mariano Avila states, "These are highly powerful forces that enslave human beings and make their life miserable and full of suffering. And these forces or powers act upon humans in a concerted way. Any diagnosis that attempts to remedy or solve the human condition without taking seriously the biblical cosmovision (world and life view) will be reductionist and a failure."²⁴

In *ruwatan*, this threefold form of the evil powers is both evident and actively involved. First, here the demonic power has spread terror among the Javanese people, causing them to believe that some of them live perpetually within a framework of bad luck. This situation confirms Arnold's observation that the 'fear of the demonic realm was a very important factor in the use of magic.'²⁵ Indeed, most cultures have a myth pertaining to chaos, and 'A final worldview theme that runs through nearly all folk religious belief systems is near constant

fear and need for security.'²⁶ For example, in the Babylonian Enuma Elish, chaos is personified as Tiamat, a chaos monster, a primordial goddess of the ocean, whereas in Mesoamerican culture, chaos is represented by a monster that has many mouths.²⁷

From a Christian perspective, the purpose of spreading terror is that when people become fearful, the devil, whom Otis defines as a creative genius and a fearful terminator,²⁸ comes with a solution. The intended result is that people will worship the devil in exchange for protection. This strategy confirms Paul's instruction in Ephesians 6:11: 'Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes (*methodeia*) of the devil.' In Paul's day, *methodeia* concerned treating a matter methodically or according to a plan, such as in the orderly collection of taxes.²⁹ In the context of war, the word referred to a careful strategy in order to win a battle.³⁰ In this case, the devil manipulates the Java-

²³ Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 124–25, 152.

²⁴ Mariano Avila, 'Ephesians: Class Handouts' (Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Fall 2013), 56.

²⁵ Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 18.

²⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 58.

²⁷ Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 81.

²⁸ Otis, *The Twilight Labyrinth*, 80.

²⁹ W. Michaelis, 'methodeia', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 102–3.

³⁰ Mariano Avila, 'Meaning of 'Metanoia: Continuous Renewal of Our Life (Ephesians 4:17–5:2)' (Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, 27 March 2013). Michaelis, 'Methodeia', 103 demonstrates that the word can mean 'machinations' ('a complicated and secret plan to get power or control', or 'an attack against which one must be armed').

nese people's fear of bad luck to make them follow his own manipulative will. As Jesus noted, the devil is the father of lies (Jn 8:44), and Paul similarly stated that Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

With regard to the systemic element, Walter Wink argues that this dimension includes an evil power that is 'invested in institutions, laws, traditions and rituals as well, for it is the cumulative, totalizing effect of all these taken together that creates the sense of bondage to a "dominion of darkness"'.³¹ If so, we may say that the evil power has influenced the ritual of *ruwatan* so that the Javanese people are subjected to the powers of darkness. This evil influence is worsened by the individual dimension of the evil powers. Arnold defines personal evil power as 'the inner drive of people to act in ways deviant to the standard of God's righteousness'.³² In Ephesians 2:1, Paul explains that before their conversion, Christians were 'dead through their trespasses and sins'. Wink states that they were dead because they were born in a world-system that is in conspiracy against God, such that we breathe its deadly vapours; 'We become its carriers, passing it into our institutions, structures, and systems'.³³ This notion is evident in the practice of *ruwatan*, since the rituals have become a key part of the Javanese culture, a structural reality that controls the Java-

nese people's everyday life.

III. The War Is Real

Unlike the Javanese worldview, which holds that good and evil are complementary, Paul places great emphasis on the sharp opposition between good and evil, using the imagery of light and darkness in Ephesians 5:3–20.³⁴ In this passage, Paul regards vices as darkness and virtues as light. Furthermore, Christians are urged to 'live as children of light' (5:8) and 'expose darkness' (5:11) because they are imitators of God (5:1), the Light (cf. 1 John 1:5). As Marcus Barth points out, 'Light and darkness determine conflicting ways of life; therefore they are names for describing good or evil conduct. They call for a radical decision and do not permit neutrality'.³⁵ Evil is not merely ignorance and the absence of good, as the Javanese worldview posits;³⁶ it is op-

³⁴ In Ephesians 6:12, Paul points out that darkness is the realm in which the evil powers reside. In using this light-darkness language, Paul is probably alluding to Isaiah: 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined' (Is 9:2); 'Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you' (Is 60:1–2). See Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 328. Arnold lists images of warfare and struggle throughout the New Testament in *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 22–23.

³⁵ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 600.

³⁶ Although Paul uses the word 'ignorance'

³¹ Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 85; cf. Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 34.

³² Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 125.

³³ Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 83.

posite to God and a manifested rebellion against God's authority. In Ephesians 2:2–3, Paul calls unbelievers the 'sons of disobedience' and 'children of wrath'. In addition, in Ephesians, sin is regarded as a destructive entity threatening the harmony between people and their neighbours (cf. 4:25–32). In other words, sin destroys the harmony that exists between us and God as well as among people.

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul continues, 'For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.' Interestingly, in this verse Paul does not use the typical vocabulary of war or battle, such as *machē* ('struggle, fight'; 2 Cor 7:5), *strateia* ('warfare, battle'; 2 Cor 10:4) or *polemos* ('war, battle'; Lk 14:31).³⁷ Instead, he chooses *palē*, a *hapax legomenon* in the NT and the LXX, which refers to 'a wrestling match'.³⁸ In Paul's time, soldiers were trained as wrestlers to equip them for hand-to-hand combat. Accordingly, his use of *palē* is probably intended to signify that our spiritual warfare will be intense, difficult and tiring, as one would expect from close

combat with an opponent.³⁹ This observation strengthens the notion that the war between good and evil is real.

IV. Ultimate Victory in Christ

In the Javanese culture, the way to find release from the grip of Batara Kala is to perform *ruwatan*, which includes giving offerings to the spirits and speaking magical spells. Likewise, the Ephesian people of the first century conducted similar rituals to invoke protection by deities.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Paul insists that Christians can defeat the evil powers only by depending upon the Lord's power. In Ephesians 6:10, he urges his readers to 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might'.⁴¹ This instruction is in accord with Paul's prayer for his recipients in 3:16, 'that he may grant you to be *strengthened* with might through his Spirit in the inner

(*agnoia*) as a reference to unbelievers' life in Ephesians 4:18, this ignorance cannot be viewed as the equivalent of that in the Javanese worldview because it is due to 'hardness of heart'.

³⁷ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 465; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 446.

³⁸ Frederick W. Danker, William Arndt and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 752.

³⁹ Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, 763; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 593. Other possible reasons are that (1) Paul wants to attract his readers' attention by referring to a popular sport in his day (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 465), or (2) Paul chooses *palē* because in Ephesus some wrestlers put *Ephesia grammata* on their ankles as written amulets to help them win the competition. In the latter case, Paul would be telling the believing Ephesians not to use magical amulets, as they did before they became Christians, but to depend on the Lord's mighty power (Arnold, *Ephesians*, 446).

⁴⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 447–48.

⁴¹ In this verse, the word *kurios* ('Lord') should be read as referring to Christ rather than to God, since of the twenty-four occurrences of *kurios* in Ephesians that refer to the divine title, nine obviously refer to Christ (1:2, 3, 15, 17; 3:11; 4:5; 5:20; 6:23, 24).

man' (cf. Phil 4:13; 2 Cor 12:9).⁴² This command is an inalienable aspect of the ethical dimension of the Christian life, and it is in sharp contrast to ritualistic practices. In this passage concerning spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10–20), Paul exhorts his readers to *put on* (verse 11) and *take up* (verse 13) the whole armour of God so that they can stand firm in the battle. The use of 'put on' here corresponds to the same expression in 4:24 by which Paul exhorts believers to put on their new humanity in Christ. In fact, all the distinct pieces of the armour of God that Paul describes in verses 14–17 are associated with the virtues that Christians should display as new creations in Christ. Some of them identify God's characteristics—truth and righteousness—that believers should imitate as the children of light (cf. 5:1).⁴³

The reason for needing to depend on the Lord and his power is that the battle is not against human beings but against the threefold elements of the evil powers as explained above (6:12). Furthermore, in 6:10, Paul employs two words with similar meanings: 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength (*kratei*) of his might (*ischuos*)'. The use of a pair of words that both mean 'power, might or strength' emphasizes Christ's extraordinary power to strengthen believers.⁴⁴ In addition,

the guarantee of victory is available to believers because God has raised and seated Christ at his right hand⁴⁵ and has given him power over all things, including the rulers and powers against whom the believers are struggling (1:20–23).

The Javanese worldview solves the problem of chaos by performing *ruwatan*. In contrast, as clearly expressed in Ephesians, the Bible teaches that chaos is under God's control. The victory of God over chaos can be seen in five instances. The first instance is the story of creation, in which Yahweh creates the universe from *tōhū wābōhū* (Gen 1:2; Jer 4:23), which to the ancient Israelites meant chaotic and destructive power.⁴⁶ How-

tions on Ephesians 6:10–20', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (April 1984): 287; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 338. Paul probably alludes to the similar phrase that occurs in Isaiah 40:26 LXX: *en krateri ischuos*. In this passage, Yahweh contrasts himself with the idols (40:18–20) and shows that he is incomparable with them. Therefore, Israel should wait for the everlasting and powerful Yahweh who will 'renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint' (Is 40:31).

⁴⁵ Paul probably echoes Psalm 110:1: 'The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool"' (Arnold, *Ephesians*, 111).

⁴⁶ John D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), xx. In the Old Testament, chaos is depicted as the raging sea (Ps 89:9–10) and *tāhōm* (the deeps) (Gen 1:2; Ex 15:5, 8; Ps 33:7; 71:20) in which the monstrous creature lived. That creature is called Leviathan or a dragon (Ps 74:13–14; Is 27:1) or Rahab (Job 26:12; Is 51:9). See Bernhard W. Anderson, 'Water', in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible: An Illustrated Encyclope-*

⁴² O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 461.

⁴³ Interestingly, all pieces of the armour of God that Paul mentions in 6:14–17 have also appeared in the previous chapters: truth in 1:13; 4:21, 24, 25; 5:9; righteousness in 4:24; 5:9; the gospel in 1:13; 3:6; faith in 1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13; salvation in 1:13; the Spirit in 1:13; 3:5; 4:4; and the word of God in 5:26.

⁴⁴ See Danker, Arndt and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 565, 484; Robert A. Wild, 'The Warrior and the Prisoner: Some Reflec-

ever, Yahweh defeated the power of chaos when he created the universe, as stated in Psalm 74:12–15: 'Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. You split open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams' (ESV).⁴⁷

Second, Yahweh crushed chaos in the exodus story. Isaiah 51:9–10 alludes to the crossing of the red sea: 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?' (ESV) (cf. Ex 15:8; Ps 114:3–6).

Third, Yahweh defeated the chaos caused by the raging nations (Is 17:12–14). Fourth, Jesus overcame the power of chaos in the following events: (1) his temptation by the devil; (2) exorcism; (3) the miracle of calming the storm; (4) his death and resurrection. Fifth, in the end times, the dragon will be defeated completely (Rev 12:7–9) as prophesied by Isaiah: 'In that day the LORD with his

hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea' (27:1, ESV).

These biblical instances confirm that evil and good are in an uneven opposition, as the evil powers are under God's control. This view departs markedly from the Javanese worldview, in which Batara Guru and other gods, as the representation of the good power, seem not to have had full control over Batara Kala, since they permitted him to eat certain people in order to prevent him from eating the oceanic creatures.

V. True Harmony in Christ

As discussed above, the Javanese worldview places great emphasis on pursuing harmony with God, the spirits, their neighbours and the universe. In contrast, Paul insists that true harmony can be achieved only in Christ because God 'has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (1:9–10). Concerning these verses, Frank Thielman points out, 'Through the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, God has conquered all powers inimical to his purposes and placed them, vanquished, at Christ's feet (1:20–22a).'⁴⁸ In other words, Christ has turned chaos, the opponent of peace and order, into shalom.

By the power of his death, resur-

dia, ed. George A. Buttrick, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), 806–10; John N. Day, 'God and Leviathan in Isaiah 27:1', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 620 (1 October 1998): 423–36; John N. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge; MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴⁷ Cf. Job 26:12; Psalm 29; 89:10–16.

⁴⁸ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 67.

rection and ascension, Christ has reconciled the believers, who were under God's wrath, to God (1:5; cf. 2:17–18) and with himself. Arnold has pointed out that in Ephesians 2:5–6, the notion of the union of the believers with Christ can be clearly found in the threefold use of the word 'with' in the following events: new life ('God ... made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression'), resurrection ('God raised us up with Christ') and exaltation ('God ... seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus').⁴⁹

In addition to uniting believers with God and Christ, Christ has reconciled the Gentiles and the Jews into his body, of which he is the head (2:11–22). Without the work and the power of Christ, this reconciliation would have been impossible, since the Jews saw the Gentiles as both sinners and unclean. Nonetheless, Christ has made the Gentiles who were 'foreigners and aliens' into citizens and members of God's household, 'a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit' (verses 19, 22).

VI. Towards a Community of Shalom: An Insight from *Ruwatan*

Ruwatan is based on the Javanese worldview that seeks to help humans attain harmony with each other, the creator, and the universe. As previously discussed, the Javanese view an evil deed not as a transgression against God's law but as improper conduct that disturbs the harmony of life. In the story of Murwakala, Batara

Kala is the embodiment of evil, but he himself is the product of Batara Guru's lustful desire, which is regarded as the antithesis of the family harmony that the Javanese should demonstrate. Riyanto says, 'This point of the myth of Batara Kala more or less conveys the message of the importance of the harmonious life in a family.'⁵⁰

In daily life, the Javanese always seek to avoid conflict and maintain *rukun*, which means 'to feel oneself in the state of harmony, calm and peaceful, without quarrel or dispute', and 'united in purpose for mutual help'.⁵¹ Every Javanese person is expected to pursue peaceful interaction with each other and avoid any hostile messages or attitudes so as to maintain harmony. The Javanese 'avoid, at all costs, signs of disorder, dissonance, dissidence, loud disputes, and any disturbance of peace or of social equilibrium'.⁵² Interestingly, they are generally willing to put aside their personal interests, if necessary, to avoid conflicts.⁵³

In addition, a person who obtains great financial gain is expected to share it with the community, as is reflected in the Javanese proverb, 'When there is a scarcity, it is shared; when there is abundance, it also shared'.⁵⁴ Similarly, in decision making, instead of voting, the Javanese practise *musyawarah*, or an effort to accommodate everyone's concerns:

Ideally, *musyawarah* is a procedure in which all voices and opinions are heard. All these are considered

⁵⁰ Riyanto, 'Lolos dari Terkaman', 15.

⁵¹ Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 39.

⁵² Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 47.

⁵³ Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 39.

⁵⁴ Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*, 50.

⁴⁹ Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 40.

to be equally true and to contribute to the solution sought. *Musyawarah* tries to establish the *kebulatan kehendak*, or *kebulatan pikiran*, that can roughly be translated as the totality or completeness of the wishes and opinions of the participants. This completeness is a guarantee for truth and right decision-making, because the truth is contained in the harmonious unity of the deliberating group.⁵⁵

The Javanese philosophy of harmony offers a valuable perspective on the more individualistic way of life exhibited by Westerners, which may in some cases hinder Christian believers in their efforts to practise the way of life prescribed in the Bible.⁵⁶ Because both Westerners and non-Westerners are inescapably situated in their own cultures, both groups can come to understand the Bible more thoroughly through listening to each other. Behind the ritual of *ruwatan*, we see a philosophy of harmony that echoes the notion of shalom, which Craig L. Nesson has found to be more overtly evoked in African and Asian cultures than in the West.⁵⁷

Scripture tells us that when God created the world, he intended to establish shalom among his creatures. As Walter Brueggemann points out, shalom is 'the dream of God that

resists all our tendencies to division, hostility, fear, drivenness, and misery'.⁵⁸ However, sin has destroyed the peaceful harmony that existed between human beings and between humans and God. God sent his Son to die on the cross and rise from the dead so that he might reconcile the world to himself and bring shalom among humans.

In Ephesians, Paul states that the believers who have been saved through the death and resurrection of Christ are called to practise good works that God has prepared beforehand (Eph 2:10). Ephesians 2 goes on to explain that one part of these good works involved enabling the people of God—both Jews and Gentiles in Paul's original context—to live in love and harmony, since Christ, through his death and resurrection, has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:14). Paul enjoins the Ephesian Christians (and us as well), as part of putting off our old life and putting on the new humanity (4:22–24), to remove all our bitterness, anger and hostility and to forgive, edify and support one another in the body of Christ (4:29–32).

God wants his people to act as agents of shalom in this chaotic world. For the church to function properly as an instrument of shalom, it must first demonstrate shalom internally by removing division, hostility, fear and enmity within the body of Christ. In doing so, every believer should be willing to put aside his or her selfish ambitions and self-interest, just as Christ emptied himself, so that we may become one in Christ (Phil 2:1–11).

55 Niels Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life in Contemporary Java* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1978), 40.

56 See E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders To Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 95–112.

57 Craig L. Nesson, *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 10.

58 Walter Brueggemann, *Peace* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001), 14.

Evangelism, Social Media, and the Mum Effect

David R. Dunaetz

As cultures evolve due to advances in technology, missionaries and other Christian leaders need to develop the most effective strategies for sharing the gospel with those who have not put their faith in Christ and discipling those who have. Various psychological phenomena come into play as technology, especially social media, evolves and influences not only cultures of the global north, but those of the global south as well.

One such phenomenon is the 'mum effect',¹ or the reluctance that people feel to share bad news with others. People tend to remain quiet or 'mum' about information that may be perceived negatively by others. For examples, doctors find it very difficult to inform patients that they have a terminal disease.² Rather than

communicate the truth concerning the patient's condition, they often find it easier to conceal the information, avoiding the awkwardness that would accompany a full disclosure. Similarly, Christians may find it difficult to share the gospel with unbelievers, anticipating the awkwardness that might accompany such a discussion.³

I. The Mum Effect

Originally studied in the 1970s, in the light of advances in medicine that made the diagnosis of various terminal illnesses more common, the mum

1 Jayson L. Dibble, 'It's More Than Self-Presentation: Mum Effects Can Reflect Private Discomfort and Concern for the Recipient', *Communication Research Reports* (2017): 1-9; Abraham Tesser and Sidney Rosen, 'The Reluctance To Transmit Bad News', in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 8 (San Diego, CA: Elsevier, 1975), 193-232.

2 L. J. Fallowfield, V. A. Jenkins, and H. A. Beveridge, 'Truth May Hurt but Deceit Hurts

More: Communication in Palliative Care', *Palliative Medicine* 16, no. 4 (2002): 297-303.

