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Is Our Quality Higher Than That of the US Presidential Campaign?

As I write this introduction, we are nearing the end of a US presidential election in which, according to social media reports, I can choose between a narcissistic bully and a man in severe cognitive decline.

(Actually, I have another choice. In my state, rapper Kanye West is on the ballot. I've already ordered my bumper sticker reading 'Don't blame me, I voted for Kanye.')

How the US political system ended up in its current dysfunctional status, and how US evangelicals have become widely credited with (or blamed for) a major role in placing America's most unusual president in office, is a long story to which I cannot do justice on this page. (We would welcome thoughtful submissions for our next issue analysing US evangelicals' political behaviour and how to move forward constructively from the November election, however it turns out.)

But many of the comments I've heard during this campaign have expressed disappointment about the quality of the candidates. Amongst the general public, many regret that one candidate is erratic and rude while the other often seems past his prime. Plenty of evangelicals wish they had more options than either an incumbent president of limited policymaking competence and questionable character or a political party perceived as a threat to mainstream Christian views of family, sexuality, the sanctity of life and religious freedom.

I am not in a position to fix that problem, as I am not active in either party at this time and the US has not seen the successful emergence of a new political party in 160 years. But I have been inspired to ensure that whatever work I am responsible for is done with the highest possible quality, as unto the Lord (Col 3:23).

Journal editors, unlike democratic electoral systems, can set high standards for acceptance and make their decisions based on merit. That's what we are trying to do with the new, open-access *Evangelical Review of Theology*. Except for the two contributions by our two World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission leaders (Thomas Schirrmacher and Thomas K. Johnson), every article that appears in this issue has gone through extensive review and revision as we work with our authors to develop broadly relevant, clearly understandable and highly instructive content.

One other aspect of editorial quality that we intend to uphold (unless the growing number of submissions overwhelms us) is to give a thoughtful, sensitive response to every submission. Few things are as exasperating to a writer as an unexplained rejection. Along with publishing the work of globally prominent Christians, we also want to nurture the next generation of promising thinkers.

We hope this issue meets your quality standards too. Either way, we'd love to receive your feedback. Happy reading!

—Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

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Evangelicals and Elections

Efraim Tendero, WEA Secretary General

The US presidential election has drawn much attention to the question of what evangelicals should do in elections. The WEA does not endorse candidates, of course, but Christians have often exerted great impact on the political realm. I would like to articulate some principles that I believe we should all support, regardless of our particular policy views or electoral preferences.

Although all forms of human governance are flawed, democracy, by giving all people a voice, best embodies our conviction that all people are created equal and in God's image. Since making every decision by popular vote is impossible, for purposes of order and efficiency we elect representatives to direct the functions of government.

We should seek to elect leaders of exemplary character and high moral standards, trusting that they will not be corrupted by the temptations of power. In our voting decisions, we should balance considerations of policy positions, character, wisdom and competence. I would argue that character, wisdom and competence are the most essential qualifications, because the people we elect will encounter newly emerging policy challenges not foreseen at the time of the election. However, policy stances can give us a good sense of the values and principles that a prospective leader would apply to any issues.

Campaigns should not be acrimonious. Elections should build up a nation, not exacerbate differences or bring discord and tension to relationships, friendships or even fellowships. Disagreements must be discussed with mutual respect and civility.

Election processes must be honest and secure. Any effort to manipulate an election through coercion or fraud is not only illegal but immoral, because it seeks to subvert God's will and the will of the people. Every qualified citizen should be enfranchised to vote, each ballot should be accurately counted and recorded, and voting should be by secret ballot to ensure freedom of choice. In many situations, Christians may honour God and serve the people just as effectively by working to ensure free and fair elections as by campaigning for a preferred candidate. All candidates and citizens should respect the will of the people as reflected in the election results.

Though our political party and candidate preferences may sometimes differ, our common desire for the ultimate good of the country and our willingness to put national benefit above personal gain should unite all evangelicals in public service. After an election has been decided, we should pray for and support the elected leaders as God has commanded us, even if they are not the ones we campaigned or voted for. We should also be quick to forgive anyone who may have hurt us or seek forgiveness from anyone we may have hurt in the heat and divisiveness of the political process.

Whatever our differences, let us pray and work together towards the goals of peaceful elections and good governance in every nation.

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The Protester, the Dissident and the Christian

Thomas K. Johnson

When and why should Christians protest? How can we turn the hearts of other protesters towards the hope offered by the Christian gospel? This article, revised from a sermon originally preached during the Arab Spring uprisings, answers those timely questions as we experience another year of widespread protests.

The protests and riots that have exploded in the United States and even globally since the death of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 have taken my mind back to 2011, a year in which *Time* magazine declared 'The Protester' to be its person of the year.[1] Few years in recorded history before 2011 were so strongly characterized by a sense that something is terribly wrong with the whole world. On the streets of Tunis, Cairo, Tripoli, Athens, Damascus, New York, Beijing and London, the participants in the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street uprisings publicly encouraged each other across the globe. Around the world, people were angry over the perception that their friends, neighbours and fellow citizens were being treated unjustly.

The events sparking the protests were so diverse as to resist a unified description. It is hard to say whether any good results came from some of the efforts; revolutions often end poorly.

The editors of *Time* magazine could not have known that their announcement would be upstaged four days later. One of the most admired revolutionaries of recent history died on 18 December 2011: Vaclav Havel, the prominent author and dissident who contributed significantly to the fall of communism in 1989 and subsequently became the first democratic president of the Czech Republic. Havel's velvet revolution ended well, leading to decades of freedom and economic growth. His state funeral was held on 23 December 2011 at Saint Vitus Cathedral in Prague, after three days of official public mourning.

I have used two distinct though overlapping terms here: *protester* (for the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street) and *dissident* (for Havel). A dissident is a long-term opponent of an established religious or political institution. Dissidents may be either open or very reserved about expressing their opposition to the establishment. Protesters, meanwhile, take part in public demonstrations in response to a particular

Thomas K. Johnson (PhD, University of Iowa) is senior advisor to the World Evangelical Alliance's Theological Commission. This essay is updated from a message originally delivered at the International Church of Prague on 1 January 2012.

1 *Time* magazine named 'The Protester' as its 2011 Person of the Year on 14 December 2011. See Rick Stengel, 'Person of the Year Introduction', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444johnson1.

event or policy. Many protesters seek only a specific policy change, not a fundamental change in a government or religion, so they are not dissidents. On the other hand, dissidents who express their desires in an underground manner are not generally considered protesters, since protests are public events.

I have long pondered, as far back as the race riots of 1968, how Jesus would relate to protests and revolutionary rhetoric. Wasn't Jesus himself a dissident who engaged in years of conflict with the authorities of his time? Isn't Palm Sunday a global celebration of the most famous protest ever, Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on a donkey to cleanse a corrupt temple? Was not Jesus' unjust death the greatest unveiling of the depth of dishonesty and corruption to which religious and political authorities can fall?

Now that George Floyd's death and others have provoked millions to engage in a new round of protests against racism and discrimination, I am again asking, 'What would Jesus do?' However, we will not find a tweet-sized answer to this question.

The biblical message pushes us to be radicals, deeply dissatisfied with our societies as they currently exist. The biblical message is much more than a message of protest against the deep-seated evils of our world, but it should not be less. Similarly, although it should also be many more things, the Christian community should not be less than a community of dissidents, talking about what is wrong with our world and offering solutions. And we should especially be offering a message of reconciliation with God and with our neighbours to our fellow dissidents who do not yet believe in Christ.

In that spirit, I will propose some suggestions first to protesters and dissidents, and then to church members.

The hidden Godward assumptions of dissidents and protesters

Protests and dissident movements start with several convictions that might remain hidden, though a few may articulate them openly. I call these assumptions 'Godward' because, I contend, these convictions are God-given even among people who are atheists or uncertain about what they believe about God.