3 Many other psychological phenomena (which are beyond the scope of this paper) come into play when sharing the gospel with others. For example, *confirmation bias* is the tendency to interpret all new information in a way that confirms one's pre-existing beliefs. If a Christian feels rejected after sharing the gospel in a socially or culturally inappropriate manner, he or she may interpret this rejection as confirmation of the gospel's truth rather than as evidence of the need to communicate the gospel more appropriately.

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effect can be defined generally as a reluctance to share bad news. However, this reluctance is not universal. Media sources provide endless accounts of bad news, and stories about people's destructive behaviours are readily shared privately in social networks. More precisely, the mum effect is a 'reluctance to transmit bad news ... to the person for whom the news is bad'.⁴

In the original experiment that demonstrated the mum effect,⁵ participants were assigned to one of two conditions. Each subject was placed in a waiting room and then asked to inform another person who appeared to be waiting (and who had stepped out of the room) that he or she should call home because there was some good news (in the first condition) or bad news (in the second condition). The participants in the bad-news condition informed the person of the valence of the news (whether it was good or bad) far less often (26 percent of the time) than those in the good-news condition (82 percent). The results indicated that when people need to transmit bad news to others, they share only the part that is least likely to be upsetting.

Since the gospel (*euangelion*) literally means good news, can the mum effect really help to explain why Christians are hesitant to share the gospel with others? It can, because the gospel is perceived differently by those who do not believe it. 'The word of the cross is foolishness to those who

are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1 Cor 1:18, NASB). The gospel is good news only to those who believe; for others, it is bad news. 'We are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life' (2 Cor. 2:15–16a, NASB).

Most Christians who have tried to share the gospel with others, especially with those who are unreceptive, know that it can be very awkward, even painful, to explain mankind's need for salvation and God's provision through Jesus Christ to those who refuse to believe. The 'offense of the cross' (Gal. 5:11) is real. Our status as sinners before God, as well as our own inability to do anything about it in ourselves, is bad news for those who have not submitted to the gospel.

Certainly, the Christian will try to present the gospel to a non-believer in a positive light, emphasizing the benefits of following Christ that the non-believer will most likely appreciate or desire. Similarly, a wise presentation of the gospel will avoid unnecessary stumbling blocks or vocabulary that hinders rather than promotes accurate communication. But, as Paul noted, this good news will ultimately be interpreted as bad news by those who reject it, regardless of how the Christian presents it.

II. The Psychological Basis

There are several common reasons why humans do not like to share bad news. The psychological underpinnings of the mum effect can be classified into two main categories: con-

⁴ Tesser and Rosen, 'The Reluctance To Transmit', 195.

⁵ Sidney Rosen and Abraham Tesser, 'On Reluctance to Communicate Undesirable Information: The Mum Effect', *Sociometry* (1970): 253–63.

cern for the other party (the recipient of the bad news) and concern for oneself.⁶

1. Concern for the Recipient

In mum effect experiments, when participants were asked why they were unwilling to transmit bad news to someone to whom the bad news was important, concern for the recipients' feelings was the most common reason given.⁷ The person who delivers the bad news indirectly causes the recipient to experience malaise or even emotional pain. According to self-determination theory,⁸ almost all humans are motivated to improve (or at least maintain) the quality of their relationships with those around them. Therefore, humans generally do not want to hurt other individuals who do not pose a threat to them. By choosing not to transmit bad news, a person avoids (at least temporarily) causing pain to another and thus maintains the relationship.

This concern for others' feelings is amplified if the recipient of the bad news is known to have especially strong negative reactions to unpleasant information.⁹ Moreover, people

tend to believe that recipients do not want to hear bad news, even if they believe that they themselves would want to hear it. In accord with this pattern, many Christians may tell themselves that non-Christians do not want to hear the gospel, although they would willingly admit that they themselves were glad to hear it.

The early studies of the mum effect also found that if people knew that the recipients wanted to hear the bad news, they were far more willing to share the news with them. Given this phenomenon, useful strategies that Christians can use to share at least parts of the gospel include telling personal stories (which most people enjoy hearing) and simply sharing a Christian perspective on some topic that is already a subject of an enjoyable conversation. I will discuss these strategies in greater depth later.

2. Concern for One's Own Interests

Although concern for the recipient's feelings can lead to the mum effect, concern for one's own interests is also a motivator. This concern can encompass one's own feelings and how one is evaluated by others.

a) Desire to avoid negative feelings

Experiments have demonstrated that after one has shared negative information with other people, one's own mood goes down.¹⁰ This occurs

6 Charles F. Bond and Evan L. Anderson, 'The Reluctance To Transmit Bad News: Private Discomfort or Public Display?' *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 23, no. 2 (1987): 176–87; Dibble, 'It's More Than Self-Preservation'.

7 Tesser and Rosen, 'The Reluctance To Transmit'.

8 Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, 'Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being', *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68–78.

9 Abraham Tesser and Mary C. Conlee, 'Recipient Emotionality as a Determinant of the

Transmission of Bad News', *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association* (1973): 247–48.

10 Abraham Tesser, Sidney Rosen and Thomas R. Batchelor, 'On the Reluctance to Communicate Bad News (the Mum Effect):

because of the phenomenon of *emotional contagion*, 'the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person's and consequently, to converge emotionally'.¹¹ People can unintentionally adopt the moods and emotions, especially negative ones, of others in almost any context where emotion is being displayed and interaction occurs, including both face-to-face and electronically mediated communication.¹²

People are generally motivated to seek positive feelings. However, when they share bad news with someone, they may adopt the negative feelings that they imagine or see in the recipient. From a social exchange (or cost-benefit) perspective, sharing bad news is costly; if a person is feeling good, he or she may lose this valued state upon sharing the bad news, experiencing negative feelings instead.¹³ This desire to avoid negative feelings and moods may sometimes engender the mum effect.

b) Concern for self-presentation

The strongest driving force behind the mum effect appears to be the desire to protect one's reputation.¹⁴ By simple association, the person who brings negative news will be linked to this news and the negative feelings it creates. As the Earl of Northumberland in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 2* (Act 1, Scene 1), says, 'The first bringer of unwelcome news hath but a losing office and his tongue sounds ever after as a sullen bell remembered tolling a departing friend.' When a person is associated with negative feelings, the person (even when not the cause of the negative feelings) is more likely to be evaluated negatively by the person experiencing the feelings.

This negative association has been demonstrated in a behaviour-focused experiment.¹⁵ People who delivered messages that created negative feelings were judged more severely than those delivering messages that the recipient wanted to hear. This phenomenon of wanting to 'shoot the messenger' is not a new phenomenon. Jesus exclaimed that the city of Jerusalem systematically put to death the messengers of God who brought unpleasant news (Lk 13:34), such as the prophets Uriah (Jer 26:20–23; Heb 11:37) and Zechariah (Mt 23:35).

A Role Play Extension', *Journal of Personality* 40, no. 1 (1972): 88–103.

11 Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo and Richard L. Rapson, 'Emotional Contagion', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2, no. 3 (1993): 96.

12 Adam D. Kramer, Jamie E. Guillory and Jeffrey T. Hancock, 'Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion through Social Networks', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 24 (2014): 8788–90.

13 Russell Cropanzano and Marie S. Mitchell, 'Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review', *Journal of Management* 31, no. 6 (2005): 874–900.

14 Bond and Anderson, 'The Reluctance To Transmit'; Jayson L. Dibble and Timothy R. Levine, 'Sharing Good and Bad News with Friends and Strangers: Reasons for and Communication Behaviors Associated with the Mum Effect', *Communication Studies* 64, no. 4 (2013): 431–52.

15 Melvin Manis, S. Douglas Cornell and Jeffrey C. Moore, 'Transmission of Attitude Relevant Information through a Communication Chain', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 30, no. 1 (1974): 81–94.

The Northern Kingdom also had a history of killing prophets (e.g. 1 Kings 18:14). Jesus himself was put to death because of the negative sentiments that announcing his identity produced in the religious leaders (Mk 14:60–64). After Christ's death and resurrection, the trend continued; for example, the apostle Paul was imprisoned several times for announcing what was interpreted as very bad news (e.g. Acts 22:22–24).

Why does the desire to protect one's reputation (or save face) lead to the mum effect? People innately want to be positively evaluated by others, because our self-esteem is strongly affected by how others evaluate us.¹⁶ Negative evaluations lead to a sense of social exclusion, which creates feelings of loneliness, anxiety and despair. Thus people avoid behaviours that lead to negative judgements and are motivated to perform behaviours that garner positive evaluations from others, a strategy known as self-enhancement.¹⁷

One very common way to pursue positive evaluations is *ingratiation*, or self-presentation efforts designed to convince the observer that one has desirable personal qualities.¹⁸ Three

common forms of ingratiation are *other enhancement* (saying positive things about a person or about something associated with the person in such a way that the person knows that the speaker has said them), *opinion conformity* (agreeing with a person's beliefs or values), and *doing favours* (acting to benefit a person in a way that will motivate the person to act beneficially towards the speaker due to reciprocity norms of behaviour). Sharing good news can achieve all three forms of ingratiation; it is typically appreciated by the receiver of the good news and thus enhances the presenter's reputation. Conversely, sharing bad news can have exactly the opposite effect.

Consider two Christians, Adam and Ben, who both wish to invite a non-Christian friend, Chris, to church. If Adam has communicated to Chris that there are some things about him that he really appreciates (other enhancement), that they share many views concerning social issues and personal responsibility (opinion conformity), and information about a reliable local air conditioning repairman (doing a favour), there is a strong possibility that Chris has concluded that Adam is trustworthy and will accept an invitation to come to church with him. With each act of ingratiation, which contained some element of positive news, Adam has earned the trust of Chris and has increased his ability to influence him.

In contrast, consider Ben's interactions with Chris. Ben has communicated to Chris that he needs to become a Christian because of his sin, that Ben does not agree with Chris's toler-

16 Mark R. Leary, Ellen S. Tambor, Sonja K. Terdal and Deborah L. Downs, 'Self-Esteem as an Interpersonal Monitor: The Sociometer Hypothesis', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 68, no. 3 (1995): 518–30.

17 William B. Swann, 'To Be Adored or To Be Known? The Interplay of Self-Enhancement and Self-Verification', in *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition: Foundations of Social Behavior*, vol. 2, ed. E. Tory Higgins and Richard M. Sorrentino (New York: Guilford Press, 1990), 408–48.

18 Edward E. Jones and Camille B. Wortman, *Ingratiation: An Attributional Approach*

(New York: General Learning Press, 1973), 2.

ance of homosexuality, and that the painter Chris hired to paint his house did a poor job. By this point, from Chris's point of view, Ben is someone to avoid, as he is a continual source of bad news and negative judgement. If Ben tries to share more of the gospel with him, Chris will probably sense more bad news coming. He will likely find an excuse to end the conversation with Ben and will try to avoid future interactions with him.

In reality, unless Ben has very poor social skills, it is unlikely that he would have shared all this negative news with Chris. Ben most likely would prefer to come across as a good neighbour. The desire not to offend, sadden or be ostracized by Chris would push Ben towards more socially acceptable behaviour, such as remaining mum about such information. The social pressures behind the mum effect normally prevent such negative interactions from occurring.

III. Social Media's Effects on Sharing the Gospel

Although the social forces behind the mum effect have always existed and thus may have discouraged Christians from sharing their faith throughout church history, the nature of Internet-based social media has amplified these effects and has made evangelism even more difficult in the present context.

Social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and a multitude of newer networks that may or may not become household names, have an enormous impact on modern culture, especially on millennials and

Generation Y.¹⁹ The smartphone has created a world in which most people are constantly a few inches, taps, and swipes away from finding out what other people are thinking and saying about them.²⁰

On the positive side of this societal transformation, social media make both asynchronous and synchronous exchanges of information with a large number of people very easy. They permit the development of relationships through information exchange in a controlled environment, which can be especially attractive to people who are less at ease in face-to-face situations.²¹ On the negative side, they encourage continual social comparison²² between users, many of whom use social media to portray an idealistic lifestyle so as to create a positive image of themselves. This tendency appears to be creating a culture in which people feel inferior or insufficient compared to others.²³

¹⁹ Amanda Lenhart, Kristen Purcell, Aaron Smith and Kathryn Zickuhr, 'Social Media and Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults. Millennials', Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED525056.pdf>.

²⁰ Jacob Poushter, 'Smartphone Ownership and Internet Usage Continues To Climb in Emerging Economies', *Pew Research Center* 22 (2016), <http://s1.pulso.cl/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2258581.pdf>.

²¹ David R. Dunaetz, Timothy C. Lisk and Matthew Shin, 'Personality, Gender, and Age as Predictors of Media Richness Preference', *Advances in Multimedia* 2015, no. 243980 (2015): 1–9.

²² Russell H. Fazio, 'Motives for Social Comparison: The Construction-Validation Distinction', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37, no. 10 (1979): 1683–98.

²³ Erin A. Vogel, Jason P. Rose, Lindsay R. Roberts and Kathryn Eckles, 'Social Com-

Cyberbullying has also become a common phenomenon, creating fear of public ridicule or humiliation for any beliefs or behaviours that fall outside the social norms promoted by the bully. This dynamic often leads to stress and suicidal ideation.²⁴ Since around 2012, when Americans and Europeans with smartphones first outnumbered those without smartphones, teen depression and suicide rates have increased dramatically, especially among teenage girls.²⁵ Our technology-inspired cultural transformation has a dark side that can produce many undesired effects.

This continual influx of information, often accompanied by comments written in an aggressive tone by people with a social or political agenda, can have a negative effect on Christians and their willingness to share the gospel with others. In a context where people can anonymously criticize and attack others with impunity, secular Western culture's narrative

around Christianity has depicted it as an oppressive and intolerant worldview that is unacceptable in modern societies.²⁶ Christians are typically described as intolerant extremists who are cruel or insensitive to the felt needs of others and dismissive of science, and people who were raised as Christians often portray themselves as former believers who have rationally decided to reject Christian beliefs and values because of their lived experiences.²⁷ Such stereotypes may instil fear in Christians and discourage them from revealing their Christian identity online lest they become labelled or criticized inappropriately. This 'escalation of fear'²⁸ enables the dominant contributors to the new media to exert a disproportionate influence over those who primarily consume it.

Essentially, Christianity is widely depicted on social media as bad news. The exception to this pattern is those social media, such as Facebook, that filter by political or religious content and create an echo-chamber effect, where the user is primarily exposed to people who share his or her worldview or to advertisements designed to evoke anger and reinforce one's beliefs.²⁹ But because people, espe-

parison, Social Media, and Self-Esteem', *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* 3, no. 4 (2014): 206–22.

24 Robin M. Kowalski, Gary W. Giumetti, Amber N. Schroeder and Micah R. Lattanner, 'Bullying in the Digital Age: A Critical Review and Meta-Analysis of Cyberbullying Research among Youth', *Psychological Bulletin* 140, no. 4 (2014): 1073–1137.

25 Jean M. Twenge, 'Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?' *The Atlantic* (2017), www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/; Jean M. Twenge, Thomas E. Joiner, Megan L. Rogers and Gabrielle N. Martin, 'Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates among US Adolescents after 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time', *Clinical Psychological Science* 6, no. 1 (2018): 3–17.

26 Mary Eberstadt, 'Regular Christians Are No Longer Welcome in American Culture', *Time* (2016), <http://time.com/4385755/faith-in-america/>.

27 MediaSmarts, 'Media Portrayals of Religion: Christianity', <http://mediasmarts.ca/diversity-media/religion/media-portrayals-religion-christianity>.

28 David L. Altheide, 'Media Logic, Social Control, and Fear', *Communication Theory* 23, no. 3 (2013): 223.

29 Eytan Bakshy, Solomon Messing and Lada A. Adamic, 'Exposure to Ideologically

cially millennials and Generation Z (or the iGeneration), spend so much time on social media, their worldview is strongly influenced by the loudest voices on that platform.³⁰ The ubiquitous criticism of Christianity amplifies the fear of rejection associated with sharing the gospel, both online and in person.

The mum effect is arguably stronger now than at any time in the last millennium for most Christians, especially in the global north. Although most non-Christians who personally know evangelical Christians view them positively,³¹ it is easy for Christians to overestimate the risk of rejection, criticism and losing face due to the mum effect. The highly visible criticism of Christians on social media increases the fear of being viewed as a bearer of bad news in all areas of life.

In an increasingly secular context, the growing reluctance to share the gospel makes fulfilling the Great Commission even more difficult. What can Christian leaders do to combat this phenomenon? How can the gospel be presented as good news rather than bad news?

IV. Distinguishing Between Outreach, Witnessing and Evangelism

One approach that Christian leaders can take to counter the mum effect is to clearly distinguish between various aspects of sharing the Christian faith with others. If we generally define *outreach* as building relationships, *witnessing* as sharing stories of what one has experienced with God, and *evangelism* as presenting all that a person needs to know to make a decision to follow Christ, then each of these aspects of sharing one's faith can be examined in light of the mum effect and the New Testament understanding of spiritual gifts. Some aspects of sharing one's faith can be done on the interpersonal level with less perceived risk of rejection and criticism, reducing the impact of the mum effect. In this way, non-Christians may also receive a more complete and comprehensive exposure to the gospel so that they can make informed decisions to follow Christ or not.

1. Outreach to Build Relationships

Outreach, as defined in the field of sociology, occurs 'when help, advice, or other services are provided for people who would not otherwise get these services easily'.³² Although often seen as a particularly Christian concept, the term is used in both for-profit and nonprofit secular organizational contexts.

In Christian contexts, outreach ac-

Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook', *Science* 348, no. 6239 (2015): 1130–32; J. Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin and James M. Cook, 'Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks', *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 415–44.

³⁰ Twenge et al., 'Increases in Depressive Symptoms'.

³¹ Barna Group, 'Talking Jesus: Perceptions of Jesus, Christians and Evangelicalism in England' (2015), www.talkingjesus.org/research/upload/Talking-Jesus.pdf; Pew Research Center, 'How Americans Feel about Religious Groups' (2014), <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2014/07/Views-of-Religious-Groups-07-27-full-PDF-for-web.pdf>.

³² Longman 'Outreach in Sociology' (2015), www.ldoceonline.com/Sociology-topic/outreach.

tivities take on many different shapes, such as afterschool tutoring services for neighbourhood children, a coffee shop run by young adults, providing meals or shelter to homeless persons, an alternative festival in place of Halloween, or services to women caught up in human trafficking. The purpose of these outreach activities varies according to the context. Sometimes the central goal is to provide the recipients with needed services or information. In other cases, when outreach is conceptually linked to evangelism, the purpose is to develop relationships with people outside the church, in the hope of ultimately encouraging them to become Christians.³³

However, a clear distinction must be made between outreach and evangelism. Whereas outreach seeks to build a social link between a non-Christian and a Christian, I define evangelism here as communicating all the information necessary so that someone can make a decision to follow Christ, typically in a structured, detailed presentation. Outreach by itself does not imply that anyone will hear the entirety of the gospel message in such a way as to make an informed decision whether to follow

Christ.