1. *Though we are sometimes mistaken in our views, we know that there exists a standard of right and wrong that is above our feelings; on this basis we see that certain things are wrong.*

When people argue, whether in private or on the streets, there is inevitably an appeal, perhaps implicit, to an ethical standard by which our actions may be judged. When people are of the same religion, they may refer to a religious text and say, 'The Bible says' or 'the Koran says'. When people do not share a religion, the norm referenced may be less explicit; nevertheless, it is crucial. Normal people do not say, 'There are no standards, so do what you want.' When we engage in debate, we are implicitly claiming, 'According to the standards which we all know, I am right and you are

wrong'; we never say, 'Let's fight like animals.'[2] This unwritten standard has traditionally been called the natural moral law, sometimes more simply just natural law. Protest movements are screams for people to pay attention to this universal standard.

Within Christianity, the natural moral law is seen as a dimension of creation, part of how our minds have been fashioned in the image of the divine Mind, such that we can hardly avoid distinguishing between right and wrong. Globally, people make similar assumptions about general standards of right and wrong, even across diverse cultures.[3] Christian theology claims this natural moral law is a prominent theme in God's ongoing general revelation, God's speech which comes to humanity in multiple ways throughout his creation. The result is that most people know basic principles about right and wrong even if they cannot explain this knowledge. Protesters and dissidents depend on this knowledge.

2. *There is something special about human beings; people have dignity that is worthy of respect, justice, and care.*

Within Christian and Jewish teaching, this is called the image of God in humans. The term recalls the Genesis creation account: 'God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27). We might call it the reflection of divine dignity in the other. Whether or not they are familiar with this religious teaching, morally healthy people recognize something about people that is different from other things. I often put my feet on my desk when I am writing (an old leg injury makes this more comfortable); it would be terribly wrong for me to put my feet on another human being, regardless of that person's race, politics or religion.

Human uniqueness is assumed by protesters, and this assumption merits frequent mention. This fact speaks to the dignity of the people whose fundamental rights have been robbed, but it also speaks to the dignity of the protester, as well as the dignity of the people addressed by a protest: public authorities and voters. The complex human communications in protests, then, take place among people with God-given dignity and a God-given sense of right and wrong.

3. *There are many things in every society that are terribly wrong; these wrongs need to be criticized and changed. But we must be careful, because misguided efforts to achieve change can easily make things even more wrong.*

Morally sensitive people come to the conclusion that things around them are horribly wrong because of the Godward assumptions discussed above. The universal

2 This analysis of moral discourse is heavily dependent on C. S. Lewis, especially *Mere Christianity* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1952), 15–26. For an assessment of Lewis on this topic, see Thomas K. Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics: An Evangelical Proposal* (Bonn: VKW, 2005), 85–105, available at https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444johnson2.

3 For a mid-twentieth-century study of this topic, see C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), appendix: 'Illustrations of the Tao'. For a late-twentieth-century effort, see the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* (Chicago: Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993), https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444johnson3a. For a more recent, official Roman Catholic discussion of this theme, see *In Search of a Global Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law* (International Theological Commission of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2009 in French and Italian, 2013 in English), https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444johnson3b.

moral standard and our awareness of God-given dignity provide the conditions that make morally serious protesting possible. However, not every attempt to criticize or change society leads to good results. Terrible mistakes with devasting results are easy to commit.

Before moving to the former Soviet Union in 1994, I read several books by Karl Marx. I saw the differences between Marx's own teaching and the actual practice of communism. This experience granted me a window into the disillusionment and despair that many people felt after communism failed.

Marx thought most people were miserable because of their alienation from themselves, their work and their neighbours. In the broadest terms, he promised that a revolutionary change of economic relations and the end of economic classes would bring an end to alienation. Though revolutionaries claiming to follow Marx came into power in 1917 (in Russia) and again after World War II in 1945 to 1948 (across much of Eastern Europe), their revolutions did not fulfil that promise. Though some poverty was reduced and some people attained a low degree of economic security, these gains came at the cost of despotic control by paranoid secret police and the loss of the freedoms of speech and religion, with millions severely persecuted or killed. Everyone was afraid their friend or relative would report them to the police for something they said in private.

Not only did the treatment (communism) not fit the diagnosis (Marxist thought), but the diagnosis included fatal mistakes. Long before the end of European communism in 1989, most people on both sides of the Iron Curtain knew that communism dramatically increased human alienation and suffering. Marx and the communists ignored what St. Augustine described as the 'lust for domination' (*libido dominandi*)[4] or what Friedrich Nietzsche described as the 'will to power' (*der Wille zur Macht*).[5]

Such philosophical mistakes inherent in Marxism and communism turned hope for a better future into suffering and despair, but the religious mistake was even more distorted. The proletariat, the working class, was described as something like a godlike saviour that would deliver society from the evils of the upper class or bourgeoisie, whereas belief in God was an opiate that prevented the proletariat from seizing control to create a new society. I come from a working-class family and know many wonderful working people, but they do not have the godlike ability to create a fundamentally new society. This profound theological error led to catastrophe in the many countries that were controlled by communism. Theology matters.

Protesters, dissidents and revolutionaries build on convictions which I have described as Godward: convictions about a standard of right and wrong, about human dignity, and about the religious desire to help people who are suffering indignity and injustice. So did Marx and the early communists! But massive mistakes about religion and philosophy led to human disaster. Unfortunately, it has been my experience that protesters and dissidents sometimes resist discussing these matters, perhaps because their anger at injustice is so hot.

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4 Augustine's phrase appears in the preface to book 1 of *The City of God*.

5 Nietzsche used this phrase in various essays. For example, in *Beyond Good and Evil,* paragraph 13, he wrote, 'Life itself is will to power.'

In 2011, I gave a lecture about human rights for a group of Belarusian pro-democracy dissidents who were in exile from their homeland, out of reach from the authoritarian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko (another target of the 2020 round of protests). My understanding of human rights is organically tied to normal Christian beliefs about creation, the fall and even the Incarnation, so I did not avoid those topics. I knew that some of the dissidents were Christians. But I felt tension in the room, even resistance, when I moved from the political level of hating totalitarianism to the level of discussing a universal moral law and the ultimate source of human dignity—God. People are sometimes frightened to connect political convictions with convictions about human nature and the nature of the universe, as I have just done. I soon perceived that for these dissidents, organized religion was linked with an oppressive government. That is a serious problem which merits our attention. Inauthentic religion easily gets everything wrong in relation to the state, as Jesus experienced at the end of his earthly life.

The Christian dissident's mind

What I have said thus far was intended for protesters and dissidents who have not yet clarified their relationship with the Christian message. Now I will address people who understand themselves as Christians with four themes that should prepare us to become more effective Christian dissidents and to engage in thoughtful Christian proclamation in the midst of our quests for justice.

1. *The Christian can take the social criticism of the protester and go deeper, to articulate God's criticism of sinful humanity. Injustices in society are the result of sin, including not recognizing God.*

The protester and the dissident start with the conviction that something in society is profoundly wrong. Those who read the Bible should notice the similarity to the Old Testament prophets, many of whom had highly conflicted relationships with society. Some 2,700 years ago, Amos proclaimed, 'This is what the Lord says: "For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom"' (Amos 1:6). Amos assumed that all normal people know that kidnapping and slave trading are atrocities, because people have a conscience informed by the universal moral law. What Amos pointedly added to his description, beyond what most protesters talk about, is the wrath of God. God is angry when people are mistreated.

On some occasions, the prophets criticized Israel and Judah based on the law of Moses. But on other occasions, such as in Amos 1, they spoke to the surrounding nations based on moral standards known to everyone, regardless of the religions the peoples followed. What I said above about an unwritten standard can be derived from Amos. This is where the proclamations of protesters and dissidents are frequently deficient; in spite of great moral courage, some lack the spiritual courage to recognize we are sinners before God. We all easily ignore the greatest injustice against Persons in the universe: that people ignore the dignity of God.