Although outreach is necessary, it is not sufficient to lead people to a Christian commitment. Dunaetz and Priddy found that the value that the head pastor placed on outreach was, in fact, a negative predictor of numerical church growth.³⁴ This is perhaps due to a tendency to emphasize outreach at the expense of evangelism. Outreach without evangelism may be a sign of a church's decline, perhaps due to an inability or lack of desire to share the gospel with the people contacted through outreach. Outreach must be accompanied by evangelism to lead to numerical growth through conversion.

Even if accompanied by evangelism (that is, a clear and complete presentation of the gospel), outreach without the appropriate structures may be unfruitful. If a church has no culturally relevant programs or community-forming activities for the people whom church members are meeting through outreach, even conversions may not bring people into that congregation. For example, if an elderly congregation runs an afterschool tutoring program in a primarily immigrant neighbourhood, youth who make some type of profession of faith will not find their needs for fellowship and discipleship met by that congregation and will turn elsewhere.

Nevertheless, outreach is essential for a church to grow because it is often the non-Christian's first contact point with people who have put their faith in Christ. Similarly, it is often the non-Christian's first contact with

33 All such outreach must come from a sincere love for the other's well-being (Rom 12:9), free from ulterior motives associated with personal gain. All actions related to sharing the gospel should be done with 'full respect and love for all human beings' as described in the document 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct', (2011), issued jointly by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 4 (2011): 194–96.

34 David R. Dunaetz and Kenneth E. Priddy, 'Pastoral Attitudes That Predict Numerical Church Growth', *Great Commission Research Journal* 5 (2014): 241–56.

the church, which provides the community context necessary for biblical discipleship. In light of the mum effect, outreach is especially valuable because no bad news is involved. The services and activities provided, as well as the interactions with the Christians involved in the outreach activities, are typically positive, as they address the needs and desires of the non-Christians. Such relationship development fosters trust, which permits a more complete sharing of the gospel in a credible way and mitigates the mum effect.³⁵

In addition, all Christians have the ability to do outreach when its purpose is defined as relationship building. Not all Christians are verbally gifted as evangelists or have the spiritual gift of evangelism (Eph 4:20; 1 Cor 12:30; 1 Pet 4:11), but all are called to love their neighbours. Verbal ability to communicate abstract concepts varies immensely between individuals.³⁶ Some Christians have limited cognitive abilities that make it difficult for them to accurately express in verbal form the abstract concepts that are part of the gospel. However, almost all Christians can de-

velop relationships and act in a trustworthy manner, opening the hearts and minds of non-Christians to better prepare them for receiving and understanding the gospel message.

Although outreach is not enough to lead people to Christ, it is an essential form of pre-evangelism³⁷ that enables all believers to develop relationships with non-believers. These relationships, in turn, can provide opportunities for non-believers to hear and respond to the gospel. In outreach, Christians do not need to share any bad news, making such interactions attractive to both Christians and non-Christians.

2. Witnessing: Telling Stories about One's Experiences with God

Witnessing is also within the ability of virtually all believers and does not necessarily trigger the psychological phenomena that produce the mum effect. Unlike outreach, witnessing is explicitly mentioned in the Bible, usually with the word *martureō*, which is often translated as 'to testify' or 'to give testimony'. It is a legal term that essentially means to verbally recount what one has personally seen or heard, to transmit information to another person about what one has perceived.³⁸

³⁵ David R. Dunaetz, 'Missionary Credibility: Characteristics of the Messenger That Make the Message More Persuasive', in *God First: Essays in Honor of Michael M. Whyte and Gary D. Lemaster*, ed. David R. Dunaetz (Claremont, CA: Martel Press, 2019), 187–99; Alaina C. Zanin, Ryan S. Bisel and Elissa A. Adame, 'Supervisor Moral Talk Contagion and Trust-in-Supervisor: Mitigating the Workplace Moral Mum Effect', *Management Communication Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2016): 147–63.

³⁶ Charles J. Fillmore, Daniel Kempler and William S-Y. Wang, *Individual Differences in Language Ability and Language Behavior* (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

³⁷ D. Jim O'Neill, *Teaming up with God: A Theology of Pre-Evangelism* (New York: Harcourt Custom Publishers, 1999).

³⁸ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. and trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 492–93; H. Strathmann, 'Martus' (Witness), in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed.

Although witnessing might include conceptual abstractions, in most cases it involves talking about something one has experienced, typically through some sort of storytelling. In a Christian context, witnessing can include telling the story of how one became a Christian or how God has worked in one's life since conversion.

Storytelling is perhaps the main way in which people seek to persuade each other. This is especially true when two people experience sympathy between them because they have something in common or because of the nature of their relationship. When one person tells a story, especially a personal story, the storyteller draws the listener into a particular conception of reality. Storytelling increases the meaning of the events for both the storyteller and the listener, integrating the story's underlying assumptions into a comprehensible worldview.³⁹

When Christians witness by telling the story of something that God has done in their life, they are strengthened in their faith as they put together the various pieces of God's interventions into an integrated narrative. When non-Christians listen to such a story, they are invited into a worldview where God is active, transforming and good. Such fundamental beliefs prepare them to respond to the gospel. Since witnessing involves telling a personal narrative, the infor-

mation presented is unlikely to be interpreted as bad news, thereby averting the mum effect. Telling a personal story is much less threatening than communicating to a person all that he or she needs to know to respond to the gospel.

Like outreach, witnessing to what God has done in one's life is within the ability of virtually all Christians. The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) serves as a paradigm for witnessing when she testified (*emarturēsen*), 'He told me everything I ever did' (Jn 4:39, NIV). Those uncomfortable with or incapable of explaining abstract concepts may still easily share stories with those around them about what they have experienced with God.

In contemporary legal contexts, the defendant or plaintiff is expected to be able to testify to what he or she has done, seen or heard. However, the lawyer is the one who argues the case, pulling all the testimony together through analysis and synthesis to make a comprehensive argument as to how the judge and jury should respond. Similarly, one gifted in *evangelism* (Eph 4:11) can argue more comprehensively for the need to follow Christ. Such clear and structured presentations are all the more persuasive when the non-Christian has previously heard others testify to what God has done in their lives.

3. Evangelism To Enable a Decision to Follow Christ

In contrast to outreach and witnessing, evangelism can be defined as presenting the complete content of the gospel so that the listener both understands it and knows how to respond to it. Whereas outreach may prepare a person to be receptive the gospel

Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1985), 564–70.

39 Richard Delgado, 'Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative', *Michigan Law Review* 87, no. 8 (1989): 2411–41; Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (1955): 428–44.

and witnessing may share parts of the gospel, evangelism, defined in this way, includes the communication of everything that a non-Christian needs to know to become a believer. Evangelism is an essential aspect of the Great Commission (Mt 28:19–20) because it provides the starting point for a life of discipleship.

Evangelism in this sense, unlike outreach and witnessing, may not be within the abilities of all Christians. Like all forms of teaching or transmitting information systematically, it requires verbal skills and a clear and culturally relevant explanation of abstract concepts, a skill set that not every Christian possesses (Jam 3:1). The New Testament recognizes that not all Christians have the same spiritual gifts. For example, Peter exhorts Christians to use the spiritual gifts they have received to serve one another, dividing the gifts into two major categories: gifts of speaking and of serving (1 Pet 4:10–11). Evangelism, along with preaching, teaching, counselling and encouraging, would fall into the category of speaking gifts.

Yet Christ calls his church to fulfil the Great Commission to make disciples throughout the world, and all Christians are called to give a reason for the hope that they have in Christ (1 Pet 3:15–16). The Great Commission is a multifaceted call that involves, among other processes, pre-evangelism (such as outreach and witnessing), evangelism, baptizing, teaching, incorporation of the new believers into a Christian community, and travel throughout the world to wherever non-believers live. No one individual or even a single church can completely carry out this command, but all Christians are to contribute towards its completion. Some elements

of the Great Commission, such as pre-evangelism (outreach and witnessing) and incorporating new believers into a Christian community, require no special gifting and are the most obvious ways to demonstrate Christ's love to a new or potential disciple, so all Christians should be expected to participate in these activities.

Such acts of love would include Peter's command to all Christians to provide an answer or defence (*apologia*) when questioned about their hope in Christ. Like *martureō*, *apologia* is a legal term, describing an oral response made in court. Rather than representing all that one has seen or heard, it is the presentation of the reason for which one believes something. Such a defence can be complex and sophisticated (e.g. those of Anselm or Thomas Aquinas), or quite simple, like that of the man born blind who told the Pharisees, 'One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!' (John 9:25, NIV). But an *apologia* is not necessarily as detailed as an evangelistic presentation that thoroughly communicates the gospel. Not all Christians may be skilled or gifted in making such oral presentations.

Undoubtedly, many people do have the capacity for evangelism. The New Testament speaks of evangelists (*euangelistēs*) in several places. In Ephesians 4:11, evangelism is described as a gift to the church for equipping Christians for ministry. Philip, one of the seven chosen to serve tables (Acts 6:5), had a ministry of evangelism in Samaria (Acts 8) and was later described as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Paul calls on Timothy to 'do the work of an evangelist' (2 Tim. 4:5 NIV), apparently because there was a need for evangelism and Timothy was capable of it, though perhaps

a bit hesitant because he did not view it as his primary calling. Similarly, there are many people in contemporary churches, including most pastoral staff, who are quite capable of evangelism. These people should receive training in evangelism and should be encouraged to use this gift whenever possible.

The presence of people gifted in evangelism who willingly share the gospel with others is an encouragement and an aid to Christians who are not gifted to do so. Whereas all Christians can help to lay the foundation through outreach and witnessing, not everyone should be pressured into doing the work of an evangelist or be caused to feel guilty if they do not regularly present the plan of salvation to non-believers, especially if they are not verbally gifted in doing so. Those who are gifted in evangelism will most likely communicate the gospel more clearly than those not so gifted. Regular public presentations of the gospel by people with the appropriate gifts allow all Christians to invite their friends and relatives to hear such presentations and to build on the foundation that they have laid through outreach and witnessing.

Sharing the gospel in large-group settings where audience members do not feel that they have a personal relationship with the speaker (such as Peter's experience at Pentecost, some of Philip's experiences in Samaria, and Paul's experiences in the synagogues) is especially strategic in light of the mum effect, which can make one-to-one gospel presentations awkward for both the presenter and the receiver. For someone without the appropriate abilities, trying to present a one-to-one gospel presentation may create feelings of coming across

as judgemental, a sense of incompetence, the fear of rejection, or malaise due to saying things that make the receiver uncomfortable. These strong negative feelings associated with the mum effect have discouraged many people from doing personal evangelism. When churches communicate that such evangelism should be a normal practice for every believer, Christians not only feel guilty but may also be less likely to participate in relationship-building outreach and witnessing to what God has done in their lives, because such activities may be viewed as insufficient if not accompanied by gospel presentations.

One-to-one gospel presentations can also be awkward for the recipients of the message. Rather than communicating back to the presenter the bad news that they do not want to make a decision to follow Christ or do not understand the message, to avoid losing face or embarrassing the presenter they may give verbal assent to the message and even pray with the presenter, but with no intention of making any change in their life.⁴⁰ This action may effectively inoculate them against future gospel presentations.

These problems may be avoided in large-group settings where the speaker has the gifts necessary to communicate the gospel clearly in a culturally appropriate manner and does not have a personal relationship with the non-Christians in the audience that could be damaged by sharing information that is perceived as bad news. Although the content of the message may evoke negative feelings in the

⁴⁰ Gerald L. Sittser and Carlos Calderon, 'Discipleship in Christendom ... and Beyond', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2018): 25–30.

listener due to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, the presenter is not concerned about being rejected by a friend and can focus on clearly communicating all that is necessary for the audience to respond to the gospel.

This does not imply that churches should give up training in personal evangelism or discourage one-to-one gospel presentations. Training in evangelism should be offered to all who wish to develop their abilities to share the gospel; such training and the experiences to which it leads help people to determine their gifts and how they can most effectively serve the Lord. However, a church program where the gospel is presented regularly and publicly gives all members the opportunity to invite non-Christian friends and relatives with whom they may have developed a relationship through outreach activities or to whom they have been witnessing by sharing how God has worked in their lives.

V. Conclusion

Jesus' call to make disciples is among the church's top priorities. However, evangelism is difficult for many Christians because of a lack of gifting. The mum effect, or hesitancy to share bad news, is due to negative feelings associated with making others feel uncomfortable, the fear of being rejected and a desire to protect one's

own reputation, all feelings often associated with personal evangelism. In addition, the fear of being mocked or humiliated, as Christians often are in social media, makes many Christians even more hesitant to evangelize in one-to-one situations.

The mum effect and evangelistic gifting are two different phenomena. Those who are gifted in evangelism may not be thwarted by the fear of rejection, or they may be appropriately skilled in teaching and communication so as to minimize the likelihood of rejection. Similarly, the mum effect in no way cancels out the need for those not gifted in evangelism to contribute towards fulfilling the Great Commission. Because the church has some people who are gifted in evangelism, all Christians can participate in fulfilling the Great Commission in accordance with their own abilities. All can participate in outreach activities to develop relationships with non-Christians, and all can be witnesses of how they have experienced Christ in their own lives. Their outreach and witnessing position them to invite non-Christians to be exposed to gospel presentations made by those gifted in evangelism, which enable these listeners to fully understand their need for Christ and to respond to him if they are ready. At the same time, such presentations reduce the likelihood of loss of face or a damaged relationship if the listener is not yet ready.

Practising Mission and Development in a Multi-lingual African Context of Jostling for Money and Power

Jim Harries

This article essentially seeks to complete the rooting out of residual colonialism in Western support of mission in Africa. Often that 'colonialism' is invisible to the West. African people may be reluctant to talk about it if the hand that engages in it is the same one that feeds them, as it usually is.

The relationship between Western aid to Africa and human flourishing has been a topic of much discussion. The results have often been disappointing. 'Numerous examples exist of hospitals, schools, and other facilities that were built with donor funds and left to rot, unused in developing countries that did not have the resources or will to maintain them.'¹ Inattention to the multi-lingual nature of communication between donors and receivers has 'yielded detrimental repercussions in the quality of interaction at the grassroots level'.²

Numerous writers have documented the disconnect between aid contributed and results achieved through both academic analysis and anecdotal summaries.³ Attempts at explanation, however, consistently undervalue the impact on the West of centuries of exposure to the Christian gospel⁴ and thus underestimate the extent of institutionalized covetousness and selfishness that persist in much of Africa. It is hard for anyone to cite this

[download/pdf/58913026.pdf](#).

3 Abhijet Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* (Philadelphia: Public Affairs, 2011); Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (London: Profile Books, 2012); W. Easterly, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); Dambissa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

4 Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilisation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011).

1 M. Lawson, 'Does Foreign Aid Work? Efforts to Evaluate U.S. Foreign Assistance' (U.S. Congressional Research Service, 2016).

2 O. Oketch, 'Language Use and Mode of Communication in Community Development Projects in Nyanza Province, Kenya' (unpublished paper), 2006, <https://core.ac.uk/>

problem as a reason for the failure of well-meaning Western-originated projects, because anyone who does so risks becoming the target of accusations of racism.

The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission (vulnerablemission.org), of which I am chairman, has dealt with these issues in detail. Members of this Alliance challenge the assumption that people can be 'developed' by outsiders. They especially question whether missionaries and development workers can effectively engage in depth with developing communities while using non-indigenous languages from contexts very different from that of the local people they are trying to help.

Most of my research has concentrated on the Luo people of western Kenya. However, much of what has been discovered about the Luo people of Kenya appears to be true for Africans more broadly and even for other majority-world people. I do not wish to over-generalize, but I think it would be wrong to assume that a particular group of people within Africa is somehow peculiar.⁵ I welcome parallel studies among other people groups that test the contentions that I present here or articulate principles that would be more relevant in those cultures.

I. Methodology

Intercultural situations accentuate issues of research methodology. Even simple studies, such as on family re-

lationships, can in practice be very complex, because any English word will be used differently in Africa as opposed to Europe. Simply assuming that a European language such as English is adequate for research on Africa is naïve.⁶

As a relative insider to a particular culture in Africa, I hope to 'translate' some thoughts into language that Westerners can understand. My background as a native Westerner should help me to do this, since I am translating from the unknown culture to a known one, which is easier than moving in the opposite direction because the latter operates in the absence of understanding of the receiving context.

In addition, not being totally integrated into the native culture being explored gives me more freedom than some native informants to communicate things of importance to my foreign listeners that may be at odds with the immediate functioning of the socio-economic context in question. As in the patron-client systems common to many non-Western societies, clients are bound by honour to praise their patrons regardless of the actual circumstances; thus Africans tend to write and act in such a way as to pla-

⁵ For more on the problem of generalization, see Jim Harries, 'Anthropology's Origins, Christianity, and a Perspective from Africa', *On Knowing Humanity Journal* 1, no. 1 (July 2017): 33–34.

⁶ *University World News Africa Edition*, like other academic sources, consistently presupposes that English is the best language for higher education across much of Africa. This claim is only rarely questioned, even though the *University World News* itself has published a report on possible negative impacts of the growing use of English rather than Dutch in the Netherlands (Rosemary Salomone, 'Dutch Court Defers Decision on English in Universities', 27 July 2018, <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20180724140627526>).

cate their Western supporters.

II. Research Foundations

Much Western engagement with the majority world is built on a donor model, which begins by assuming that the West has things that the majority world needs. Initiatives are boosted by resources from the West and documented using Western languages. Missionaries, development workers, and others engaged in such initiatives almost inevitably build their knowledge base on interactions that are constrained by their use of outside languages and resources.

1. Vulnerable Mission Uses the Local Vernacular

In contrast, we call for the use of local languages wherever possible. The use of outside languages limits the Westerner to engaging with and understanding only a certain, formal part of local people's discourse. 'Formal' understanding in Africa comes from Europe through the education system.⁷ Yet 'formal education can never be integrated into people's innate understanding of life.'⁸ An outsider who engages with African people using English will mainly access that formal arena. A vulnerable mission approach, which emphasizes using the indigenous language while drawing only on people's own resources, can reveal otherwise hidden aspects of the people's ways-of-being, some of which may be driving the success or failure of outside initiatives.

⁷ Jim Harries, *The Godless Delusion: Europe and Africa* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 35.