We Christians should borrow a page from other protesters and dissidents and become much more courageous about confronting injustices in our world. However, if we accept Amos as a role model, we need to add a much deeper level to our social

criticism. Christian dissidents and protesters need to address the deepest level of the problem: sin, alienation from God, and even the wrath of God. If we do this, there will be no separation of our Christian proclamation from our concerns as social dissidents.

2. *The Christian can take the hope proclaimed by the protester and dissident and go deeper to proclaim our ultimate political hope, a new heaven and a new earth.*

People always look for a source of hope and courage that is based on a promise. Even when despair and disillusionment threaten, people can find hope for a better future, so long as they have at least a flimsy promise. The human heart can hardly resist trusting in promises. At the core of every protest and dissident movement is a promise of a better future, whether for us or for our children.

Social and political hope is both precious and fragile. Hope empowers people to work towards a better future, even if it will cost blood, sweat and tears. Though I am deeply concerned about deceptive hope, I think hope can be a tool of God's common grace to bring about a more prosperous, free and just future. When some of my ancestors lived under conditions of terrible poverty, hope gave them the courage to bring about a better future.

Recognizing the depth of sin and foolishness should not destroy political hope. The real threat to hope comes from confusing secondary hope with ultimate hope. As Christians, we should trust in God's promise that he will give us a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1). At that time, 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away' (21:4). This is our ultimate hope in Christ. We believe it will come after the end of history, when, as we say in the Apostles' Creed, Jesus will come as the Judge of the living and the dead.

If people do not place their hope in God, they continually place their ultimate hope in the promises of a human saviour. Already in the time of Jesus, some of the Jews put too much hope in a political saviour who would free them from the hated Roman Empire. Some of the worst events in the twentieth century were caused by people putting ultimate hope in a secular saviour. Hitler, Stalin and Mao are prime examples. Death and destruction follow when people trust the promises of a mere human as if he were a divine Messiah.

We Christians should boldly say that no leader or ideology can bring heaven to earth, but that does not mean we simply accept the world as it is. Our ultimate hope, based in God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth, should give us hope for improvements in this age.

Only Jesus will wipe away every tear, but we can wipe away some tears. Only Jesus will bring the end of mourning and pain, but we can reduce mourning and pain. Jesus is the only ultimate Victor over injustice, but perhaps we can reduce human trafficking, racial discrimination and religious persecution. And all our efforts to change things in this world should stand as a sign and symbol that Jesus will ultimately wipe away every tear and punish every injustice.

We must protest injustice as a sign that Jesus will ultimately end all injustice. And while we protest and work for change, we must always say clearly that our limited efforts point to the real and eternal hope, that Jesus is the ultimate Saviour.

3. *The Christian can describe the body of Christ as an alternate, dissident community that points to our eternal hope.*

It is characteristic of dissident movements to form alternative communities with their own internal cultures. For example, the dissidents in communist Czechoslovakia had their own foundational document (Charter 77), their own small-group meetings, their own underground literature, and even their own conflicts and differences of opinion. Consider the people who gathered in Hahrir Square in Cairo during the 2011 protests against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak: the estimated 50,000 people quickly developed their own internal culture, with norms, customs and organization. Once people perceive their society to be fundamentally flawed, they very naturally form an alternate society, a counterculture.

Already in the first century, the basic Christian confession referenced Christians' relation to their society. Roman society said, 'Caesar is Lord'; the Christians said, 'Jesus is Lord.' With these words they not only described their trust in Jesus; they also said they did not trust in the religious promise at the core of the Roman Empire, the religious ideology that shaped the society. The New Testament church became a counterculture.

The counterculture they formed, however, was not disconnected from their world; rather, a central task of the church is always to carry the word of God's judgement and of God's grace into society. Such a thoughtful interaction with one's surrounding society includes recognizing what is good in a society. The early Christians recognized the goods brought by the Roman Empire, such as roads, law enforcement and a common language, that helped people and families to flourish. They also saw these benefits of the Roman Empire as part of the God-given *kairos*, the appointed time for taking the gospel to the nations. Then and now, believing in Jesus makes us an alternative community with a mission.

In the Western world, we have a history of mistakes in this matter. I grew up in a Dutch community in the US state of Michigan, where the church was frequently seen as providing the moral coherence for society. As a result, we sometimes lacked a clear sense of where we needed to be dissidents in relation to our society. This was part of the lingering heritage of 'Christendom', dating back to the time of Constantine. There were problems with this model of faith and society; confessing faith in Jesus was too much like promising to be a good citizen. The element of rejecting the false standards and false messiahs of the world was sometimes weak, though a strong sense that the world needed Jesus provided a corrective.

As soon as we describe the church as a dissident community, with its own standards and way of life, we encounter a recurring problem. Consider the words of Nietzsche, one of my favourite atheists: 'If they want me to believe in their redeemer, they should look like redeemed people.' For a long time, I thought Nietzsche was right. But we have this problem: as Christians, we want to look like something we are not. We want to pretend to already be fully redeemed, when in fact we are still in process. To be honest, we still find incidents of injustice, abuse and betrayal

occurring amongst us. We are in the process of being redeemed, but that process will not be complete until Jesus returns.

What makes us Christians a dissident people is our belief that Jesus is Lord, which means there is no other lord, saviour or messiah. And we accept the message that Jesus is Lord with universal intent, meaning that Jesus is the Messiah whom everyone needs. We are carriers of this message of hope for all the world.

4. *Like every dissident community, we want to make massive changes in our entire society while we also preach the gospel to all.*

If the dissident starts with the conviction that something is fundamentally wrong in society, then the dissident community wants to bring about real changes. This is true of almost every dissident movement around the world. It is their defining quality. They desire to contribute to a better future.

This is also true for us as a Christian community. Our dissident agenda should be on two levels, a moral level and a spiritual level. For example, we long to dramatically reduce human trafficking, divorce, abortion, religious persecution and racism; we also want people to know God through faith in Jesus. Throughout Christian history, Christians have often recognized this two-sided calling: to declare peace with God while also making significant contributions to society.

Whether our social contribution is to write treatises on the concept of human dignity, to adopt a child or to start a local business, our two-sided agenda flows from the two-part revelation of God: his general revelation of a universal standard and of human dignity makes humane communities possible in this world, while his special revelation in the Bible proclaims redemption in Christ. As Christians, we want to make it possible for people to come to real faith in Jesus; as a dissident Christian community, we seek to produce positive changes in our societies. Our world needs a new generation who are both preachers and dissidents.

Our assignment

In conclusion, I propose this 'to do' list for Christians and other dissidents:

1. Recognize that our world is deeply flawed. This is the starting point for any dissident or protester.
2. Accept your role as a dissident in relation to society.
3. Consider that honest protests are only possible on the basis of what God is already doing, namely giving us the universal moral law and human dignity.
4. Develop courage to talk comfortably about our central Christian convictions as the foundation for being truly serious dissidents.
5. Identify ways in which you can both protest against and contribute to your society.
6. Confess that our churches have made serious mistakes about how to address the injustices of our world, compelling us to pursue improvements.

May we have the courage to function as serious Christian protesters and dissidents, so that our lives may point back to the human dignity given in creation and point forward towards the final end of alienation and injustice, our ultimate hope.

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The Invisible Global War: An African 'Theocological' Assessment of Responses to COVID-19

Ebenezer Yaw Blasu

How should the experience of COVID-19 shape future human behaviour? This article examines responses by both Christians and practitioners of primal (traditional) African religions, from a perspective that combines theology and ecology. Drawing on scientific and spiritual principles, it argues that COVID-19 may be calling us to avoid forms of resource exploitation that disturb the sensitive balance between human activity and nature.

Our world is living through a period of surprise. One hundred years ago, the First World War coupled with the Spanish flu radically reshaped the world; a century later, COVID-19 is our unpleasant surprise—although some would argue that we should not have been surprised at all by the arrival of a global pandemic.[1] Many have described the battle against the coronavirus as like a global war, one with major and lasting social consequences.