⁸ Harries, *Godless Delusion*, 139.

a) Translation and Globalized Englishes

Translation processes can result in enormous amounts of bias and often include a great deal of invention. 'Cultural keywords [that] act as 'focal points' for complex sets of culturally specific values ... are very hard, if not impossible to translate without a great deal of paraphrasing', Taylor and Littlemore tell us, lifting the lid on just a small part of intercultural translation's complexity.⁹ Some scholars consider intercultural translation to be essentially impossible.¹⁰

The intricacies of the translation process are particularly germane in today's communication-enabled world, in which English has become increasingly globalized, with the result that English is used both by the Westerner and by the majority-world people with whom the Westerner is communicating. Although such intercultural use of English is heralded by some as bringing wonderfully high levels of mutual comprehension, it also has drawbacks. Those who rejoice in the communication that it enables rarely consider what has happened to the sheer difficulties that translators are known to face. Is it really possible that learning to use

⁹ John R. Taylor and Jeanette Littlemore, 'Introduction', in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. John R. Taylor and Jeanette Littlemore, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 4. For more on cultural keywords see A. Wierzbicka, *Understanding Cultures Through Their Keywords* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ T. Pattberg, *Language Imperialism and the End of Translation* (New York: LoD Press, 2015).

the same grammatical and phonetic code (i.e. the English language) makes those difficulties simply disappear?

Farzad Sharifian helpfully points out that words acquire meanings only when conceptualized through contexts in which they are used.¹¹ English terms such as 'love' or 'mother', when appropriated by a non-Western people, will often be understood as equivalent to the terms in their own languages. For example, among Australian aborigines, 'mother' might also refer to someone's aunts.¹² Therefore, using a language interculturally can easily hide from view significant differences in how certain things are understood.¹³

b) Location and Direction in Translation

Translation between a Western and African context can happen in either of two directions, and the person translating can be from either the originating or the receiving culture. This gives us four possible translation options, two of which involve translating from a known to an unknown context while the other two involve the reverse.

A person translating into his or her native cultural context is likely to be less well informed about the *source* of the translation. On the other hand, the person translating into a non-native cultural context will be less aware of the *target* of the translation. This raises the question of which is preferable. I strongly recommend translation into the known culture; that is,

the target audience and the translator should share the same linguistic and cultural background.¹⁴ Some simple examples should illustrate my point.

A Westerner might say that 'Africa is hot' whereas an African might say that 'Europe is cold.' The former is culturally correct for Europeans, because to them Europe is not cold; it is normal. Similarly, Africans might react negatively to a statement that Africa is hot when to them it is normal.

An African might say that Westerners are far too lenient to homosexuals; a Westerner might say Africans are cruel to condemn homosexuals and are infringing upon their rights. In this case, a translator going from the known to the unknown culture might make a statement that is quite disconcerting or even offensive to the host culture—especially in Africa where the infringement of a taboo by one person is seen as having negative effects on the whole community.¹⁵

2. Vulnerable Mission Uses Local Resources

In addition to the use of the vernacular language, a vulnerable mission approach advocates using local resources while engaging in ministry. Outsiders working in the majority world often sense an urgency to facili-

¹¹ Farzad Sharifian, *Cultural Linguistics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017), 20.

¹² Sharifian, *Cultural Linguistics*, 49.

¹³ Sharifian, *Cultural Linguistics*, 197.

¹⁴ Harries, *Godless Delusion*, especially 136–40.

¹⁵ For this reason, the pressure to conform can be intense in African communities. See Lucas Shamala, *The Practice of Ubuntu among the Abaluyia of Western Kenya: A Paradigm for Community Building*. (Saabruecken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008), 135. Shamala notes that failing to attend a ceremony can be interpreted as 'wanting to destroy' the group concerned.

tate the transfer of resources. Those who do not engage in such resource transfer may be quickly condemned.¹⁶ This tendency has almost certainly become more intense in recent years, as outsiders are expected to participate in improving the lives of developing peoples in ways that require financial contributions from elsewhere.

Although it may be instinctive for warm-hearted Western people to be materially generous to others, this practice has its disadvantages.¹⁷ Even seemingly low levels of generosity can seem extravagant when viewed from within the local context, causing people to respond to donors in a manner motivated by interest in culturally inappropriate acquisition of funds or material aid. This can perpetuate a status quo that perhaps ought to be undermined: Georges and Baker call into question the simple formula that 'giving things will help' by pointing out that 'the de facto economic system' that prevails in much of the majority world is in Western terms 'immoral'.¹⁸

As Westerners have realized the problems that result from overly free giving, some have gravitated towards a second option, which is to be *less generous*. Corbett and Fikkert advocate carefully restricted financial gen-

erosity, emphasizing for example that we should 'not do things for people that they can do for themselves',¹⁹ but instead focus on what people have.²⁰ Implementing the need for less generosity leads to a kind of dance as people seek to give enough but not too much. When the Western outsiders are deciding when to be generous, this leaves a lot of power in their hands.

Limiting one's generosity may unfortunately not prevent people in the majority world from being preoccupied with issues related to the exchange of material goods, such as seeking the 'best' use of resources or the most efficient work flow. A heavy stress on efficiency is not present in most non-Western worldviews and, where imposed or strongly encouraged by outsiders, can reduce local motivation by hampering a sense of community and perpetuating the appearance of outside domination. Moreover, merely moderating Western generosity is not likely to undo the common majority-world perception of Westerners as 'suppliers of all things needed'.

Foreigners who retain financial power in a cross-cultural situation while blind to local circumstances can create a scenario similar to blind-man's buff, the game in which one person is blindfolded while others call out to and then try to dodge the person. In the African context, outsiders are the blindfolded ones, encouraging local people to reach out

16 Joseph G. Healey, *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Black Christian Values* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 75.

17 Jim Harries, *Vulnerable Mission: Insights into Christian Mission to Africa from a Position of Vulnerability* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011).

18 Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 52, 54.

19 Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 115.

20 Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 126.

for their money while not having the local information needed to achieve the desired purpose. (In this version of blindman's buff, the Africans' intention is not only to dodge the blind man, but also to get money out of his pocket without being accused of malpractice.)

The third option, promoted by advocates of vulnerable mission, is that an outsider's material contributions to ministry should either be pegged (roughly) to those made by other local people or should be zero. This approach offers the following advantages:

- People can be honest with each other as there is no possibility of enabling a flow of funds through flattery.
- By not controlling the purse strings, the outsiders avoid taking charge of contexts that they do not understand or situations in which their control will not be appreciated.
- Not being involved in a dance of generosity enables an outsider to spend time on activities more closely aligned with the promotion of sustainable mission or development, such as encouraging use of local languages and innovations in what we might call the 'spiritual sphere', which is often otherwise dominated by the demands and expectations of the patron-client system.

It is not without cause that Westerners tend to have a 'pessimistic view of patron-client structures' in the majority world.²¹ Such structures are of minimal economic functionality.

3. Vulnerable Mission Embraces Diversity

Westerners make major efforts in the name of 'anti-racism' to emphasize that majority-world people are not fundamentally different from them.²² If differences are acknowledged at all, particular care is taken not to sound racist. On the other hand, in my experience, Africans and other majority-world citizens are frequently happy to compensate for what they perceive to be peculiarities of Western people's ways of life and behaviour. They do this because they understand that when they do things in Western ways, they are likely to benefit financially. Hence majority-world peoples expect, so as to enable Westerners to do 'business as usual', to fit into a foreign model of 'normality.'

Since Westerners most often meet English-speaking people of African origin in Western-style contexts, such as in a Western country, at a university, in a hotel, at a conference funded by the West, at a lodge in a game park or on an airplane, the setting adds to the appearance of similarity between African and Western people groups. Many African people have another life—in their families, celebrations and indigenous churches—in which they speak non-Western languages. Hence, meetings between Westerners and Africans occur on Western 'territory', but African people also maintain their own territory, perceiving and maintaining differences from the West that Westerners fail to see. Although Westerners tend to minimize differences, Africans know that

²¹ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 52.

²² See Emma Kowal, *Trapped in the Gap: Doing Good in Indigenous Australia* (Oxford: Berghan, 2015).

differences between Western ways-of-being and their own are enormous.

I now turn to exploring the dynamics of development initiatives in more detail.

III. Giving Gifts to the Poor

Giving to the poor is a problematic and at times apparently self-contradictory activity. The West is heavily engaged in making donations to the poor in the majority world, but it rarely asks what kind of obligation the receiver has vis-à-vis the donor. Donations might, from the Western side, seem to be 'free gifts' given altruistically.²³ Even then, for the sake of accountability, the giver of a free gift is frequently obliged to make sure that it is used in a particular way. Receivers of 'free gifts' never, I suggest, take them as totally devoid of anticipated reciprocity.²⁴ Rather, receivers know that they are expected to deliver some kind of return. As such, gifts to the poor can be a residue of colonial power.

Whether it be money or tangible items, accountability of some sort must be present even when gift giving and receiving happen across a cultural divide.²⁵ This can become extremely complicated. One thing

that donors and recipients typically have in common is ignorance of each other's cultural assumptions regarding the giving and receiving of gifts. The donor needs to understand that recipients' default response will be to apply their own cultural context, values and beliefs to guide them in the implementation or use of a gift. Being unfamiliar with the donor's culture, recipients will almost inevitably want to use the gift in a way different from what the donor might have envisaged, thus stretching the donor's tolerance. It is possible that the donor will consider the recipients' use of the gift not just different from what was intended, but also wrong or unethical.

We could put the potential uses of a gift on a scale from identical to the use in the Western donor's home country to extremely unfamiliar. Note that missionaries and development workers who are familiar with the recipients' culture may be able to envisage and comprehend uses of gifts that are too close to indigenous ways for most donors to comprehend.

Recipients of outside funds are frequently pulled in multiple directions simultaneously. They desire to use the gift to maximum advantage within their cultural context, while realizing that if the gift is not used according to the donor's specifications they may be accused of corruption. They can be caught between endeavouring to help a community in the way that the community believes it should be helped and not wanting to offend donors who may stop funding projects that fall outside the intended purpose.

Imagine, for example, that a donor designates assistance through a poverty-alleviating organization for a child to receive a Christmas gift. At the same time, a close relative of the

23 See John M. G. Barclay, *Firth Lectures*, University of Nottingham (2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlQ9UN_b4Zs for a history and problematization of the concept of altruism.

24 John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), chapter 1.

25 'Giving directly' endeavours to get around this (see <https://givedirectly.org/>). I do not have space to analyse this organization's activities here.

child has died and family members need funds to travel to the funeral. Since kinship relationships form the central organizing principle in many majority world cultures, there will be considerable pressure from a moral standpoint to use the money to fulfil obligations to kin.

If donor organizations view such redirections of funds as improper and therefore decide to send aid elsewhere, this decision can cause bad feelings, especially towards whoever rattled on the recipients. As a result, either a gap emerges between what is said and the actual situation, or a distinction is made between those who use aid 'properly' and those who 'mis-manage' it or are corrupt.

Even if a project proves to be unsustainable, the seed money already invested in it is likely to benefit the local community. For example, in a poultry project, even if all the chickens die before laying any eggs, builders, salesmen, farmers (who have obtained manure), owners of hardware stores and the wives of all the husbands who found employment will already have benefitted. Thus, a village that uses funds 'corruptly' on a failed project will become wealthier than a village that refuses funds because it knows that the proposal is not viable. The desire to please a donor may preempt contextualization, effectively resulting in a totally non-contextualized intervention.²⁶ The degree of likely

contextualization of an intercultural mission or development intervention might thus be limited by the degree to which a recipient is prepared to refuse the will of a donor.

IV. The Pincer Effect

Intimate familiarity with local ways of doing life can enable missionaries or development workers who have spent several years living and working in a community to be in a helpful position in the planning and implementation of development projects. Unfortunately, such people can end up caught in a pincer between local leaders and donors.²⁷

On one hand, local leaders are eager to say and do whatever they believe pleases the donor so that funds will continue to flow. Donors who are eager to give, especially if they want to avoid being perceived as neo-colonialists, often want to acquire understanding directly from local people. Hence the long-term missionary or development worker can be left out of conversations. If the donor wants to talk with the local person, and if the local person is trying to maximize income by saying what the donor wants to hear, then the experienced long-term workers can become the enemy of both; the donor doesn't want them interfering with funding decisions, and locals don't want them to threaten a valued source of income.

²⁶ Byang H. Kato provides a simple definition of contextualization as 'making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation'. Kato, 'The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism', in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications,

1975), 1217.

²⁷ Jim Harries, 'Building Castles in the Sky: A Case for the Use of Indigenous Languages (and Resources) in Western Mission-Partnerships to Africa', *Global Missiology* 3, no. 13 (April 2016), <http://ojs.globalmissionology.org/index.php/english/article/view/1883/4192>.

The result is a missed opportunity for insights that could bolster a project's chances of success. Also, long-term workers find that they are digging a hole for themselves whenever they open their mouths.

Western models of implementation and evaluation contribute to the pincer effect. When success is defined as quantified behaviour(s) observed in a relatively short period of time, the focus is on short-term facilitation. Donors and short-term personnel who implement projects emphasize efficient use of time, resources and personnel over a limited time frame. In many kinship-based majority-world cultures, however, timelines for accomplishing tasks are less relevant.²⁸ Instead, the focus is on maintaining good relationships among members of a community. A long-term worker or missionary who understands this dynamic is often hard pressed to gain a hearing from short-term project facilitators who must deliver the timely results expected by donors.

Majority-world peoples understand this clash between Western timelines and maintaining good relationships. When asked for his opinion of a particular method of strategic planning, a Papua New Guinean once said, 'I can use [this method] for my own planning and for relating to [the NGO]. But when I go to the village, I will wait until my people are ready to do things!'²⁹

28 Frustration with locals who don't show up on time to do project work is a recurring theme in casual conversations with Westerners who work in majority-world countries. There is a reluctance to say or write anything officially about this, however, because it could sound racist.

29 Amy Pagarigan shared this anecdote

A Westerner familiar with the local context who can explain what is needed to donors is often considered a less desirable source of information, even though the Westerner has the advantage of translating from the unknown culture to the known one as discussed above. The Westerner who lives in the local context and speaks the vernacular may be in a better position than locals to discern aspects of the local culture that are concealed by their use of English. Ignoring these kinds of insights is a sign of residual colonialism, one that can be very costly.

V. Why Bad Things Happen: Two Views

An important disconnect between Western and majority-world people's ways of living concerns the Western concept of the 'material' with all its implications. This disconnect affects development initiatives in various ways.

'Witchcraft' is widely acknowledged as a 'problem' in many parts of the world.³⁰ I want to briefly consider the origins, foundations and impact of witchcraft beliefs on the scenarios we are considering above. For the purpose of this discussion, I assume that the power of witchcraft arises from interpersonal relational tensions expressed as mystical powers.³¹

with me.

30 Robert J. Priest, 'The Value of Anthropology for Missiological Engagements with Context: The Case of Witchcraft Accusations', *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 1 (2015): 27–42.

31 Jim Harries, 'Witchcraft, Envy, Development, and Christian Mission in Africa', *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 2 (2012): 129–39; George M. Foster, 'The Anat-

Something happened between 1400 and 1700 that changed the face of Europe and is still changing the face of an increasing proportion of the rest of the globe.³² At the start of this period, Western Europeans were evidently essentially monistic (understanding all causation as arising from one source). By the end of it, they were dualistic—separating religion from secular explanations and seeing more and more causation in the material realm. Thus, the newly invented concept of religion was pushed into a private realm.³³ Over many generations, this change has left Westerners virtually ignorant of the previously dominant worldview.

Consider, for instance, a scenario where all causation is rooted in relationship, as Rasmussen and Rasmussen suggest is the case in many parts of Africa.³⁴ Then achievement is credited to and non-achievement is blamed on relationships. Knowledge of what constitutes good or bad relationships may well be defined through many generations' prior experience.³⁵

In relationally oriented communities, relationships may be extended from people who are present to those who are absent, the dead, and those not yet born.³⁶ Once a tradition has developed that seems to provide a level of success in life, people are reluctant to let it go. This includes understandings of ways in which the living, dead and unborn play a role in determining the general prosperity of the living.³⁷ By way of contrast, in the West the dead and unborn are not considered part of a community, so there is no assumption of an ongoing relationship with them.

An outsider coming from a tradition in which causation is understood in Newtonian and not fundamentally in relational terms is likely to be particularly slow to perceive African community life. *Whether that outsider is 'right' or not is irrelevant* for our purposes. Even if the Westerner is 'right' from a scientific or other viewpoint, a few outsiders are unlikely to be able to impose their understand-

omy of Envy: A Study in Symbolic Behaviour', *Current Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (April 1972): 165–86.

32 William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 58.

33 Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 58–122.

34 Steven D. H. Rasmussen and Hannah Rasmussen, 'Healing Communities: Responses to Witchcraft Accusations', *IBMR* 39, no. 1 (January 2015): 13.

35 The Luo people of Western Kenya are guided by an extremely complex, orally transmitted law code passed down over generations. For details, see Paul Mboya, *Luo*

Kitgi gi Timbegi (Kisumu, Kenya: Anyange Press, 1997, first edition 1938) and Jacktone Keya Raringo, *Chike Jaduong e Dalane* (n.p, n.d.).

36 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 105.

37 See Kevin G. Hovey, *Before All Else Fails ... Read the Instructions! A Manual for Cross-Cultural Christians* (Fort Worth, TX: Harvest Publications, 1995), for the same view in Papua New Guinean cultures. Naomi M. Scaletta, 'Primogeniture and Primogenitor: First-born Child and Mortuary Ceremonies among the Kabana (Bariai) of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea' (1985), <https://mcsphere.mcmaster.ca/handle/11375/5883>, gives an excellent description of how honouring the dead is intricately integrated into firstborn celebratory feasts among the Bariai people.

ing on a whole community that does not grasp where they are coming from. A 'right' in absolute terms may be a wrong in local terms.

An example from the Luo people of western Kenya may clarify my point. When the Luo plant crops, older people must plant before younger people. If younger people do otherwise, they show disrespect, which can bring misfortune. Elders who are already dead contribute, through their 'spirits', to producing this misfortune.³⁸ The apparent benefits of early planting can thus be outweighed by the risk of exposing oneself to a curse.³⁹ Problems arise if the older people delay, forcing the younger ones to delay. Early planting of crops has been scientifically proven to give the best yields, but to the Luo, that does not in itself make it a desirable practice if it is also associated with a curse.

Missionaries who promote God's word tend to threaten long-held traditions. For example, they may encourage someone to ignore restrictions on early planting, either because they seem rooted in a belief in the continuing influence of ancestors (i.e. gods⁴⁰) rather than faith in the one eternal creator God or because research shows that delayed planting results in a reduced yield. If local people believe that the taboo must be upheld to avoid misfortune yet missionaries are calling for its removal, then to local people the missionary is promoting risks that will bring misfortune.

In an actual development situa-

tion, a Westerner is unlikely to be criticized for encouraging young people to plant before their elders, as long as the Westerner is channelling funds into a community. That flow of resources constitutes, in the eyes of locals, the source of the voice, authority and power of Western missionaries and development workers. Such immunity to criticism can end when funds are no longer coming.