In this paper, I consider implications of COVID-19 for how we prepare, particularly in the African context, for life after the worst has passed. I apply a framework of African 'theocology' (i.e. theology plus ecology) to consider changes in human values and behaviours that may be necessary to sustain planetary health in our generation. Along the way, I will attempt to reconstruct the holistic reality of primal or indigenous religious cosmologies and their possible contributions to Christian creation care.

The previous pandemic in Africa

Looking back at how Africa responded to the Spanish flu in 1918–1919 provides useful historical perspective. The second of the Spanish flu's three waves was lethal in Africa, because the continent largely missed the first wave and so lacked the

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1 See Bryan Walsh, 'The History of Pandemics', BBC, 25 March 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu1. Walsh wrote, 'Over the past 15 years, there has been no shortage of articles and white papers issuing dire warnings that a global pandemic involving a new respiratory disease was only a matter of time.'

immunity that people exposed to the first wave had developed. Nearly 2 percent of Africa's population died within six months. In the Gold Coast (now Ghana), more than 60,000 died, or 4 percent of a population of 1.5 million.[2]

In such a traumatic situation, both indigenes and Western missionaries looked to religion for explanations. Some people in Ghana's northern districts saw the pandemic as a sign of the end of the world, while for people in the coastal districts it was 'the hand of God at work', for which reason 'an open-air prayer meeting on 15 October 1918 was well attended.'[3] Some other Africans attributed the epidemic to the anger of their deities over the unspeakable amount of human blood spilled and environmental damage caused in World War I. A common expression among Malawians, for instance, was that 'the "war-air" had brought the new and devastating disease, blown by the winds from the front.'[4]

Drawing on their holistic worldview and embedded religiosity, Africans could best understand and respond to the 1918–1919 influenza catastrophe in terms of theocological phenomena. That is, they identified factors underpinning the pandemic in terms of theistic religious cosmology and ecological consciousness.[5] For them, the pandemic was a sign of God's (or other divinities') displeasure with the ecological pollutions of World War I.

Some suggested that God was angry with the proliferation of 'generic sins like immorality, drunkenness and lax church attendance'. Others, however, attributed the immediate cause of the pandemic to the 'sinful science' employed unethically by human warlords. Historian Howard Phillips explains, 'One novel sin, though, was that of "worshipping science", a real "si(g)n" of the times.' For Calvinists, it was as if humanity had arrogantly perfected the ability to kill and wantonly destroy life created by God.[6]

Theological and scientific interpretations of COVID-19

Not surprisingly, Africans are interpreting the present pandemic in similar fashion. The All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) held a virtual meeting on 5 June 2020 to discuss 'Ten Theological Theses on the COVID-19 Pandemic' that would guide the responses of the ecumenical Christian body in Africa. I participated in that conference from Ghana.

The first thesis cautioned Christians to be discerning and circumspect in discussing causal factors of the pandemic, since only God fully knows exactly what

2 Howard Phillips, 'Why Did It Happen? Religious Explanations of the "Spanish" Flu Epidemic in South Africa', *Historically Speaking* 9, no. 7 (September–October 2008): 34–36; Phillips, 'Influenza Pandemic (Africa)' in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel et al. (Free University of Berlin, 2014), doi: 10.15463/ie1418.10431 (https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu2); David K. Paterson, 'The Influenza Epidemic of 1918–19 in the Gold Coast', *Journal of African History* 24 (1983): 495–96.

3 Paterson, 'Influenza Epidemic', 489, 491.

4 Jan-Bart Gewald, 'Spanish Influenza in Africa: Some Comments Regarding Source Materials and Future Research', African Studies Centre (ASC) working paper 77/2007 (Leiden, the Netherlands), 16, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu4.

5 See Ebenezer Y. Blasu, *African Theocology: Studies in African Religious Creation Care* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 48.

6 Phillips, 'Why Did It Happen?'

is happening and why. (Accordingly, we should all exercise caution and humility in proposing explanations.) The other nine theses were as follows:

2. We should test every claim of prophecy using sound biblical and theological interpretations.
3. We should be cautious in the use of apocalyptic interpretation of the pandemic even though it may be biblical, to avoid unnecessary panic.
4. Even in suffering and death, we know God promises to be with us.
5. COVID-19 is a wake-up call for the Church to review our relationships with God and all creation to ensure integrity of planetary health.
6. COVID-19 is a reminder of the Church's calling to be in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, based on African *ubuntu* [i.e. shared sense of community], Christian self-understanding and the glory of God.
7. We understand better what abundant life means: not to accumulate but to share material and spiritual wealth for the improvement of all.
8. Physical distancing to contain the spread of COVID-19 calls for contextualizing our theology of gathering together as a Church.
9. We need to rethink our ways of celebrating life, whether with gladness or sadness.
10. We call on governments to fulfil their rightful duties of welfare to all.

There was no thesis suggesting that COVID-19 was a Chinese biological weapon, although that conspiracy theory has circulated widely in some contexts.[7] However, African theocology, characterized by a holistic worldview that integrates religion and science, emphasizes the need to integrate Christian faith and ethics in the application of modern technoscience.[8]

Viewing the situation with integrated theological and ecological lenses, we may not rule out the possibility that the pandemic could represent one of 'Mother Nature's ways of resisting humanity's assault on her essential life systems'[9] and, hence, commission of ecological sin against her. A European scholar asked a traditional priest (*bokor*) in Accra, Ghana, 'What is the [cause of the] virus pandemic?' In his response, the priest stated that 'maybe man [sic] has crossed the path of Nature', because 'if we don't wrong Nature, Nature will not attack us.'[10] If we were to go looking for possible sins against nature in Ghana, we could find plenty of candidates: 'the escalating environmental degradation of land, water bodies and forests; sand winning, illegal mining or galamsey [the term used in Ghana for illicit gold mining], extensive logging of forests, the proliferation of plastic products and waste, the dumping of e-waste, the growth in vehicular traffic'[11] as well as hunting

7 Michael T. Clare, 'Rethinking Our Relationship to the Natural World after COVID-19', *The Nation*, 3 April 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu7.

8 Blasu, *African Theocology*, 91.

9 Clare, 'Rethinking Our Relationship'.

10 Angelantonio Grossi, 'Religion on Lockdown: On the Articulation of Vodu, Media and Science', *Religious Matters* (Utrecht University), 15 April 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu10.

11 Allison M. Howell, 'African Spirituality and Christian Ministry: "Discerning the Signs of the Times" in Our Environment and Community', *Journal of African Christian Thought* 20, no. 1 (June 2017): 12.

down endangered species like pangolins and illegal howling of 'juvenile fish through transhipment or [the] "Saiko" system'.[12]

In particular, COVID-19 could reflect humanity's role in planetary health perturbations—that is, in affecting the finely balanced relationships between human beings, other living things and ecosystems. 'Scientists, by and large, believe the virus originated in bats and was transmitted to humans by wildlife sold at a Wuhan seafood market.'[13] This suggests that the source of the coronavirus can be identified in zoonotic sources. A study of another coronavirus strain 20 years ago reported that it could be found 'in animals such as turkey, swine, dogs, cats, rabbits, cattle, mice, and bats. The virus causes severe respiratory tract and gastroenteritis diseases in humans and animals.'[14]

John Vidal asserts, 'We invade tropical forests and other wild landscapes, which harbor so many species of animals and plants—and within those creatures, so many unknown viruses.'[15] David Quammen, author of *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Pandemic*, was even more assertive in a *New York Times* opinion essay: 'We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it.'[16] Nicholas LePan contends, 'The more civilized humans became—with larger cities, more exotic trade routes, and increased contact with different populations of people, animals, and ecosystems—the more likely [zoonotic] pandemics would occur.'[17]

One animal viewed as a possible carrier of coronaviruses is the pangolin, which is one of the most threatened and most widely traded species in the world, valued for its scales and meat. In Ghana, the species is called *aprawa* and its meat is considered a delicacy.

There are thus a variety of plausible reasons for interpreting the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic as the result of humankind's assault on and commission of ecological sin against nature. These thoughts are apparent in the responses to the pandemic exhibited by the religious community of Ghana.

Christian Responses to COVID-19 in Ghana

In Ghana, one week after the first two positive cases were announced on 11 March 2020, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo held a breakfast meeting with Christian clergy at Jubilee House, the seat of the presidency in Accra. His purpose

12 USAID Ghana Sustainable Fisheries Management Project, *A Guide on Illegal Fishing Activities in Ghana* (Narragansett, RI: Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, 2018), https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu12.

13 Clare, 'Rethinking Our Relationship'.

14 J. S. Guy, J. J. Breslin, B. Breuhaus, S. Vivrette and L. G. Smith, 'Characterization of a Coronavirus Isolated from a Diarrheic Foal', *Journal of Clinical Microbiology* 38 (2000): 4523–26.

15 Vidal, 'Destruction of Habitat and Loss of Biodiversity Are Creating the Perfect Conditions for Diseases like COVID-19 To Emerge', *Ensia*, 17 March 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu15.

16 David Quammen, 'We Made the Coronavirus Epidemic', *New York Times*, 28 January 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu16.

17 Nicholas LePan, 'Visualizing the History of Pandemics', *Visual Capitalist*, 14 March 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu17.

was 'to seek the face of God for healing and restoration'.[18] Assuming that the pandemic might be related to human ecological sins that must be forgiven so that wholeness could be restored to both the land and its people, he appropriately supported his call with commonly used Scripture passages on the healing of land and people, respectively (2 Chronicles 7:13–14; James 5:14–15).[19] The President called for national days of fasting and prayer for both Christians and Muslims, on 25 and 27 March, respectively.

Since then, Christian prayers have been offered continually to God to save the land and people from this dangerous virus. From 24 to 26 April 2020, the entire Christian community—including mission-founded churches, Pentecostal-charismatic churches and African independent churches—declared another three-day fast.[20]

Listening to the prayers streamed live on social media, especially video clips shared on WhatsApp, it is not difficult to conclude that for many of these Christians, the pandemic was ultimately a sovereign God's punishment for the sins committed by the global eco-community. Hence, the sessions involving confession of sins were most vigorously and fervently approached. The extempore confessional prayers were characterized by loud cries and glossolalia, requesting divine forgiveness for individual, national and global sins such as 'occultism in the Church and schools, ritual murders, brutal rapes, corruption and wickedness'. Other evils confessed included cybercrimes, increasing pollution of water bodies and the overwhelming heaping of solid waste in many African cities.

From an African theocological point of view, the evils confessed in the April 2020 prayers in Ghana were related to the disturbance of harmonious relationships amongst people or with nature, and hence degradations of the Earth's health. Consistent with this perspective, Allison Howell draws attention to religious eco-ethics as a fundamental motivator for more permanent solutions. She observes that harmonious relations with water bodies in Africa were sustained in ancient times through the people's spiritual engagement with land and water. This spiritual engagement was once part of the fabric of African spirituality, but it seems to have become unravelled in our time, especially with regard to illegal gold mining.[21]

God's sovereignty has been a prominent theme in Ghanaian Christians' response to the pandemic. Christian social commentator Dr. M. K. Boateng, in explaining recommended behaviours in light of the virus's unusually fast spread across Ghana in March, stated, 'In the first place, God created the virus and he was aware and [is] still aware of this pandemic.'[22] This view was corroborated in the first of the AACC's ten theological theses in June, which acknowledged God as the ultimate cause of all

18 'Ghana Seeks Divine Intervention amid COVID-19, President Hosts Breakfast Prayer Meeting', *Aciafrica*, 20 March 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu18.

19 'Remarks by the President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, at the Prayer Breakfast Meeting with Christian Leaders', 19 March 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu19.

20 Aciafrica, 'Pray Not to Question God's Existence during COVID-19, Religious Leaders in Ghana Implore', 29 April 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu20.

21 Howell, 'African Spirituality and Christian Ministry', 12.

22 Vida Ofori Boahene, 'Facts to Know and Practice to Salvage This Epidemic in Ghana: Suggestions by Dr. M. K. Boateng', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu22.

creation and not oblivious of the pandemic. Thus, a theocological basis for seeking divine intervention against COVID-19 lies in the belief that God can send or, at least, must have allowed the emergence of this natural, invisible agent and the pestilence it has inflicted (2 Chron 7:13) to punish human wickedness and sinfulness that has sickened the land (v. 14). Perhaps the healing of the land (v. 14b) would then come in response to the fasting and prayers offered by those who are called by God's name (v. 14a).

In addition to responding with prayer, the Christian leadership in Ghana demonstrated considerable practical love of neighbour and African *ubuntu*. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana, like other churches, through their respective humanitarian and development agencies assembled emergency responses, providing temporary shelter in their empty school buildings and feeding centres for the homeless. A Roman Catholic soup kitchen supplied meals for over 800 children in Accra.[23] The PCG made several donations to government institutions and risk-taking frontline mission health-workers in March 2020, including food, medical supplies, toiletries and money, as well as directly assisting church members and other people in their communities who were affected by the lockdown. Local church leaders extended psychological and spiritual support through pastoral visitations.[24] On 21 April 2020, World Vision presented the Christian Health Association of Ghana with over $10,000 (in U.S. dollars) of personal protective equipment.[25]

Primal religionists' responses to COVID-19

The responses by primal religionists (i.e. followers of traditional African religions) in Ghana presented additional indications of African theocological interpretation. In primal religious ecologies, evils such as rape (especially when committed in the bush) and violating eco-taboos concerning the health of water bodies and forests are blatantly detestable. They are referred to as *busu* (Ewe, also written as Eʋe) or *mmusu* (Twi), meaning a high-level ecological abomination that jeopardizes the relational health of the 'gecosphere' (the Earth and its eco-surroundings in African thought). Such acts are believed to invite untold fatal consequences, including drought and pestilences, into the entire eco-community 'unless culprits offer expiatory sacrifices' to appease the eco-deities and cleanse the land.[26]

This perspective may explain why some primal religionists in Ghana responded to the national call for divine intervention by going beyond extempore verbal prayers to ritualistic sacrifices. Although they were not initially invited to the national day of fasting and prayer,[27] the primal religionists subsequently reminded the

23 'Ghana Catholic Church Supporting Poor and Vulnerable', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu23.

24 'Presbyterian Church of Ghana Donates PPEs to Donkokrom and Bawku Hospitals', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu24.

25 'COVID-19 Response: World Vision donates PPE to Christian Health Association of Ghana', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu25.

26 Blasu, *African Theocology*, 75.

27 Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu and Samuel N. Nkumbaan, 'Fighting COVID-19: Interventions from Ghana's Traditional Priests', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu27.

government of their presence. After that, 'selected priests from the Volta region, Greater Accra and other places'[28] converged at Independence Square in Accra on 29 March to call for help from their deities.[29] This was upon a directive from the National House of Chiefs for 'traditional leaders to hold special traditional prayers and rites to purify their communities and seek the face of God in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic'. The directive explained, 'Nananom [leaders of traditional states], the situation we are faced with is akin to war and it is our obligation to lead the fight. Let's not disappoint our people.'[30] Here the traditional authorities assessed the cause of the pandemic theocologically as community impurity or gross sinfulness, warranting rites of expiation to placate the deities and seek cleansing and deliverance.

At Independence Square, the traditional priests obeyed the government's order for social distancing as they lined up to pray. I heard one Ewe chief priest fervently confessing and requesting forgiveness for the *busu* in both the country and the world, as well as the government's initial failure to invite help from the earth deities.[31]

In addition, the Nai Wulomo (priest of the Sea deity) and elders of shrines in the Greater Accra region gathered at the shore of the Atlantic Ocean to perform purification rites to the marine deities.[32] They encountered some problems with the security agencies due to violating the President's social distancing order. Similarly, the Ghana News Agency reported that traditional priests in Aflao, Volta Region, offered an animal sacrifice to the deities of the land to 'purge not only their Ketu-South district, but the entire land of Ghana'. Through divination, they learnt that the deities 'allowed the land to be plagued with the disease', because of numerous sins of the nation, including 'the ban on libation prayers at public gatherings'.[33] Whereas these responses may not necessarily correspond to modern scientific worldviews, they affirm a typical African view of the need to integrate a theistic spiritual consciousness and undertake a holistic, theocological approach to fighting COVID-19.