If development workers or missionaries were to contextualize what they are doing, donors might lose faith in them and outside funding could slow or stop altogether. Local people, having lost the tangible benefits arising from donor funds, might now blame the foreigners for preventing local people from prospering.

VI. The Essence of Power

Let us look further at the issue of mystical power as a source of benefits for a community. When Paul commanded a spirit to come out of a slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:18), he was exercising the power of God. According to the Bible, this slave girl was predicting the future by the power of a spirit who possessed her (Acts 16:16). Presumably her predictions were coming true, or at least were perceived as coming true, or her owners' business would not have been profitable. Paul used God's power to defeat another kind of power. This provoked the owners to attack Paul (Acts 16:19–24), because they perceived that he was undermining their ability to make money by exploiting people's faith in certain spirits.

The Pharisees levelled a similar accusation against Jesus: 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons'

38 I have put 'spirits' in quotation marks to emphasize that this English word falls far short of doing justice to the African concept thereby described.

39 Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, 185.

40 Healey, *A Fifth Gospel*, 146.

(Mt 12:24; see also Jn 8:40, 48). By interfering with the Jewish taboo system, such as the rules on keeping the Sabbath,⁴¹ Jesus was in their minds interfering with Jewish people's prosperity.

Similarly, in the Gentile region of the Gadarenes, Jesus cast out demons from two men who lived among tombs. The townspeople, when they discovered what Jesus had done, pleaded with him to leave (Mt 8:28–34). Their request indicates a belief that Jesus' presence would undermine their well-being, as the death of their pigs had already demonstrated.

A difference between these biblical examples and contemporary missionaries is that the latter have resources to back what they are doing. Those very resources can enable the continuation of a colonial pattern. The resources mitigate opposition, as long as they continue to flow. Outside resources thus give contemporary missionaries a certain immunity to criticism as well as momentum, which can be built up whether their message is reaching people's hearts or not.⁴² Serious opposition to the contemporary missionary might arise only when outside money and technology stop coming. On the contrary, opposition to Jesus and Paul was more immediate, as it had no relationship to foreign funds. Not having (or not using) the option of reaching into their

pocket,⁴³ Jesus and Paul could acquire a following only by touching people's hearts with their message.

Implications for the creation of dependency are clear. Because Jesus and Paul did not have foreign resources with which to validate their ministry, their words were put to the test immediately. Whereas contemporary missionaries' use of outside funds can guarantee impact regardless of the nature of their message, Jesus and Paul were immediately vulnerable to contextualizing forces. If their work had not been contextually pertinent, Jesus and Paul could not have attracted an appreciative audience. When they engaged in activities perceived by locals as destructive, such as healing on the sabbath, local opposition ensued. Unlike many contemporary missionaries, for whom failure is deferred or put off as a result of the subsidy that stands behind them, Jesus and Paul were subject to the presence of mystical forces that threatened to cause immediate failure.

VII. Contextualization, Language and Fiscal Accountability

Let us suppose that English is the language used in the planning and ongoing implementation of a project, but that local participation in the project is sought. (These are typical conditions for project initiation and implementation.) Missionaries and the donors standing behind them tend to receive feedback from communi-

⁴¹ Many of Jesus' healings recorded in the New Testament were performed on the Sabbath. This fact particularly troubled the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

⁴² I am not questioning the motives of missionaries. I am attempting to show that laudable motives do not always line up with the perceptions of others.

⁴³ There is no biblical evidence that Jesus or Paul ever made the kind of donations towards development that characterize much of contemporary mission.

ties they are reaching through translation from the indigenous language into English. Because few outsiders these days are acquiring a deep understanding of indigenous languages, this translation will typically be done by locals, in our case Africans—who also wish to please current and potential donors.

Local people may speak English, but as African natives they will use English differently from a native Westerner. This fact is generally difficult for a monolingual speaker of English to grasp, yet it is crucial. Local people typically learn English as a second language, so they understand English words as translations from indigenous language terms. Because there is never a complete overlap in meaning between a word in the source language and its analogue in the receptor language, translation will always have a distorting impact. The more the cultural contexts of the two languages differ, the greater the likelihood of incomplete overlap.⁴⁴

A native speaker of English from the West uses English in ways that are consistent with his or her own cultural background. An African who learned English as a second language may be expressing his or her heart language, even while speaking English! As a result, the two may mean vastly different things by the same words. Deep confusion and disagreement about what the other person really meant to say can occur for this

reason.

I will offer a few examples.⁴⁵ In Africa, the term *God* has a much stronger implication of ‘the provider of all my needs and wants’ than in the United Kingdom. Whereas *spirit* in the West seems to imply a disembodied being, in Africa it refers to outcomes of actions by an embodied being. In many African languages, short and abrupt requests can be *polite*, whereas in English a multitude of words are needed to communicate politeness. Whereas the *world* in Western English implies a physical thing, in Africa it may well imply a community of the dead. The self-sacrificial context of *love*, learned by the West from centuries of Christian belief, may not necessarily be carried over into African understandings of the word. Translations from the English term *believe* into African equivalents tend to imply agreement rather than belief.

An African who recognizes these

⁴⁵ I have done in-depth study in this area. For a study of the use of the term ‘bad’ in the Luo language of western Kenya, see Jim Harries, ‘Pragmatic Theory Applied to Christian Mission in Africa: With Special Reference to Luo Responses to “Bad” in Gem, Kenya’ (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2007), <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/15/>. For a study of the use of the term ‘God’, see Jim Harries, ‘The Name of God in Africa and Related Contemporary Theological, Development and Linguistic Concerns’ in Harries, *Vulnerable Mission*. For use of the term ‘Spirit’ see Jim Harries, ‘Understandings of Pneuma in East Africa That Point to the Importance of “Vulnerable Mission” Practices from the West’, in *The Pneuma Foundation: Resources for Spirit Powered Ministry* (2010), <http://www.pneumafoundation.org/resources/presentations/JHarries-VulnerableMission.pdf>;jsessionid=33DDC7DABC4E84183C1F257006799616.

⁴⁴ Youssouf Dembele, ‘The Concept of Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel: Its Contribution to the Understanding and Translation of the Bible’ (2015), <https://map.bloomfire.com/posts/944585-the-concept-of-corporate-personality-in-ancient-israel-its-contribution-to-the->

kinds of differences in uses of English would invariably have to structure his or her language differently to communicate what a native English speaker would mean.⁴⁶ Conversely, culturally Western donors who think they have understood the English of someone who is culturally African have almost certainly misunderstood it.

Moreover, a project proposal written by a Westerner who has become contextualized in an African culture may not be understandable or acceptable to a Westerner whose thinking is rooted in Western culture. Crucially, though, neither the writer nor the reader may be aware of this fact, because they assume that they are speaking the same language. When the contextualized worker goes back to the West and explains what should be done, how and why, Westerners are likely to think that he or she is mistaken. In fact, the missionary who is on the right track will be comprehensible to neither Africans nor Westerners.

There is a solution to the above apparently inescapable dilemma of mis-comprehension. Missionaries should not be condemned for using their own language when reporting about the majority world when back in the West, provided that they (implicitly and explicitly) engage in a process of translation. If they use English, it should be Western English in the West and African English when in Africa.⁴⁷

I have found that it is very difficult to hold two distinct Englishes in one's head at the same time. I suggest that missionaries' knowledge of African English will invariably affect their use of Western English and vice versa. This is one reason why, to avoid residual colonialism, it is important to use African languages for planning and implementation of projects in Africa and Western languages while in the West.⁴⁸ Using different languages will help missionaries to maintain a distinction in their engagement with dissimilar cultures.

VIII. Empty Seats at the Academic Table

Since Western English is the language of academia, other forms of English that don't fit or don't work with the West are quietly invalidated. This exclusion of non-Western participation results in a lopsided scholarly community.

Western scholarship about Christianity in Africa should be recognized as exactly that—*Western* scholarship, not universal scholarship. It is *not* the 'reality' of Africa. In fact, this real-

bound and from which its expressions get their meaning'. A. C. Grayling, *Wittgenstein: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 97.

⁴⁸ Although the cultural gaps between different African or different European languages are much smaller than those between African and European languages, parallel issues are identified within Europe by Jennifer Jenkins; see Lennox Morrison, 'Native English Speakers Are the World's Worst Communicators', BBC, 31 October 2016, www.bbc.com/capital/story/20161028-native-english-speakers-are-the-worlds-worst-communicators.

⁴⁶ More accurately, something must be stated 'wrong' in one English to have the possibility of being 'right' in another English.

⁴⁷ I here go along with Wittgenstein's suggestion that learning a language is learning the 'outlook, assumptions, and practices with which that language is inseparably

ity cannot be discovered by Western scholarship. This is why Westerners create plans for 'development' based on the wrong linguistic categories. Western scholarship must always be 'wrong' for Africans.

IX. Vulnerable Mission: A Path to Success

Mismatches between peoples' views of causation, misunderstandings resulting from inadequate translation, and the pincer effect all contribute to failures in mission work and in development programs. As a result, church mission efforts can look like a game of blindman's buff where the missionary is the blind man, and efforts to promote sustainable development can be reduced to a farce.

Happily, the situation can be re-deemed. The first step towards doing so is to ask some Western workers to avoid the linguistic and resource traps described above. Some missionaries or development workers from the West need to carry out their ministries (or at least some key activities) using only local languages and local resources from the start. This is the essence of vulnerable mission. Because alternative approaches do not produce sustainable, indigenously powered African development, a vulnerable mission approach deserves careful consideration.

In the context of African mission and development, there is intense

rivalry for the money, prestige and power that come through relationships with the West. If outsiders do not recognize and sidestep the intense search for wealth in which they are implicated, mission and development initiatives can be subsumed in a destructive morass of jockeying for position by locals. Limiting one's generosity, as advocated by some, leaves intact the problematic dance in which Westerners' ill-informed influence over when and what to give leaves them with too much effectively neo-colonial power relative to their limited local understanding. Contextualization can occur only insofar as donors do not require standard versions of accountability.

Furthermore, African views of causation that include active roles for the dead and the unborn make a confusing mix with Westerners' determined adherence to Newtonian physics. In biblical times, missionaries did not ignore but engaged with mystical powers, while remaining vulnerable in ways that kept them sensitively on track, even if their actions were apparently contrary to the thriving of indigenous people. The gaping disconnects in language and worldview between Western and African cultures suggest that the belief that a single form of English can be a good fit in Africa while simultaneously satisfying Western reasoning is a delusion in need of serious attention.

‘Thou Hast Forsaken Thy First Love’: Soteriological Contingency in the Book of Revelation

Nicholas Rudolph Quient

‘Can I lose my salvation?’

‘My mother doubted her faith before she died. Did she fall away?’

Debates over these personal and deeply existential questions rage throughout much of the evangelical world, frequently posing particularly difficult pastoral ministry challenges. Everyone from Southern Baptists to Methodists to Presbyterians is engaged in this theological contest, with no end in sight until Jesus returns.

In this paper, I will examine what the book of Revelation has to say concerning this debate. My thesis is that John the Seer¹ portrays soteriology as contingent and dynamic, flexible and open, and thus by implication not predetermined. This does not necessarily mean that the totality of the New Testament presents soteriology in conditional or contingent terms (although I believe it does). However, I contend that the Apocalypse consistently and coherently presents the dynamics of soteriology in that manner.

I. A Word on Words: Methodology

My line of inquiry can be reduced to the question, ‘Is salvation contingent?’ I use the word *contingent* to encompass two concepts. First, it means that an event or outcome is subject to change. Second, contingency is predicated upon certain conditionals or actions on the part of mutually self-aware agents—that is, people who are aware of their freedom of choice when presented with conflicting options.

The debate over determinism involves both compatibilist and deterministic models within various competing theological systems. Determinism can be defined as ‘the metaphysical thesis that the facts of the past, in conjunction with the laws of nature [or, for evangelicals, God’s determinative will], entail every truth about the future.’²

A consensus in the classic debate relating to free will and determinism

¹ I do not believe that the author of the gospel of John is the same person who wrote the book of Revelation. As such, when I refer to John in this work, I am referring to John the Seer.

² Michael McKenna and Justin D. Coates, ‘Compatibilism’, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/compatibilism/>.

remains elusive, but we should keep an open mind when approaching the evidence on whether soteriology is a contingent or determined matter. We are to build our theology on what is revealed to us, not what we desire to be true. As an evangelical Christian, I must be most concerned with what Scripture says rather than my own feelings. I concur with John Jefferson Davis's admonition that 'further progress in the study of this doctrine [perseverance of the saints] calls for continuing exegetical studies of the pertinent biblical texts on election, regeneration, and warnings of apostasy as well.'³ I hope that my work here, albeit tentative, will contribute to such progress.

II. Important Words and Concepts in John's Vision

Specific Greek verbs like *akouō* ('to hear, understand/comprehend') are often central to the Spirit's messages to the seven assemblies in Revelation 2–3. This verb occurs nine times in those chapters out of a total of forty-three appearances in the book. In context, the word calls for understanding or comprehension of a concept, rather than simply the auditory intake of words or knowledge. Other words (both as nouns and as verbs) centre on the activity of human repentance, such as *metanoēō* (to repent or change one's mind; used ten times in Revelation),⁴ and must also

be considered contextually and theologically. More important to this study are various conditional or contingent particles in the Apocalypse. John uses them twenty-three times (*ei* fourteen times, *ean* nine times), often at key points. The relationship of these two particles to matters of soteriology, judgement, ecclesiological participation and potential apostasy is often neglected.

Although the conditional particles have various nuances, it seems fairly clear that they are used contextually and semantically to describe provisional or contingent statements. The particles can be used in a variety of contexts with different moods and tenses, and hence our discussion of the Apocalypse must reflect these nuances.

III. Conditional Particles in Revelation

John's uses of the various particles in his apocalyptic visionary experience do not conform to a specific and narrow semantic domain. Rather, context dictates the relevance of each usage. The Greek particle *ei* ('if') occurs throughout Revelation in a variety of contexts and each instance must be exegeted properly. We begin with its uses in the letters to the seven churches.

Rev 2:5: 'Therefore, remember from where you have collapsed,⁵ and repent (*metanoēson*) and do the

³ John Jefferson Davis, 'The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 2 (1991): 228.

⁴ Revelation 2–3 uses *akousatō* specifically in relation to an ethical admonition or im-

perative to correct behaviours.

⁵ The verb *piptō* occurs ninety times in the New Testament, often in a literal sense (Matt 7:25, 10:29, 13:4, 15:27, 17:15, 24:29; Luke 10:18, 11:17, 13:4; Acts 1:26, 5:5, 9:4, 20:9; Rev 2:5, 6:13, 7:16, 9:1).

works you did at first. But if you do not (*ei de mē*), I will come to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place, if (*ean*) you do not repent (*mē metanoēsēs*)' (all translations are my own).

The word 'collapsed' (*peptōkas*)⁶ seems to be used here in the sense of a spiritual or moral falling or failure, suggesting former sins or a status of sin among those who were formerly not in Christ (i.e. non-Christians).⁷ Other instances in Revelation (11:13, 14:8, 16:19) suggest that the word is functioning metaphorically to describe the destruction of a city. This specific syntactical construction *ei de mē* is echoed in Gen 20:7 LXX, where Abimelech is given a choice to return Sarah to Abram, but 'if you do not (*ei de mē*), know that you will certainly die.' In the Greek text of the LXX (Gen 30:1; 42:20; 43:5; Ex 7:27; 40:37; Josh 24:15), this word always denotes conditionality and contingency as it relates to God's interaction with humanity. 1 Maccabees 15:31 is rather explicit in asserting that if a fellow ruler does not acquiesce, there will be war. The notion of conditionality and contingency runs throughout Jewish literature in discussions of the fore-

stalling of divine and human wrath, and even of God's own desire to pause or relent from wrath against sins such as economic injustice (Sir 29:6).

John the Seer echoes this sort of conditionality in his admonition to the assembly in Ephesus to repent for the purpose of 'reform and renewal'.⁸ This conditionality is rooted in the particle *if*. If the church does not repent (turn away from sin), then God will remove (*kinēsō*) the 'lampstand', which John uses to represent the status or perhaps presence of an assembly (Rev 1:20b). God can indeed remove the status of a church, but this judgement can be undone via repentance from sin. Gregory Beale states, 'If they do not repent, Christ will come and judge them. They will cease to exist as a church when the very function that defines the essence of their existence is no longer performed.'⁹

The repeated active tense forms (including imperative and subjunctive moods) strongly emphasize the nature of repentance and the turning away of divine wrath. If the Ephesian assembly does not remember, repent and do their first works, then Jesus will utterly remove them from their privileged status before him. This is echoed in Joel 2:14 (LXX): 'who knows if he will turn and repent' (*epistrepsei kai metanoēsei*).¹⁰ The conditionality is centred on human action in response to Christ's admo-

6 The perfect tense-form suggests their former inoperable state, and an act of repentance and expressed allegiance is what moved them from this 'fallen' state.

7 Rom 11:11, 22. Paul's response is countering the hypothetical: they 'did not fall' when it appeared that they had fallen. This presumes the possibility of some sort of fall, and the response is based on how God decides to deliver Israel. This is confirmed by Paul in Rom 11:22 where the Gentiles are told that they too could be 'cut off' and are not free from apostasy, which includes those who have 'fallen'.

8 Ian Paul, *Revelation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 80.

9 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 232. Beale is himself Reformed.

10 Joel 2:13 LXX makes this point as well, indicating that the person is to 'turn towards the Lord', which clearly involves conditionality. See also Jonah 3:9 LXX.

nition. Christ's apocalyptic return is imminent; the consequence of his return is conditioned on humanity's response and repentance. The judgement of God is truly universal, and not even the church will escape it except through the act of repentance.¹¹

Rev 2:16–17: '[Therefore],¹² repent! And if you do not (*ei de mē*), I will come to you in swiftness (*tachu*), and wage war (*polemēsō*) with you all by the double-edged sword from my mouth. The one who has an ear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies: to the one who conquers I will give (*tō nikōnti dōsō*) to them the manna which is being hidden, and I will give to them a small white stone, and upon the stone a new name is being written, which no one knows except (*ei de mē*) the one who has obtained the stone.'

The reference to 'swiftness' echoes the immediate judgement that God will perpetrate on Satan (Rom 16:20) in the eschatological end. This is John's method of asserting the most severe apocalyptic form of violent eradication, as shown by the future tense use of the verb 'wage war'. In the New Testament, this verb is found almost exclusively in the Book of Revelation (12:7 twice; 13:4; 17:14; 19:11), and the noun is used extensively as well (Rev 9:7, 9; 11:7; 12:7, 17; 13:7; 16:14; 19:19; 20:8).¹³ This

usage echoes the Maccabean warfare against the Jewish people (1 Macc 3:14).