Another response was also of notable theocological significance. A video clip trending in social media, especially WhatsApp, showed a purification rite in the Volta River, believed to have been performed by leaders from the Nogokpo shrine.[34] As the ritualists stepped into the Volta, the 'chief priest' leading the rite confessed the sins of humanity with libation prayers. Among the sins confessed was the *busu* of 'whites who manufactured the coronavirus to show power against each other and brought this calamity onto us all'. He explained that the Volta River was best qualified to carry all the *busu* of the world and, particularly, of our land away. It is

28 Ntewusu and Nkumbaan, 'Fighting COVID-19'.
29 Nuseli, 'COVID-19: Traditional Leaders Pray at Independence Square', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu29.
30 Myjoyonline.com, 'National Chiefs Urged to Lead Traditional Rites to Purify Their Communities as Coronavirus Cases Spike', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu30.
31 Nuseli, 'COVID-19: Nogokpo Gods Reveals [sic] Source and Casts It into the Rivers', 30 March 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu31.
32 Ntewusu and Nkumbaan, 'Fighting COVID-19'.
33 Papaga Bless, 'Aflao Traditional Council Offers Sacrifices to Stop Coronavirus', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu33.
34 Nuseli, 'COVID-19: Nogokpo Gods'.

the main body of fresh water in Ghana, carrying dirt from both humans (symbolized by face washing every morning) and most rivers to the sea.[35]

National administrative responses

The government of Ghana's efforts to curb the spread of the virus included closing borders, schools and churches; limiting all public gatherings, especially funerals, to a maximum of 25 people initially; partial lockdowns in the cities and surrounding areas of Accra and Kumasi; and regular hand washing under running water. During this restriction period, water and electricity supplies were subsidized heavily, both to mitigate people's economic burdens and to prevent criminals and other evil people from taking advantage of the situation for personal gain.

Here we see the theocological import of water and sanitation amidst the pandemic. The crucial role of clean and potable water in dealing with COVID-19 cannot be overemphasized, from both religious and scientific (public-health) points of view. But water is a scarce resource in many eco-communities. The World Health Organization, while prescribing hand-washing protocol against COVID-19, lamented also that more than a billion people globally are without access to clean water, that over 3.4 million lives are lost through scarce and contaminated water each year, and that half of the world's hospitalizations are because of diseases associated with inadequate access to clean water.[36]

In Ghana, 81 percent of the population does not have direct access to safe drinking water and depends on private vendors.[37] Yet only the primal religionists' prayers specifically included requesting divine intervention to provide water for all. They acknowledged, from their holistic religious worldview, the value and diverse relatedness of water to the pandemic. Perhaps, although the pandemic struck in the height of the dry season and during the hottest month of the year (March), Christians and Muslims either anticipated an early onset of the rainy season and so were less explicit in seeking divine assurance of water availability, or—as in my own experience—did not perceive the spiritual aspects of this need apart from the increased public-health demands for water.

Rethinking sustainable planetary health following COVID-19

What lessons can we glean for improving planetary life following the COVID-19? Could the pandemic have resulted from wrongful human applications of science and technology, or is there truly a zoonotic causal link from animals due to human perturbations of our biosphere? How certain are we that COVID-19 is not God's response to sinful anthropogenic eco-degradation and eco-crimes? The search for the origins of and antidotes to the disease as ecological concerns will continue, but our relationships with the earth's ecosystem following COVID-19 should not be the same as before it.[38] David Bookless believes that Christian creation care in our

35 Ntewusu and Nkumbaan, 'Fighting COVID-19'.
36 'Our Mission', World Health Organization, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu36.
37 Ghana Water, 'Ghana's Water and Sanitation Crisis', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu37.
38 See Ian Goldin and Robert Muggah, 'The World before This Corona Virus and After Cannot be the Same,' *The Conversation*, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu38.

generation requires drastic changes in eco-relationships, pursuant to an honest audit of the impact of our lifestyles on planet Earth.[39] Notably, all the African responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have suggested that changes in human behaviour should emphasize harmonious ecological relationships in the 'gecosphere'. John Vidal quotes Richard Ostfeld, a distinguished senior scientist at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, New York, who believes that although natural ecosystems pose threats, 'The health risks in a natural environment can be made much worse when we interfere with it.'[40]

That the post-COVID-19 change in eco-relationships needs to be religious in character for the African Christian is based on both African primal religious and biblical eco-consciousness. In a previous work, I showed not only that African perceptions of nature are theistic, but also that Africans 'are likely to treat the environment with little or no respect when their belief in the relationship of deities and ancestors with nature is undermined'.[41] I concluded that engaging primal religious ecological taboos and praxis with the gospel will enable Christians to appreciate theocentric motivations for creation care by attributing eco-taboos ultimately to the sovereign God of creation.[42]

Thus, for the African Christian, a theocentric motivation for sustaining planetary care and health emphasizes doing things either out of fear of local eco-deities or out of love for the Lord God, our neighbours, and all creation.[43] If guided by love, we will seek to combat the unethical production and use of bioweapons. We can also lessen the human commodification and consumeristic handling of ecological resources and services that lead to zoonotic diseases and eco-degradation, if we prioritize harmonious eco-relationships based on the Christian call to love God and neighbour.[44]

This reconstructed theology and paradigm is what I call African theocology. It emphasizes our Christian eco-care praxis from God's perspective as his vicegerents (administrative deputies to creator God), African religious worldviews and eco-ethics, scientific eco-affirmations and biblical motivations of love for God and neighbour. As an emerging corollary of the theology of nature, African theocology is fundamentally based on the biblical assertion that God is creator and sustainer of the cosmos.[45] This truth, and not the human condition nor scientific postulations about the cosmos, is the starting point for understanding and caring for the world around us. Creation care should be driven by our awe of and obedience to God, which, in Africa, is embedded in both our primal religiosity and practical ecology.[46]

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39 David Bookless, *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 117.

40 Vidal, 'Destruction of Habitat'.

41 Blasu, *African Theocology*, 166.

42 Blasu, *African Theocology*, 166.

43 Ebenezer Yaw Blasu,'"Compensated Reduction" as Motivation for Reducing Deforestation: An African Christian Theological Response', *Journal of African Christian Thought* 18, no. 1 (June 2015): 27.

44 Blasu, *African Theocology*, 91.

45 Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Editions Clé and Regnum Africa, 2000), 25.

46 Blasu, 'Compensated Reduction', 24.

As intimated earlier, in African primal religious ecologies, violating eco-taboos attracts fatal consequences, including drought and pestilences, unless expiatory sacrifices are offered to appease the eco-deities and cleanse the land.[47] Similarly, 'In Christian thinking we understand that we are, firstly, in relationship with God, and then in relationship with creation.'[48] Thus, anthropocentric interference with God's created order is not only disobedience to God, and hence ecological sin, but also results in unnecessary ecological distress, because we disturb the divine 'sustaining creative powers that keep the forces of chaos at bay'.[49] We learn from Job 38 and 39 that 'creation and created beings exist and are there because of God's power of sustaining hand.'[50] In Jeremiah 9:11–14, the prophet 'identifies the neglect of divine law, and in particular the Sabbath law as the cause of the downfall of Jerusalem' and ecological collapse of the land.[51]

Although biblical cosmology and ecology are anterior and fundamental to African theocology, the paradigm postulates also that we should approach planetary health concerns by integrating ongoing scientific searches and findings with effective religious eco-ethical knowledge, faith and praxis. No longer should ecological science and technology alone be a valid way to take action, but it must be synthesized with religious eco-ethics, so as to ensure just and peaceful relationships between God, humanity and other-than-human creation through theocentric motivations for creation care.[52] Perhaps integrating technoscience and religious eco-ethics is in order because '[religious] morality and [scientific] reason are vitally implicated in the character and structure of creation.'[53]