No mere excommunication is depicted here. Rather, the allegiance of the Pergamum assembly has shifted away from Jesus and their lack of repentance—as indicated by the conditional particle—will result in their violent demise, most likely their being denied according to Christ's proclamation (Mt 25:41–46). Leaving aside the notion of 'hearing' in verse 17a for later, God's response to false teaching (likely idolatry leading to sexual immorality; see verses 14–15) is again a call to a change of mind and heart, which is possible because of God's empowering activity and invitation.¹⁴

The second use of the particle here concerns a contrastive element, delineating an exceptional concept or person: 'the one who has obtained the stone'. The active substantival particle (*ho lambanōn*) assumes self-agency on the part of the person who has obtained the stone, an act predicated upon the person's repentance in verse 16a. Hence, John's vision indicates God's demand that the assemblies repent and turn back towards him, and his warning that if they do not, God will wage war upon them as if they were part of the evil empire to be utterly destroyed at the end of all things (1 Cor 15:23–26).¹⁵

11 Beale, *Revelation*, 232ff focuses almost entirely on the conditionality of Christ's return but does not focus on the particle and the nature of what the conditionality implies concerning what happens to everyone else where Christ returns.

12 This conjunction is missing in 01 Sinaiticus and is thus textually suspect.

13 The noun is used in Mt 24:6; Mk 13:7; Lk 21:9; 1 Cor 14:8; Heb 11:34; Jam 4:1.

14 Hence, the case for prevenient grace becomes a central tenet and helps to prevent us from falling into the trap of meticulous determinism. For a helpful work on this topic see W. Brian Shelton, *Prevenient Grace: God's Provision for All Humanity* (Anderson: Warner Press, 2014).

15 Beale, *Revelation*, 251 correctly observes that the church will not escape judgement. But he does not speak of the specific condi-

Rev 9:4: ‘And it was said to them that they were not to mistreat the grass of the land, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only (*ei mē*) those people who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads.’

After the fifth trumpet is blown, chaos erupts from the abyss (9:2–3). In this instance, the negated particle *ei mē* refers to human beings who do not have (*ouk echousi*) God’s seal on their foreheads. This sealing process appears to occur in Revelation 7:2–3 and presumably continues throughout the apocalyptic narrative in chapters 7–9, but it is still conditioned upon repentance and allegiance. Asserting that this is left up to ‘God’s decreative will’¹⁶ does not take into account the evidence of human participation and allegiance that we have seen, and will continue to see, throughout Revelation. Moreover, no decree from God is present here. The negated particle specifies a distinct grouping of people who have been set apart, most likely because of faithfulness and repentance (2:10; 13, 19).¹

Rev 11:5: ‘And if anyone (*ei tis*) desires to harm them, fire bursts forth from their mouths and it will devour their enemies. If anyone (*ei tis*) desires to harm them, this is how they will die.’

There are two uses of this conditional particle here; the context is clearly, though perhaps not exclusively, figurative. Both particles appear in hypothetical statements, but John applies a contingent, fatal judgement to those who might bring harm to the

witnesses. God’s protection will be over them, for anyone who attempts to cause them harm will instead be harmed.

Rev 13:9–10: ‘If anyone (*ei tis*) has an ear, hear this! If anyone (*ei tis*) is taken into captivity, into captivity they will go; if anyone (*ei tis*) is to be killed by the sword, the sword will kill them. Here is the perseverance and the faithful allegiance (*hē pistis*) of the holy ones.’¹⁷

Similar to 11:5, this passage contains three uses of the particle-plus-indefinite pronoun construction. The first use assumes contingency on the part of the various Christian victims of the Beast, although the second and third uses clearly reflect the ‘call for the endurance and trust of the holy ones’ (13:10b). A multiplicity of interpretive options are in play, but clearly the threats are real, especially when viewed as a result of sin.

The repeated call for ‘perseverance’ undermines a deterministic reading here, for at least two reasons. First, unless one assumes that people are incapable of following God’s commands and calling, there is no logical reason to believe that this call carries with it a deterministic element. Second, and more importantly, John does not describe faith as a gift (as one finds, for example, in Ephesians 2:8). Rather, the call for perseverance and allegiance confirms the need for tenacious faithfulness to God, the one who has been faithful to them, at a time when the danger of falling away was very real. A person who does not ‘hear’ or ‘comprehend’ what the faithful are called into ‘will go into captivity

tionality of repentance.

¹⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 496. The rather loaded language here is unsustainable when we consider what John has already shown us.

¹⁷ John is clearly referencing Jeremiah 15:2 LXX.

ity'.

Rev 13:17: 'So that no one would be able to buy or to sell if they did not have that imprint (*ei mē ho echōn to charagma*), the name of the beast or the number of its name.'

In imposing universal martial law, the Beast has seized control of the various socio-economic spheres of life (see Revelation 18),¹⁸ requiring all to possess an 'imprint' or mark. The survival of a multitude of people within the ancient world now depends on the sands of shifting allegiances; without the mark of the Beast, they are not permitted to buy or sell and will starve. Although the passage does not directly address apostasy, it does make one's fate conditional on specific actions and reactions between agents.

Rev 14:9–11: 'And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a great voice, "If anyone (*ei tis*) worships the beast and its image, and wilfully takes (*lambanei*)¹⁹ the branding mark upon their forehead or upon their right hand, that person will also be made to drink from the wine of the wrath of God poured full strength in the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented in fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb,

and the smoke of their torment²⁰ will ascend into the ages of the ages and they will not have rest day or night, the ones worshipping the beast and its image, and if anyone (*ei tis*) has wilfully taken (*lambanei*) the branding mark of its name.'"

Space does not permit us to exegete this complex and disputed passage at length, but we can make several key observations. The conditional particle used to bookend verses 9–11 strongly stresses human agency in relation to the active verbs that follow this particular syntactical construction: *ei tis proskunei* (v. 9) and *ei tis lambanei* (v. 11). Both verbs are in the present tense-form²¹ and active, suggesting that those who have taken the mark of the Beast have done so freely and with full knowledge of their rebellion against God.²² Had they not done so, God's judgement would have been averted. Swift destruction²³ is the end result of a life lived in active rebellion

¹⁸ See especially Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (New York: T&T Clark, 1993), chapter 10.

¹⁹ Many English translations render this verb as 'receive'. However, the proper meaning is more like 'takes' or 'accepts', especially as it relates to the human person actively or wilfully partaking in evil. In essence, the dehumanizing act of branding a slave is forcefully desired, and the person is therefore professing a perverse allegiance to the empire.

²⁰ Although this incredibly harsh language suggests the traditional doctrine of eternal torment, the highly symbolic nature and the blatant literary echoes of Isaiah 34:9–11 (where nations are leveled and the 'smoke' rises from the destruction) suggest that this imagery denotes literal obliteration, not torment. See Paul, *Revelation*, 250–51.

²¹ With Beale, it seems difficult grammatically and contextually to take these verbs as truly 'futurist' as opposed to 'true present verbs'. See Beale, *Revelation*, 758.

²² Significantly, the nations and the enemies of God in this apocalyptic vision never cry out, 'Why are you doing this?' or 'Why is this happening?' Part of comprehending God's judgement is recognizing the self-inflicted nature of rejecting Christ.

²³ The intertextuality between Isa 34:9ff and Rev 14:11 suggests that the torment language is a metonym for destruction, not a literal symbol.

against God.

God's conditional response to judgement illustrates his own patience (Rom 3:24–26) towards those who have rejected God's mercy and must face the justice of God. Mercy is God's prerogative, but not at the expense of injustice and exploitation and oppression; God will respond to such repeated sins with full and unfiltered force. Included in this eschatological response are the powers and those who profess allegiance to them.²⁴

Rev 20:15: 'And Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.'²⁵ And if anyone was not found (*kai ei tis ouk heurethē*) written in the scroll of life, they were cast into the lake of fire.'

Our last two texts concerning this particular construction are centred on God's final judgement. In 20:15, John states that anyone not found within God's sovereign plan 'in accordance with their works' (*kata ta erga autōn*) is removed from creation. The conditionality of the particle presses us to see that, even after the destruction of all sinful powers, God will make a final tally of what people did during this apocalyptic time period.

Soteriological contingency also plays a part in how we conceive of the status of a person within the scroll of

life: are they marked there forever, or is there a notion of removing oneself from God's kingdom? This verse indicates that unless a person is in the scroll, that person's fate is death. Judgement is contingent upon what a person does in this life. Salvation is conditioned upon faith and repentance.

Furthermore, John's use of *ean* throughout Revelation speaks to conditionality and contingency as it relates to repentance (2:5, 22), keeping watch (3:3), response to God's discipline (3:19), hearing and freely responding to God's voice (3:20), the authority of the two witnesses to destroy if they desire (11:6), participating in or refusing to join in worship of the Beast (13:15), and finally if someone adds to God's word (22:18–19).

Rev 21:27: 'and nothing unclean will enter into the city, nor anyone who does detestable things and speaks lies; only the ones (*ei mē*) who are written in the scroll of life of the Lamb.'

John's final use of this construction is similarly sobering: the exclusive and provisional nature of the Lamb's scroll is predicated upon faithfulness and the purity of the new creation (22:1ff). Those who wash (*hoi plunontes*) their robes in the river of life are granted eternal life in Christ. This conditional particle clearly indicates contingency as it relates to one's status before God and the Lamb. For those who are not part of God's kingdom people, if they have participated in evil (Rev 14:9–11) there is nothing but destruction, but even this is contingent upon accepting the imprint of and wilfully professing allegiance to the Beast. Only those who wash their

²⁴ David A. deSilva, 'A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation 14:6–13: A Call to Act Justly toward a Just and Judging God', *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 114ff.

²⁵ John immediately clarifies the 'hell' language with imagery designed to give a plain meaning: the use of 'torment' and 'day and night' is spoken of as 'second death', a literal cessation of existence for Death and Hades (cf. 1 Cor 15:26).

robes in the river (22:14),²⁶ repent (2:5, 16–17), and persevere in allegiance to Christ (13:9–10) are granted eternal life in the new creation.

The frequent use of conditional particles demonstrates John's intent: repentance and a change of heart and mind will protect one from the coming wrath. A failure to repent will result in eternal death, even for those who have at one time claimed allegiance to Christ (Rev 2–3). That is, the angelic invocations throughout Rev 2–3 directed towards specific, explicitly identified historical churches suggest that some may have at one time given allegiance to Christ but are in the process of being removed or removing themselves from the assembly, as expressed through warfare language (2:16). Hence, the Apocalypse establishes a rather firm layer of theological bedrock characterized by soteriological contingency.

IV. Repentance and Contingency in Revelation

A second major issue concerning apostasy or the contingency of salvation resides in repentance as the mechanism of contingency. Every occurrence of *metanoëō* in Revelation occurs in the active tense-form, often as an imperative or a subjunctive.²⁷ The intent is to influence or command someone to act in a particular man-

ner.²⁸ Repentance, according to Rev 2:5, will lead to 'do[ing] the works you did at first' and the consequence of failing to respond to this imperative is communal apostasy (2:5b). In Revelation 2:16a, this same logic applies: 'Repent!' (*metanoëson*). This assumes the status of the church as the body of Christ and also that due to immorality this status can be revoked—even violently through means of divine warfare (see the discussion above on the use of war language). Because it has fallen into this risky status, the assembly is explicitly called to repent.

This is especially true in the stark portrayal of the assembly at Thyatira (2:21–22). God's explicit reasoning for granting them more time (*chronon*) was for the purpose of repentance. What was the result? The immoral people in the local assembly 'did not want to repent' (*ou thelei metanoëσαι*), and therefore God cast them into great affliction, which also ultimately results in death (2:23)²⁹ for those who wilfully resist repentance (*ean mē metanoēsōsin*).

As opposed to righteous deeds in 2:5, the deeds of the assembly in 2:22 are to be repented of. Refusal to do so results in expulsion and death. The call to remember is directly continued in Revelation 3:3, where the assembly of Sardis is called to remember what they repented from, especially as it

26 Whether this washing takes place in the eschatological future or in John's post-visionary experience is irrelevant to my argument.

27 As Stanley E. Porter notes, 'The imperative form is normally used to direct someone's action.' Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 53.

28 The relationship between the indicative and the imperative suggests that the status and the command are not to be separated or bifurcated. Rather, the indicative and the imperative should be taken together as forming a singular reality that can be altered via a failure to participate in the imperative.

29 See Mt 10:28. This verb most often refers to someone's death, sometimes in an eschatological or final way.

relates to what they have ‘obtained and comprehended and kept’ (*eilēfas kai ēkousas kai tērei*).³⁰ Repentance in 3:19 also is used also as an imperative (*metanoēson*) for the assembly at Laodicea, and this is placed within the sphere of ‘discipline’ (*paideuō*). To discipline someone is to seek to correct one’s behaviour for that person’s own good, as many Second Temple Jewish authors stressed (2 Macc 6:16; 10:4; 4 Macc 5:24, 34).

The negative side of this call to repentance is seen with vivid force in Rev 9:20–21. The negated aorist verbs showcase humanity’s hardness of heart in response to God’s call and judgement. The refusal to repent is exhibited in their worship of demons and idols (9:20), showing that they have committed direct and egregious apostasy, worshipping created things rather than the Creator God. Not only this, but they did not repent of the sinful actions that arose from their idolatry: ‘murders or magic or sexual immorality or stealing’ (Rev 9:21). Sinful desires are actively deployed and there is no longer any resistance of evil behaviour. Despite God’s will that they repent, they refused the grace of God in exchange for their pleasures and their fate.

A refusal to ‘repent and give glory’ (*ou metenoēsan dounai autō doxan*) to God (Rev 16:9) is an additional corollary of contingency. Eventually, blasphemy, in combination with sexual immorality, economic exploitation and the extreme perversity of the sinful human mind, reaches its climactic peak in 16:11. God was willing

to grant repentance earlier in John’s vision, but now they have pressed themselves into God’s wrath. In contrast to good works in Rev 2:5, the evil deeds in 16:9–11 are celebrated and taken to their final extreme. Repentance is the final mechanism to remain in Christ; when repentance is ignored, God responds.

Throughout John’s vision, repentance is the thing that assuages divine wrath. In this section, we have seen Revelation’s depiction of immoral creatures who have given themselves over to their base desires, refusing repentance and life with God. Repentance is not ‘a sorrow for actions that have been done or for sins that have been committed’;³¹ it involves a reorientation of the whole person. Salvation, even for the various assemblies in Asia Minor, is contingent upon repentance.

V. Faith and Perseverance: Contextual Relationality

I will now turn to two positive words that appear frequently in Revelation: perseverance (*hupomonē*; 1:9; 2:2–3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12) and faith (*pistis*;³² 2:13, 19; 13:10; 14:12). John

³⁰ The final imperative in this chain suggests active observance or obedience in relation to something being asserted or commanded.

³¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 798.

³² Matthew W. Bates and Teresa Morgan have both successfully demonstrated that the word group for ‘faith’ more properly refers to ‘allegiance’, or that it has ‘relational components’ and may indicate virtue. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017); Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

places the two words in relation to each other; both appear in the messages of chapters 2 and 3. Neither word occurs in the verb form in Revelation.

John's use of *hupomonē* in Rev 1:9 is placed in parallel with 'affliction' and 'kingdom', suggesting that all three nouns are governed by the single article (*tē*) and therefore present a specific chain of meaning: the three nouns are complementary but not synonymous. Taken together, the syntax points to people's anticipation and expectation 'in Jesus', but the notion of perseverance is intensified if we consider John's exile on Patmos, which highlights his faithful witness to Jesus (1:9b) through affliction and pain. The will to persevere 'because of the word of God' (1:9) is a testament to the enabling power of the Spirit.

Concerning the church in 2:2–3, John uses *hupomonē* twice. The first use is clarified as 'your perseverance' (*tēn hupomonēn sou*), thus personalizing the church and identifying its enduring witness to Jesus. This includes the believers' work (*erga sou*) and labour (*kopon*) in responding to the 'false apostles' (2:2). Their remaining in Christ throughout this troubling period is contingent upon several factors. First, they are told to 'have perseverance' (*hupomonēn echeis*), signifying the active and continual need for people to participate and not 'stop working' (*ou kekopiakes*) in 2:3b.³³ The charge to persevere is a charge to remain steadfast in Christ, illustrating symmetry between Christ's work and

human agency in response; human perseverance is central to God's invitation to participate in the kingdom of Christ (Eph 5:5).

Faith (*tēn pistin*) in Rev 2:13 carries something stronger than merely a belief in an object or person. The text reads, 'You seized my name and you did not renounce my allegiance.' The political overtones here are overwhelming. The issue of the 'name' is central to professing allegiance to someone or something.³⁴ The assembly 'seized' or held onto this name, despite Satan's 'throne' being present amongst them. The political pressure was immense, but they resisted and did not renounce their allegiance to God. This resistance in a time when martyrdom was a real possibility testifies to the power of the Spirit. Trajan's comment in a letter to Pliny (*Letters* 10.96–97) proves the point: 'Whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it—that is, by worshipping our gods—even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance.'

The risk of renunciation underscores that faith can be lost or forsaken by those who do not wish to participate in God's kingdom. We see this quite clearly in Rev 2:19, where *hupomonē* and *pistis* appear together: 'I know your works (*erga*) and love and allegiance (*tēn pistin*) and your perseverance (*hupomonēn sou*), and your latter works are more than the former.' Here allegiance and perseverance are tied together with love. The emphasis on the church's works, love, allegiance, and perseverance con-

³³ The charge not to stop working, or to continue labouring, strongly implies the ability or desire to do so. Otherwise this language would be rhetorically ineffective and needless.

³⁴ See Philippians 2:9–11 where people bow the knee to Jesus—and, by extension, not to anyone else.

firms the sense of contingency, i.e. the need to actively pursue and honour God during trying times.

God's protection is contingent upon perseverance again in Rev 3:10, where the word 'because' indicates conditionality and result. Because the church kept (*etērēsas*) God's word, God will keep (*tērēsō*) them safe from temptation.³⁵ God's combination of sovereignty and patience in response to human activity is a testament to his loving kindness.

The final two uses of each noun occur together, signifying a complementary semantic domain in Revelation 13:10 and 14:12. In 13:10, the threat of violent death calls for 'the perseverance (*hē hupomonē*) and the allegiance (*hē pistis*) of the holy ones'. Martyrdom is central to much of Jewish thought (e.g. Dan 12:1–2), and endurance unto death illustrates the allegiance that God desires for himself alone. A similar call for endurance and for keeping faith in Jesus occurs in 14:12. Salvation is conditioned upon a person's willingness to participate in Christ, without coercion and without any guarantees of his or her outcome in this life.

VI. The Dynamics of the Scroll of Life

The contingency of the 'scroll of life' is perhaps the strongest support for the conditional nature of soteriology in Revelation. Although the word group

for 'scroll' (*biblion* and its cognates) occurs twenty-four times in John's apocalyptic vision, only six occurrences are central to our point (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27) and the first of these offers clear evidence.

Rev 3:5: 'The one who conquers, this one will be clothed in white robes and I will not obliterate³⁶ his name from the scroll of life. I will acknowledge his name before my Father and before his angels.'

Both the conditional particles and the nature of perseverance and triumph are found in 3:5. Additional elements that indicate a predetermined soteriological outlook (13:8; 17:8) should be interpreted through the lens of 3:5. The ultimate triumph of the church is central to John's imagery, but the triumph promised in Revelation is predicated upon allegiance, perseverance and the will to be faithful to Jesus.

The dynamic nature of the scroll of life centres on the contingency of who is in it, and if they can be removed from the scroll; Rev 3:5 says they can. Being written in the scroll of life does not mean one cannot be removed from it, just as the status of the church can be revoked (2:1–19). Even those whose names have been written 'in the scroll of life from³⁷ the foundation

³⁵ John Wesley interpreted the *hoti* clause as 'because'. See Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 12th ed. (New York: Carlton & Porter, n.d.) 663. This conjunction likely refers to 'a causal or inferential' connection (Porter, *Idioms*, 237).

³⁶ See Ex 32:32. Literally 'blot out', but the use of 'name' functions as a representation of the whole person, and so this blotting out denotes a form of obliteration.

³⁷ I thank Brian P. Roden, 'The Doctrine of Election: Corporate Calling of a People with Conditional Individual Participation in the Elect', <http://evangelicalarminians.org/brian-roden-the-doctrine-of-election-corporate-calling-of-a-people-with-conditional-individual-participation-in-the-elect/>, for this insight, and specifically for pointing out

of the world' (Rev 13:8; 17:8) are not determined unconditionally to be in this scroll. The progressive nature of the verbs used to describe the 'writing' process (*gegrammenōn*; 20:12; 21:27; 22:19) suggests a dynamic outlook concerning soteriology (that is, an ongoing process of participation in Christ via being written in the scroll of life), not a deterministic model wherein salvation is established from before creation. Rather, salvation is contingent upon a person's response to God's work in Christ.

In other words, being included in the scroll of life is predicated on the work of God in Christ to achieve atonement for the entire world (1 John 2:2), but *remaining* in the scroll of life is predicated upon human allegiance and faithfulness. This fact necessarily includes the possibility of apostasy on the part of people who reject God. The sovereignty of God encompasses God's decisions as to how he will act, and he has decided that if anyone does not persevere and turns to idolatry, that person will be blotted out and will go into eternal death (Rev 20:11–15).

Regardless of the positive affirmation of Revelation 3:5,³⁸ the implicit threat of being blotted out remains untouched as it relates to the contingency of being in the scroll of life. The notions of triumph (3:5) and repentance (3:3) reinforce that both condi-

tionality and a legitimate threat are present in Rev 3:5.

My interpretation, of course, has dissenters. Gregory Beale has offered three objections, each of which I will address. First, he says, 'None of the promises to the overcomer contains such an implicit threat of losing a salvation once gained, but they are coined in purely positive terms.'³⁹ This objection could be taken as a retreat from the actual data. Contingencies are an integral part of John's entire vision, and the idea of having one's spiritual status (or even one's church) removed is surely a rather explicit threat, especially as it relates to God waging war on that church body (2:16). Beale assumes that providing a positive assessment of benefits excludes the implicit existence of the negative. My reading fits the broader context better as Revelation 2 and 3 are full of overt threats and exhortations to the churches, which are directly related to God's judgement.

Second, Beale claims, 'Another reason this should not be understood as referring to a possible loss of authentic salvation is that in John's scheme throughout the names of those who ultimately prove themselves unbelievers are never at any point associated positively with the book of life, but the books of judgment.'⁴⁰ This is a *non sequitur*. Beale assumes two things here that he does not prove: he does not explain the questioned status of unbelievers in terms of mechanism or result. That is, he does not ask *how* or *why* they are not believers. Did God predestine them, through his own decretive will or through sec-

the misconception of the preposition *apo* and the mistranslation of the Greek text by the ESV.

³⁸ See Grudem, *Systematic*, 802. He asserts that this verse 'is just a strong assurance that those who are clad in the white garments and who have remained faithful to Christ will not have their names blotted out of the book of life'.

³⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 279.

⁴⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 280.

ondary causes, not to be in the book of life? Would they consider themselves non-believers? How are we to know they are non-believers? Revelation 20:15, located in the central text about eschatological judgment, uses the phrase 'book of life'; there do not appear to be separate books for God with regard to the eschatological future and the fate of humanity. Also, Beale's language lacks nuance: what does 'ultimately prove themselves unbelievers' mean within John's scheme? What does 'authentic' salvation look like outside of 'deeds' or 'works' (Rev 20:15)? Contingency language is compatible with this language, but one is left wondering precisely what Beale means in light of unstated theological convictions. Hence, the most likely option in understanding Rev 3:5 in light of its context is that salvation is contingent.

Third, Beale asserts that 'the metaphor of erasure does not imply loss of actual salvific life.'⁴¹ But this statement simply begs the question. God's conditional demands and calls throughout Revelation render this interpretation unsustainable, especially in light of the reference to the person who 'triumphs' in 3:5a—a conditional description of salvation. Beale's claim faces stiff obstacles: does God plan on making eschatological war against the churches in chapters 2–3 but then forgiving them in the afterlife? What does warfare mean here in the context of salvation?⁴² Unless one presumes soteriological determinism,

one cannot make such an argument.⁴³

John's language clearly references Ex 32:32–33 LXX, where God says to Moses, 'If anyone (*ei tis*) commits a sin before me, I will blot them out from my book.'⁴⁴ John is drawing upon the strongly contingent language of the Old Testament narrative to support his claim here; where idolatry and sin govern human hearts, the consequences include being blotted out of the book. As such, the language of contingency throughout Revelation also seems to undermine Beale's claim.

God's response to sin is therefore consistent with both Exodus and Revelation: apart from repentance, continual sin by a faithless person or empire results in eternal death. John's presentation of soteriology is thoroughly and coherently contingent, despite arguments to the contrary. Whether he is discussing the possibility of being blotted out of the Lamb's scroll of life, faith, perseverance, comprehending and participating in the gospel, or the contingency and conditionality of salvation, John is clear: salvation is a process that can be undone, even by those whose names are already in the scroll of life.

VII. Pastoral Implications

I have a genuine concern for the women, men and children who sit in the pews of the Baptist church I help to pastor. All theological reflection or

⁴¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 282.

⁴² Warfare in Scripture certainly includes the loss of bodily life, and in the case of the New Testament's apocalyptic outlook, it certainly includes 'eternal destruction' (2 Thess 1:9ff).

⁴³ The verb 'to cancel, blot out' here refers to human agents who have turned against God, indicating their loss of both the possibility of salvation and their physical lives.

⁴⁴ Both Grudem and Beale are aware of the intertextuality between Ex 32:32–33 LXX and Rev 3:5.

preaching is, ultimately, a matter of praise, worship and discipleship. For many who struggle with doubt and pain regarding themselves or their loved ones, the pastoral implications of soteriological contingency are very real. However, John's message for pastors is simply to proclaim the forgiveness, peace and kindness of Christ.

The genuine call to repent and to reconfigure one's heart and life around the witness of the Holy Spirit is centred on the fact that God is love (1 Jn 4) and that God forgives our sins (Rom 3:21ff). Sin is a crippling and terrifying reality by which many are held captive. The clarion call of John's vision of contingency does not imply that God is not forgiving, loving, or kind. Rather, it is *because* God is all these things and more that we can trust him to empower us to persevere in even the most troublesome or terrifying situations.

VIII. Conclusion

Conditionality and the contingency of salvation are a central theme in John's wild vision. The repeated emphasis on persistence, perseverance and the need to triumph over the various powers remains crucial to the life of the church. Debates between various models of election and soteriology will undoubtedly remain entrenched and heated until the Lord returns, but in the book of Revelation, I believe that the contingency of salvation and hence the plausibility of apostasy are clearly and decisively affirmed.

This fact does not, of course, express the totality of the biblical data concerning this pressing question—a topic worthy of further exploration in biblical and systematic theology. However, we should keep John's biblical vision in mind in our preaching and disciple-making activity as we advocate for believers not to forsake their first love and for all people to repent, return to Christ, and participate in the kingdom work to which God has called us by his Holy Spirit.

Complementarity and Its Significance for Biblical Theology

Thomas Schirrmacher

I. Complementarity in Physics

The great Danish scientist Niels Bohr (1885–1962), who received the Nobel Prize in 1922, introduced the concept of complementarity broadly into physics. Until his time, the only instance of complementarian thought in physics pertained to complementary colours. But Bohr showed that other phenomena can be described in this way. For example, electrons can be separately shown to be either particles or waves, depending on the experiment; in effect, they are both at the same time. The same also applies to light.

Complementarian thinking demonstrates that it is possible to investigate and describe multiple sides of many phenomena only serially—i.e. one at a time—even though one knows that the individual results and statements are simultaneously true and that an exact result is obtained only if one sets both or all participating facets of the phenomenon into the correct relationship.

As Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker put it, ‘Complementarity consists in not being able to simultaneously use both [research aspects of a phenomenon] but nevertheless having to use both.’¹

The first mention of complementarity in physics beyond Bohr’s work was by Werner Heisenberg, who demonstrated that in the course of experimentation the precise measurement of both position and momentum could not be made simultaneously; one could measure only one or the other.² Other physicists, such as Max Planck and Pascual Jordan, later picked up Bohr’s thinking about complementarity but advanced a number of models and variants.³

In quantum theory and its mathematical codification, complementarian thinking means primarily rejecting claims of the absolute truth of binary logic.⁴

bild der Physik (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1958), 284.

² L. von Strauss & Torney, ‘Das Komplementaritätsprinzip der Physik in philosophischer Analyse’, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 10 (1956): 110.

³ Max Planck, *Scheinprobleme der Wissenschaft* (Leipzig, Barth, 1947), originally a lecture delivered in Göttingen on 17 June 1946; Pascual Jordan, *Verdrängung und Komplementarität* (Hamburg: Stormverlag, 1947), 79–83.

⁴ Hans Primas, ‘Ein Ganzes, das nicht aus Teilen besteht: Komplementarität in den exakten Naturwissenschaften’, in *Mannheimer Forum: Ein Panorama der Naturwissenschaften* (1993): 84.

¹ Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, *Zum Welt-*

II. Complementarity in Other Disciplines

Meanwhile, the concept of complementarity moved far beyond the bounds of physics to other sciences and spheres of life. Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich's definition of complementarity in a German-language historical dictionary of philosophy is illustrative of this expanded application:

Complementarity indicates a cohesiveness of various possibilities of experiencing the same object in different ways. Complementary insights belong together insofar as they are insights into the same object; however, they exclude each other as they both cannot occur at the same time.⁵

Interestingly, Bohr played a role in this transfer of complementarian thinking to other fields. As Guy Marcel Clicqué explained:

The first deliberations with respect to taking the concept of complementarity beyond the borders of how it was understood in physics and making it fruitful in other sciences come from Bohr himself. For example, he suggested that the concept of complementarity could be applied to clarify various philosophical and psychological problems, such as the body-soul problem, the question of the relationship between justice and love, the relationship between various human cultures, and to the difficulties of gathering observations

by using the concept of complementarity constructively for these problems.⁶

In a 1954 lecture entitled 'Unity of Knowledge', Bohr even recommended using the term in theology and expressed the view that the relationship between justice and love of neighbour in religious thinking was a classical example of complementarity.⁷ He also suggested that science and faith had a complementarian relationship with each other.⁸ Indeed, there is no theological question where the term 'complementarity' has more established itself than in efforts to determine the proper relationship between theology and science.

III. Related Words and Concepts

Ideas similar to complementarity have been captured by other words throughout history. One such word is *paradox*. From the time of the Greek

⁶ Guy Marcel Clicqué, *Differenz und Parallelität. Untersuchungen zum christlichen Glauben in einer säkularen Welt 1* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), 214.

⁷ Niels Bohr, *Atomphysik und menschliche Erkenntnis. Die Wissenschaft 112* (Braunschweig: Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn, 1958), 68–83; Günter Howe, 'Zu den Äusserungen von Niels Bohr über religiöse Fragen', *Kerygma und Dogma 4* (1958): 20–46; Günter Howe, 'Niels Bohr über die Religion (1958)', in Howe, *Die Christenheit im Atomzeitalter: Vorträge und Studien* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1970), 92–109; Niels Bohr, 'Physical Science and the Study of Religions', in *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen* (Hauniae: Einar Munksgaard, 1953), 385–90; Clicqué, *Differenz und Parallelität*, 225–27.

⁸ Bohr, *Atomphysik und menschliche Erkenntnis*, 82.

⁵ Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich, 'Komplementarität', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 4 (Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1976), columns 933–34.

philosophers all the way to Luther, this word primarily meant 'strangeness'. Only later did it gain the meaning of apparent contradiction. In the twentieth century, the question of how to avoid paradoxes was primarily a matter for logic and mathematics.⁹

Polarity has primarily made its appearance since the mid-seventeenth century in connection with magnetism and has signified the tension between two facts or statements, sometimes coming very close in meaning to complementarity.¹⁰

The word *antinomy* has been frequently understood in the sense of complementarity. However, it mostly meant a clash between two antithetical statements, though which a synthesis emerged from thesis and antithesis. For Kant, antinomy was often the inexplicable conflict between two statements.¹¹

The term that Hermann L. Goldschmidt introduced into philosophy in 1944, *dialogic*,¹² has practically the same meaning as complementarity.

For instance, Heinz Stefan Herzka defines the term as follows:

Dialogic postulates that two thoughts, which no one is able to think simultaneously, or two tendencies, which no one can simultaneously turn into reality, or two terms, which mutually exclude each other and where each carves out an area for itself at the same time (i.e. not serially) and equally (i.e. without claims to superiority and subordination), comprise a whole.¹³

IV. Complementarity in Theology

According to John Baillie, Bohr said the following in his Clifford Lectures in 1949: 'I think you theologians should make much more use than you are doing of the principle of complementarity.'¹⁴ I fully agree with Bohr on this point. The relevant, decisive lesson to be drawn from complementarian thinking is that two or more statements, despite apparent contradictions between them, can both be logically substantiated, and that in such situations neither one is to be abandoned or changed in favour of the other, nor should we simply adopt a middle position somewhere between the two truths.

The proper application of complementarity in Christian dogmatics begins with teaching on the Trinity and

9 P. Probst, 'Paradox I', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 7, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel: Schwabe & Co, 1989), columns 81–90.

10 P. Probst, 'Polarität', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 7, columns 1026–29.

11 Petr Kotátko, 'Antinomie', in *Europäische Enzyklopädie zu Philosophie und Wissenschaften*, vol. 1, ed. Jansjörg Sandkühler (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), 847–49; N. Hinske, 'Antinomie I', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 1, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel: Schwabe & Co, 1971), 393–96.

12 Hermann L. Goldschmidt, *Philosophie als Dialogik* (Frankfurt: EVA, 1948); Hermann L. Goldschmidt, *Dialogik: Philosophie auf dem Boden der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt: EVA, 1964).

13 Heinz Stefan Herzka, 'Was ist Dialogik', in *Widersprüchliche Wirklichkeit: Neues Denken in Wissenschaft und Alltag*, ed. Ernst Peter Fischer, Heinz Stefan Herzka and K. Helmut Reich (Munich: Piper, 1992), 38.

14 John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God: Clifford Lectures, 1961–2* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 217.

on the two natures of Jesus Christ.

Christopher Kaiser has invoked complementarity to explain the Trinity. He describes Jesus as a single being who appears in at least two ontological modes (both Son of God and man). Kaiser mentions eleven characteristics which have to be fulfilled to meet these criteria: (1) both modes of being must belong to the same reference object (such as the body and soul of the individual), (2) they must have certain common attributes (that they are alive, for instance), (3) they describe or expound with sufficient precisely what is to be explained, (4) they together provide a complete description, (5) they are equally necessary, (6) they are mutually interlaced, (7) they have interchangeable attributes, (8) they exist unmingled and unchanged (i.e. they mutually exclude each other), (9) they have respective unique attributes, (10) they are marked by asymmetry and emergence, and (11) 'there are pointers within the subordinated mode to the existence of the higher-level mode'.¹⁵

Taking the Trinity as a starting point, Bernhard Philberth sees our entire universe as permeated by complementarity and asks why:

What is reality? Complementarity itself is reality and vice versa: Reality is complementarity. Why is this the case? Because God, the Triune

One, is complementarity himself and has created the world according to his nature. Complementarity is the essence of being almighty.¹⁶

For Philberth, there is hardly a greater turning point in the history of ideas¹⁷ than the discovery of complementarity. Physics suddenly becomes the inadvertent trailblazer for philosophy and theology, and in these latter cases one suddenly has to concern himself or herself with physics.

After Kaiser himself, the first person to discuss the possibility that Christology could be explained in a complementarian manner was William H. Austin in 1967. However, he rejected this idea. Ian G. Barbour followed in 1974 and was somewhat more positive in his assessment.¹⁸

Other authors have held that the relationships between psychological experiences and the activity of the Holy Spirit or of miracles occurring in time and space,¹⁹ the relationship between body and spirit,²⁰ that between the brain and the activity of thought,²¹

¹⁶ Bernhard Philberth, *Der Dreieine: Anfang und Sein: Die Struktur der Schöpfung* (Stein am Rhein: Christiana-Verlag, 1987), 531.

¹⁷ Philberth, *Der Dreieine*, 438.

¹⁸ William H. Austin, *Waves, Particles, and Paradoxes* (Houston, TX: Rice University Press, 1967), 85–92; Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms* (SCM, 1974), 151–55; Kaiser, 'Quantum Complementarity', 291; Kaiser, 'Christology and Complementarity', 38.

¹⁹ D. M. MacKay, 'Complementarity in Scientific and Theological Thinking', *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 9 (1974): 237–39.

²⁰ Kaiser, 'Christology and Complementarity', 37.

²¹ Fraser Watts, 'Science and Theology as

¹⁵ Christopher B. Kaiser, 'Christology and Complementarity', *Religious Studies* 12 (1976): 37–48; Christopher B. Kaiser, 'Quantum Complementarity and Christological Dialectic', in *Religion and Science*, ed. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildmann (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 291–98; Christopher B. Kaiser, *The Logic of Complementarity in Science and Theology* (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974), 318–39.

or areas such as Christian ecclesiology and the doctrines of the sacraments²² are understandable only by using complementarity.²³

Admittedly, in all these cases the authors' concerns are more philosophically theoretical in nature than biblical or exegetical. But this means that applying complementarity to biblical revelation remains a wide-open area for evangelical researchers and theologians.