Pragmatically, David Bookless, theological director of A Rocha, suggests that Christian spirituality of loving God and neighbour—in daily lifestyles, discipleship, worship and mission—demands living 'as if creation matters'. He acknowledges painfully that changing lifestyles based on Christian theocological motivations so as to care for creation is 'one of the hardest things to do'. Yet he suggests we all need to 'ask God to pinpoint where we should start making changes', no matter how small.[54] He and his family have engaged in changing their lifestyle to living lightly, avoiding waste and celebrating simplicity as an individual and family missional response. He believes that these are little but significant eco-actions, at least, to begin with; if adopted by many in the community, they may, in the aggregate, contribute immensely towards mitigating climate change and eco-crisis. For Bookless, 'simplicity is first a state of mind'; it is about seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness,[55] believing that if we do so, our needs from the ecosystem will take

47 Blasu, *African Theocology*, 75.
48 Peter Harris, 'Environmental Concern Calls for Repentance and Holiness', in *God's Stewards: The Role of Christians in Creation Care* (Papua New Guinea: World Vision International, 2002), 11.
49 Michael Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007), 11.
50 Ebenezer Yaw Blasu, 'Our Earth, Our Responsibility', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 41, no. 3 (July 2017): 259.
51 Northcott, *Ethics of Global Warming*, 12.
52 Blasu, *African Theocology*. 236–38.
53 Northcott, *Ethics of Global Warming*, 13.
54 Bookless, *Planetwise*, 117.
55 Bookless, *Planetwise*, 112.

care of themselves and appropriately sustain the environment. Thus, each of us can get involved as individuals and/or families by asking how we contribute to and thus what we can do to mitigate eco-problems.

As a Christian pastor and science educator, I prayerfully sought God and believed that I was directed to make my contribution, amongst other ways, by promoting creation care through incorporating it in my teaching curriculum. I envisioned doing this by integrating Christian faith in the teaching of ecological science and the use and development of technoscience. This led me into the journey of PhD studies and to developing African theocology as an alternative curriculum for teaching and learning environmental science, in a way that could motivate theocentric moral creation care.[56] I hope that through this curriculum, Christians in scientific fields will be equipped to promote positive aspects of African primal holistic worldviews and eco-ethical praxis that affirm a biblical theology of creation care, in both academia and church life, at all levels.

I propose that recognition of the sacramental and hygienic value of water in managing COVID-19, as highlighted by some primal religionists in Ghana, could guide all of us to change our attitudes towards health issues related to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). In my house, as part of the plan to avoid wasting water and yet maintain sanitized washrooms, we re-use bath and laundry water to flush toilets. Recently, World Vision Ghana has produced some timely, practical messages as a biblical response to WASH promotion needs in churches and communities. Sermon three of the series provides a biblical and theological basis for hand washing at critical times.[57]

The AACC has strongly admonished all African governments to improve their political commitment to ensuring the total well-being (physical and spiritual) of the people they govern, as both a divine duty and lessons from COVID-19. Dr. Yaw Bediako's ideas corroborate these suggestions. Bediako is a Christian, an immunologist and a research fellow at the West African Centre for Cell Biology and Infectious Pathogens at the University of Ghana. In an episode of a television programme entitled 'Surviving COVID-19', Bediako affirmed the value of prayer but also said it was essential for Ghana's government to provide adequate resources for medical responses to the disease.[58]

It is also important for Christians to learn from and reconstruct the observation of African environmental taboos and recognize how they affirm biblical principles that support the flourishing of life and sustenance of the gecosphere. African cultural self-understandings of food and food habits can be transformed through the prism of the gospel, helping us develop a more theocentric attitude towards bush meat and other resources. Ultimately, a more cooperative and less possessive approach to natural resource use may reduce biodiversity perturbations and, hence, lessen zoonotic health challenges in the future.

56 Blasu, *African Theocology:* 234–38.

57 World Vision Ghana, *Sermon Guide on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)* (Accra, Ghana: World Vision International, Ghana and Partners, 2017): 38–44.

58 Yaw Bediako, 'Surviving COVID-19, Episode 5'. https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444blasu58.

ERT (2020) 44:4, 313–323

Reflecting the Image of God through Speech: Genesis 1–3 in James 3:1–12

Andrea L. Robinson

This article shows how James 3:1–12 echoes the creation account, using imagery from Genesis 1–3 to correlate purity of speech with bearing the image of God. Accordingly, the untamed tongue is regarded as a central characteristic of fallenness and a distortion of God's image—emphasizing that our failure to tame the tongue separates individuals from God, creates division in the community of faith, and has a severely destructive impact on the world. Applications and a sample sermon outline are provided.

James 3:1–12 crafts a vivid description of the power of speech. Peaceful images, such as horses tamed by their masters and ships guided by their captains, serve as a stark counterpoint to the subsequent description of unrestrained hellfire. The kaleidoscope of vivid images illustrates the great impact of speech.

Numerous phrases in James 3:1–12 echo language found in the creation account of Genesis 1–3. I believe that James intentionally utilizes subtle references to the creation account to associate purity in speech with the wholeness of the individual as made in the image of God. Conversely, James associates defilement through speech with defilement through the fall. Just as the deceptive words of Satan in Genesis 3 lead to the corruption of Adam and Eve, destructive patterns of speech can corrupt the entire life of an individual. By implication, James hints that if believers can tame the tongue, they will draw closer to the original state of purity God intended, resulting in unity with other Christ-followers and with God himself.

In the next section, I examine conceptions of purity and wholeness to provide a framework for James 3:1–12. I then exegete the passage, drawing attention to key topics and phases. Finally, I show the relationship between James 3:1–12 and Genesis 1–3.

Purity and James

Conceptions of purity and impurity were crucial for the Old Testament people of Israel. The schema of pollution and purity maintained order, wholeness and distinctiveness amongst the people of God and kept them distinct from the culture

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at large.[1] Further, due to the Israelites' close proximity to the presence of God, the defilement of a single individual put the whole community in danger. Ritual impurity could be expunged by ritual means, but no simple solution existed for moral impurity.[2] Thus, for the individual engaging in a prohibited or moral impurity, the penalty typically involved being cut off from the community (Lev 18:29).

OT ideas of purity and impurity are not expanded much in the New Testament period, although Greco-Roman culture influenced Jewish ideals.[3] One of the primary ways in which Hellenism influenced conceptions of purity was the collectivist mindset. Individuals understood themselves in terms of their relation to the group(s) of which they were a part. The collective personality was needed to form a conception of the self. One's self-image was perceived in terms of what other group members observed and reflected back to the individual.

Because of this collective mindset, the traits of any individual could be considered indicative of the whole group. Thus, ethical and moral responsibility rested not only upon the individual, but upon the social body in which the individual was embedded.[4] Because the actions of each group member reflected upon the entire group, deviance from established norms was a symptom of disorder and infirmity within the social body.

A primary challenge faced by first-century groups of Christ-followers was to discern the exact nature of their relationship to one another within the framework of a new religion that had emerged from Judaism. Paul clearly believed that OT purity laws were no longer binding, as evidenced by the clashes with his congregations over the application of Jewish law.[5] Jesus also shifted the emphasis, promising that the 'pure in heart … shall see God' and exhorting his followers to exhibit humility, gentleness, mercy, and pacifism (Mt 5:3–10). He called those desiring to live a pure life to eschew behaviour that causes division, threatens societal wholeness, creates moral defilement and disrupts relations with God.

Purity laws were fulfilled by Christ in one sense, but also transformed as Jesus reinterpreted the boundary rules set forth by Judaism.[6] Jesus taught that purity rules were meant to facilitate access to God, not to cordon humanity off from him.[7] In Mark 7:15, Jesus transposed the idea of defilement from a cultic to an ethical level: 'There is nothing outside the person which can defile him if it goes into him; but the

1 John H. Elliott, 'The Epistle of James in Rhetorical and Social-Scientific Perspective: Holiness-Wholeness and Patterns of Replication', *Biblical Theology Bulletin 23 (*1993): 71–81.