V. On the Complementarity of Biblical Thought

Recognition of the limitations of human understanding has caused many to claim complementary propositions in biblical revelation and theology. The early church knowingly formulated the most central doctrines of Christian faith in complementarian form. One sees this in the church's defense of God's triune nature and of the idea that Jesus is truly man and truly God at the same time.

In my view, such complementarity can play a vital role in resolving unnecessary disputes among Christians. We tend to play one side of complementarity off against the other or

to overemphasize one part of the complementarity. Thus, in the early church the humanity of Jesus was played off against his divinity, or the fact that Jesus was obedient to his Father was set against the fact that he is one in essence and rank.

Knowledge itself, arguably, is complementarian, for which reason Guy Marcel Clicqué discusses 'circular complementarity'.²⁴ In the study of the Bible, for instance, there is knowledge which God's revelation teaches and which brings about a change in the thinking of the individual who studies the revelation. And yet, without a prior understanding, the individual cannot study the Scriptures. This hermeneutical circle is not an admission of something unscientific. Rather, it demonstrates the multi-sided nature of truth and knowledge.

Complementarity is not the result of theological compromises between various theological systems. Rather, it arises from the revelation of Scripture itself. Complementarity is the consequence of the attempt to produce systematic theology, which is to allow all of Scripture to speak; indeed, the Reformation spoke of '*tota scriptura*'. When Jesus is revealed to us as man as well as God, it is not our task to play both sides off against each other. Rather, it is to see them together and to confess them simultaneously.

It is frequently the case in the Bible that two sides of a coin (or even more sides) are named in one breath, that is, two biblical doctrines are presented that apparently contradict each other and call for a complementarian understanding. Let us consider some

Complementary Perspectives', in *Rethinking Theology and Science: Six Models for the Current Dialogue*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen and J. Wentzel van Huyssteen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 165.

²² Kaiser, *The Logic of Complementarity*, 340–54.

²³ See James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt, 'Barth, Bohr, and Dialectic', in *Religion and Science*, ed. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildmann (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 271–89; most comprehensively, Kaiser, *The Logic of Complementarity*, 230–377.

²⁴ Clicqué, *Differenz und Parallelität*, 222–28.

examples.

In Genesis 2:15, the instruction given to man regarding the earth was to 'work it' and 'take care of it,' or both to change and to maintain it. Theoretically these exclude each other, and yet in everyday life they belong inseparably together.

In Psalm 51:18–21 one reads, 'You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ... Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.' Here one finds that sacrifices are initially not desired, and then they are indeed accepted.

From 1 John 1:5 to 3:10, John alternates between four basic statements: 'No one who is born of God will continue to sin' (3:9); 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves' (1:8); 'If we confess our sins ...' (1:9); and 'My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin' (2:1). These four statements—that a Christian does not sin, that every Christian sins, that every Christian should confess his or her sins, and that every Christian should desist from sin—do not contradict each other. Rather, they belong together.

In 1 Corinthians 8–10, Paul initially opposes those who participate in idol worship but then also takes a position against those who believe that meat dedicated to idols may not be eaten.

These relatively modest examples should prepare us to see similar complementarity with regard to some central doctrines of the Christian faith. For example, Christoph Haufe has written as follows regarding the presence of both salvation by faith

and the necessity of good works in Paul's writings:

For a start, this specifically means that for each person who invokes Paul, both lines of understanding have to be binding, and on the other hand, that both lines of understanding contradicting each other have to be able to find a place in a single human subject. ... Something can only be evaluated as orthodox when it contains both, and every piece of theological work and sermon which does not reflect *both* has to be seen as non-Pauline. This is done instead of taking only one line of understanding as a criterion of Pauline Christianity and thereby branding the other as heretical, and thus having to brand it as heretical in Paul ... Paul versus Paul?²⁵

The relationship between predestination and human responsibility cannot be resolved except by reference to complementarity. Alister E. McGrath has poignantly described the view of Augustine on this matter:

According to Augustine, if one wants to do justice to the richness and the complexity of biblical statements on this topic, one has to simultaneously hold to the absolute sovereignty of God and to true human freedom and responsibility. The problematic nature of simplifying the contestation to the sovereignty of God or human freedom runs into a serious challenge to the Christian understanding of the manner in which God justifies

²⁵ Christoph Haufe, *Die sittliche Rechtfertigung des Paulus* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1957), 37–38.

humanity.²⁶

The Bible makes people as completely responsible as individuals. And yet this responsibility extends only to the area of responsibility which God has given humankind. God stands above this in his omnipotence and directs the creation. It is from this omnipotence that human responsibility and the command given to people are justified in the first place.

Indeed, both ideas appear beside each other in Philippians 2:12–13: ‘Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.’ At this point, the knowledge that God is the ultimate cause of all things does not lead to passivity but rather to an expectation that we will ‘work out our salvation’.

In a similar fashion, good works by Christians in Ephesians 2:8–10 are bound up with God’s sovereign action: ‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.’

I would propose that each of the following pairs of concepts affirmed in Scripture illustrates complementarity:

- Faith and works in salvation
- God’s sovereignty and human responsibility
- Assurance of salvation and the risk of losing salvation

- Law and grace
- God’s mercy and God’s wrath
- The priesthood of all believers and the need for teaching and leadership offices in the church
- Self-fulfilment and self-denial
- Mature faith and childlike faith
- God as transcendent and as immanent
- The witness of the Spirit and witnessing by people
- Christian liberty and obedience to law

If we fail to affirm both sides of these pairs of biblical doctrines, we risk falling into error. As C. S. Lewis wrote:

That is the devil getting at us. He always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors.²⁷

The biblical formulation of this truth is ‘Do not turn aside ... to the right or to the left’ (Deut 17:11).

The Bible often presents two sides of the same coin. Taken together, both sides provide biblical truth and biblical ethics. If we emphasize one side too heavily at the expense of the other, or if we handle certain biblical truths in either too lax or too rigid manner, we can expect figuratively to fall off either the left or right side of the horse.

²⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Der Weg der christlichen Theologie* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1997), 436.

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Christentum schlechthin* (Cologne: J. Hoegner, 1956), 228–29.

Books Reviewed

R. W. L. Moberly

The Bible in a Disenchanted Age: The Enduring Possibility of Christian Faith

Reviewed by Kenny Silva

Christopher A. Castaldo

Talking with Catholics about the Gospel: A Guide for Evangelicals

Reviewed by Maarten Hertoghs

Jonathan W. McIntosh

The Flame Imperishable: Tolkien, St. Thomas, and the Metaphysics of Faerie

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Book Reviews

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***The Bible in a Disenchanted Age:
The Enduring Possibility of
Christian Faith***

R. W. L. Moberly

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018

Hb., 240 pp., bibliog., indices

***Reviewed by Kenny Silva, Ph.D.
student in systematic theology, Trinity
Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield,
IL, USA***

Why should we privilege the Bible above any other sacred text? This is the fundamental question that Moberly, a professor of theology and biblical interpretation at Durham University, seeks to answer. Modern admonitions that we should read Scripture like any other book once traded on the assumption that, in doing so, interpreters would prove that Scripture was *unlike* any other book. What this interpretive posture lacked, however, was an account of why that should be so. As Christian identity eroded in culture and the academy, the assumption fell away and the Bible did, indeed, become a text like any other. This leaves us facing the question of why the Bible should be treated differently from other texts.

Moberly answers this question by proposing a threefold typology for reading the Bible: history, classic, Scripture (42). Throughout the book, he unpacks and illustrates his proposal by comparing Virgil's *Aeneid* with Daniel 7 and, in the final chapter, with Matthew 28. Each type of reading, Moberly contends, is legitimate, for 'it is entirely possible to take the Bible seriously and to benefit from so doing, without taking it religiously' (50). Although the first two types (history and classic) operate independently of any consideration of faith, they do not contradict faith. Ultimately, the historical and literary qualities of the Bible augment its religious dimension.

How, then, can readers be compelled to engage the Bible *as Scripture*? Here, Moberly invokes Jonathan Z. Smith's phenomenon of canon. Human beings interpret their world through a narrow lens, followed by 'a subsequent expanding of the interpretive power of that narrowed focus' (82). In short, we extrapolate from our limited experience to make sense of the world. This phenomenon is every bit as true of fundamentalist use of the Bible as of Darwin and Dawkins whose naturalistic focus guides them to interpret the world through a decidedly anti-theistic lens. Therefore, the church plays a crucial role as the embodied

plausibility structure in which readers come to believe that the Bible is a word from God: 'The truth value of the Bible as Bible is inseparable from recognition of the church as its plausibility structure' (108).

But still, what makes belief in *this* sacred text and its deity 'a good thing' (131)? Moberly explores Jesus' teaching in John 7 to describe the process of coming to faith in terms of persuasion and response, trust and truth (140). First, one must be open to the embodied witness of Christians for whom the Bible offers a true God and a viable option for present life. Second, this process requires an existential openness to and engagement with grace. In the company of trustworthy individuals, the Bible manifests as a better window into cosmic reality than any other text. As Moberly says, 'If Jesus is the Word "through whom all things were made" (John 1:3), then to come to faith is to come to a grasp of the way the world really is, to learn to be attuned to the rhythm of the universe' (165).

Moberly offers a learned exploration of the Bible's place in our present age. Even if readers are not willing to read the Bible as Scripture, there indeed is some benefit to be derived from engaging it as history or as classic literature. The unavoidable question, however, is whether such benefits sufficiently accord with Scripture's stated program of making believers 'wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ' (2 Tim 3:15). While Moberly does treat the religious aspect of Bible reading at length, he nonetheless leaves open the legitimacy of *not* reading the text as Scripture. This will strike many readers as 'too thin' (3) an account of Scripture's function within the economy of God's self-communication. Would Jesus legitimate a mode of reading Scripture that does not acknowledge its *telos* and does did not ultimately lead to communion

with him (cf. Jn 5:39–40)?

These concerns notwithstanding, Moberly raises an important issue by discussing the church's role in confirming to readers the Bible's authority as Scripture. Although we do not view God's truth as contingent upon its local expression, we must nevertheless acknowledge the power—even the necessity—of that truth's embodied witness in the life of the Church. As John writes, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6), and the canon of Scripture is the text that bears witness to Him (Jn 5:39). Even so, it is through the church, where God's love for his people manifests itself in our love for one another; that outsiders will see the meaning of our devotion to Christ (Jn 13:35) and take an interest in the words that bear witness to him.

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Talking with Catholics about the Gospel: A Guide for Evangelicals

Christopher A. Castaldo

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015

Pb., 192 pp., notes, index

Reviewed by Maarten Hertoghs, pastor of the Evangelical Church in Kuurne, Belgium

Is it possible to talk with Catholics about the gospel? This question divides the evangelical movement. Some evangelicals stress the disagreements, making it nearly impossible to see that there are brothers and sisters among Catholics. Others simply don't see any essential differences.

Castaldo's book is an accessible guide towards an honest conversation that leaves room for differences and similarities. Castaldo puts great emphasis on

grace, truth, honesty and humility. Talking about the gospel, he notes, should go hand in hand with loving God and loving our neighbour.

One helpful chapter deals with understanding Catholics. Castaldo stresses that not all Catholics are the same, distinguishing between traditional, evangelical and cultural Catholics. On the other hand, he challenges evangelical Protestant readers to evaluate their own posture towards Catholics, which can range from an 'anti-Roman Catholic approach' to one of 'internal renewal' in which distinctions are avoided or minimized. For Castaldo, the big question is whether our view of Catholics poses an obstacle to loving them.

The chapter about Catholic history since the sixteenth century is particularly useful for those who don't read historical theology, but also for those who don't know why Catholics do the things they do.

When he turns to the disagreements between Catholics and evangelical Protestants, Castaldo highlights two fundamental issues: the question of (church) authority and the doctrine of justification. A Protestant finds supreme authority in Scripture alone; a Catholic points to the pope (or bishops), to Scripture and tradition, and thirdly to the magisterium, or 'the teaching office of the Church whose task is to provide an authentic interpretation of God's word' (90).

Concerning the doctrine of justification, Castaldo points out similarities but says that the fundamental difference can be found in the reason why God ultimately accepts us. A Protestant emphasizes that God accepts him at the moment of conversion, a moment that is followed by a journey towards holiness. A Catholic sees the verdict of God's acceptance at the end of his life, after a faithful life in

which the sacraments play a very important role. He merits divine favour during the journey of his life.

Can we find common ground within these differences? Definitely, Castaldo claims. Concerning justification, Castaldo refers to Bonhoeffer's 'cheap grace'. Faith alone doesn't mean that we don't need the Spirit who sanctifies us. Our life is an ongoing process that shapes us into the image of Christ. Emphasizing this process in our conversations with Catholics can help them to understand that evangelicals also see the need for a faithful life. Concerning authority, Castaldo notes that Catholics view Protestants as having left the apostolic communion five hundred years ago and split into innumerable denominations. Castaldo encourages pointing to the abiding unity among the different Protestant groups regarding the central message of the gospel, namely salvation by grace.

In the final chapter, Castaldo helpfully addresses ten common questions. For example, at question 3 he gives a better understanding of the Catholic mass, refuting three misunderstandings that (as I readily had to acknowledge) are quite prevalent among Protestants. Question 7 deals with the problem of how to articulate doctrinal differences while still calling Catholics brothers and sisters. Citing John 1:14, Castaldo says that Jesus came full of grace *and* truth, so showing grace does not mean that one has to hide the truth.

Castaldo concludes, 'We should not hesitate to dialogue with Catholic friends, learning from one another and celebrating areas of agreement, as long as we are also honest about our differences' (147). Let's keep in mind that love for Christ and for each other should always permeate the conversation.

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The Flame Imperishable: Tolkien, St. Thomas, and the Metaphysics of Faerie

Jonathan S. McIntosh

Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2017

289 pp.

Reviewed by Austin M. Freeman (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), teacher at Founders Classical Academy, Mesquite, Texas, USA

McIntosh explores the ways in which Tolkien draws on the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas to inform his fiction—primarily the creation myth that opens *The Silmarillion*. Although he does not completely confine himself to this work, he leaves aside other Middle-earth tales such as *The Lord of the Rings*.

In the introduction, McIntosh defends his claim that Tolkien should be read as a Thomist, presenting a brief literature survey and a briefer survey of Tolkien's Thomist influence.

Chapter 1 addresses the metaphysics of God. It relies heavily on Velde's reading of Aquinas and the relationship between faith and reason as mutually interpenetrating forces. McIntosh argues that Tolkien employs something of an apologetic of desire, maintaining a tension between God's metaphysical presence and narrative absence. God's absence behind the veil of causality creates a radical display of presence when he tears the veil aside in the gospels. McIntosh also discusses the Trinity in Middle-earth.

In chapter 2, McIntosh covers the Ainur (angels), who are associated with the divine ideas and with freedom in creation. Here, there is no amoral or atheological realm in which possibility can be discussed. Everything is a reflection of the divine nature and thus of what God

as moral lawgiver decides to bring into existence.

Chapter 3 examines the music of the Ainur from an aesthetic perspective, dealing with concepts of harmony and order, dream and reality. McIntosh points out that the divine ideas have more 'reality', or existence in the mind of God, than in creation proper. God creates to benefit his creation. Art is fundamentally an interested rather than abstracted endeavour.

Chapter 4, on the Valar (the most powerful of the angels), addresses whether angels can assist in creation in the way described in the *Ainulindale*. The short answer, for Aquinas, is no. More on this below.

Chapter 5 examines the hierarchy of evil in Middle-earth: creation, sub-creation, preservation, domination, and annihilation. McIntosh also wades into the contested issue of whether Tolkien flirts with Manicheanism and rebuts the claim. There is very little of Thomas in the latter half of this chapter, and McIntosh misreads Shippey as claiming that Tolkien avoids falling into dualism (Shippey considers this possibility but concludes the opposite).

McIntosh has written an intelligent and worthwhile book, rich in insights and full of gleanings from the harvest of Tolkien scholarship. He shows that Tolkien and Thomas are consonant with each other to a large degree. However, McIntosh's main thesis remains unproven.

McIntosh aims to show 'that Tolkien was a metaphysical thinker, that questions concerning the nature of both created and uncreated being significantly inspired and shaped his fiction, and that one of the foremost influences on Tolkien's metaphysical imagination was ... Thomas Aquinas' (1). He purports to use Thomist metaphysics to illuminate

Tolkien's metaphysics and thereby, through Tolkien, to retrieve Thomist metaphysics for the present day (263). Tolkien, says McIntosh, 'purposefully incarnates' the Thomistic metaphysical themes that form the basis of each chapter (261). This can be shown through a study of their 'discernible theological and philosophical affinities' (17).

With the first two facets of his thesis (Tolkien's metaphysical concerns and their influence on his fiction), one can find no fault. However, there is very little to link Tolkien to Thomas directly, except for the former's Catholicism. Tolkien's copy of the *Summa* is mostly unmarked—a crucial point that McIntosh relegates to a footnote. McIntosh must therefore argue that Thomas forms, for Tolkien, an implicit rather than an explicit standard against which things are measured—a trustworthy frame upon which to build, taken on by cultural osmosis. This is, needless to say, hard to prove and a far cry from 'an important and altogether unique landmark in the history of Thomism' (266).

Moreover, where Tolkien explicitly differs from Thomas (such as in his angelology), McIntosh dismisses these instances as demonstrating a Thomism that includes 'creative departure' from Thomas. In other words, Tolkien is Thomist even in his non-Thomism!

It would be much better to say that both Tolkien and Thomas operate from a shared framework, namely orthodox Christianity. This view explains both the similarities and the differences, as the

two are drawing (sometimes different) ideas from the same well. Were Tolkien a self-conscious Thomist, we should expect him both to talk about Aquinas and to agree with him in much more concrete ways than he in fact does. Their similarity to each other is no greater than that between Tolkien and Augustine or any other prominent classical theologian. Indeed, where Thomas held distinctive views that are not widely shared by the church as a whole, we find that Tolkien follows the church rather than the Angelic Doctor (see 147 note 69).

Second, by focusing especially on the *Ainulindale*, McIntosh distorts the pattern of Tolkien's thought and influence. Tolkien was just as much formed by his readings of the old Anglo-Saxon theology of the Midlands as those from the Apennine climes of Aquino; he was just as concerned with fate, death and freedom as with creation and being. To compare one part of one work with one Catholic author, to find some general similarities, and then to conclude that Tolkien, as a cohesive thinker, should be considered a Thomist metaphysician is to put the evaluative cart before the textual horse.

Nevertheless, despite the heavily overplayed thesis statement, this is a well-researched book, and each chapter offers a stimulating study in comparison and contrast between two great Christian thinkers.