2 Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1573.

3 Jacob Neusner, 'The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (1975): 15–26.

4 Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 62–65.

5 Jerome H. Neyrey, 'Clean/Unclean, Pure/Polluted, and Holy/Profane: The Idea and the System of Purity', in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohrbaugh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 80–104.

6 Hans Hubner and Ronald B. Thomas Jr., 'Unclean and Clean (NT)', *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:743.

7 Malina, *New Testament World*, 188.

things which proceed out of the person are what defile the individual.' Proceedings that create defilement, according to Jesus, involve actions, thoughts, or words that are harmful to others (Mk 7:21–22).

James also contributes significantly to the discourse on this topic, referencing purity concerns numerous times in his letter. In fact, a convincing argument can be made that the central theme of James is purity and wholeness, which are described as the fulfilment of the entire law (2:8–12). Yet when James interacts with the law, he does so with a distinctively Christian emphasis. In James, purity conceptions are used to delineate the characteristics and responsibilities of the people of God.[8] Any action that would contradict wholehearted devotion to God should be avoided by those who are perfect and complete. God himself is characterized by perfection and is thus a deserving standard against which one's actions should be measured.[9]

Purity terminology seems to provide the scaffolding for the book of James.[10] The opening verses of the epistle introduce the theme of wholeness with the terms *teleios* (perfect) and *holoklēros* (complete) (1:4, 17; cf. 2:8, 22; 3:2). The focus on wholeness can also be found in such topics as loyalty to God (1:8, 27; 4:4, 8), active faith (1:22; 2:22; 5:15), wholeness of community (2:1; 3:14–18; 4:1, 11; 5:9), and showing mercy (1:27; 2:1–5; 3:17–18).[11]

The author of James addresses themes of purity on three levels: personal, cosmological and social. An individual's failure to act in accord with the perfect law (1:25) results in enmity with God and friendship with the devil (4:4–10). Friendship with the devil precludes a relationship with God and results in enmity with creation. Thus, actions outside prescribed boundaries result in communal divisiveness, alienation from God and loss of wholeness.[12] Deviations from God's holy standard indicate not just weakness in the offending individual but something amiss within the entire group.

In James, purity and wholeness are prominently manifested in control of the tongue. The man or woman who can control the tongue can control the whole person, thus unifying the mind, will and deeds in obedience to the Lord. Conversely, the tongue can also cause extensive destruction. In contrast to godly speech, which is consistently wholesome, the tongue pollutes 'pure and undefiled religion' (1:27). Unwholesome speech distances an individual from God and creates strife with other humans. Furthermore, because speech is an indicator of one's entire nature, the tongue serves as a litmus test for an individual's degree of purity.[13] Viewed in the light of communal wholeness, one's speech also reflects the health of his or her community of faith.

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8 Elliott, 'The Epistle of James', 73.

9 Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999), 178–81.

10 Darian R. Lockett, '"Pure and Undefiled Religion": The Function of Purity Language in the Epistle of James' (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2006), iii.

11 Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, eds., *The Brother of Jesus: James the Just and His Mission* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 126.

12 Elliott, 'The Epistle of James', 78.

13 Scot McKnight, 'A Parting with the Way: Jesus and James on Israel and Purity', in *James the Just and Christian Origins*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 83–131.

Exegesis of James 3:1–12

The primary theme of James 3:1–12 is the proper use of speech. In the discourse, speech is metonymically referred to as 'the tongue', which is the vehicle for wisdom, instruction and blessing. Unfortunately, the tongue is used more frequently as an instrument of destruction than for blessing.[14]

The translation of James 3:1–12 is rather straightforward, although a number of atypical Greek words are present. For clarity, I will provide my translation of the passage with its interpretation.

> [1]Let not many of you become teachers, my brothers and sisters, knowing that we will incur greater judgement. [2]For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in speech, this person is a perfect individual, able to bridle the whole body as well.

At first glance, James 3:1 seems unrelated to the rest of the passage. However, a teacher's principal tool is the tongue. Because teachers make such frequent use of the tongue, 'they are engaged in a dangerous enterprise, and only the mature person of humility, purity, gentleness, and sincerity (3:17) should engage in it.'[15]

After delivering this warning, James turns his focus to the congregation in verse 2. We can discern that the passage as a whole is not directed at teachers because of the term *hapantes*, 'all'. James transitions by saying 'we all stumble'—including himself, teachers and everyone in his audience.[16]

Verse 2 contains the topic sentence around which the remainder of the argument revolves. The use of *teleios*, 'perfect', here and elsewhere in James highlights the theme of wholeness throughout the book (1:4, 17, 25; 2:8, 22). The motif gains momentum with the subsequent use of *holon*, 'whole'. Additionally, the reference to 'the whole body' relates to both the physical and spiritual elements of an individual.[17]

> [3]Now if we thrust bridles into the mouths of horses in order that they are induced to obey us, we direct the whole body as well. [4]And look at the great ships, also being driven by strong winds; they are guided by the smallest rudder wherever the will of the helmsman desires.

The main topic of the section, having now been introduced, is immediately illustrated by a series of examples. The 'strong winds' in v. 4 are probably an intentional reference to the double-minded person who is tossed by the wind in James 1:6.[18] Strengthening the connection, the term *krima* in 3:1 closely relates to *diakrinō*, also from 1:6, with both originating from the *krinō* family of terms. *Diakrinō* refers to the act of deciding or judging; *krima* denotes the decision or

14 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 217.

15 Dan G. McCartney, *James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 178.

16 Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 135–37.

17 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 256–57.

18 Johnson, *Letter of James,* 257.

judgement itself.[19] The relation between the terms is easily missed in the English translation, since *diakrinō* is often translated as 'doubting'. However, the phonemic similarity is more obvious in Greek. James is, in essence, relating inconsistency in speech to inconsistency in obedience to God.[20] The one who doubts is susceptible to being driven by the tongue, whereas one who can control the tongue will also have the capacity for self-restraint. The admonitions of vv. 1–3 echo in the ears of James's audience as he makes his point more explicit in the following verses.

> [5]And likewise the tongue is a small member, yet it makes great boasts. See how great a forest it sets aflame with such a small fire. [6]And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members, that which pollutes the whole body, that which sets afire the course of existence and is inflamed by Gehenna.

James's argument gains intensity in vv. 5–6 as he draws attention to the dualism of human freedom. As boasting relates to increasing one's own status and power, James may be invoking the prideful spirit that separates humans from God. More overtly, the mention of Gehenna (commonly translated as hell) reminds hearers of the fundamental struggle between God on one hand and Satan, sin and evil on the other.[21] God and the devil are diametrically opposed, and humans have the power to choose one or the other. Luke Timothy Johnson asserts, 'All human activity is defined in terms of these two allegiances.'[22]

Believers draw closer to God and fellow humans through religion that is pure, undefiled and unstained (1:26–27). Conversely, the tongue destroys such religion by staining the entire body. The term *sōma*, which refers to the physical body, can also be extended metaphorically to the communal body of believers.[23] Thus, James is skilfully explaining how improper speech not only defiles the individual but also sets him or her, and by extension the community, apart from God. When viewed in the light of Genesis 1–3, the verse may recall Adam and Eve contaminating the collective body of humanity.

> [7]For every species of wild animal and of birds, of crawling things and of sea creatures is being subdued and has been subdued by the human species. [8]But the tongue no one is able to subdue; it is badly unstable, full of deadly poison.

The word *gar*, 'for', in v. 7 immediately connects back to v. 6 by way of explanation. Hearers can perceive that the fire of the tongue must be lit by a cosmic force, because humans have tamed everything in creation except the tongue itself. Whereas wild and possibly venomous creatures are not inherently wicked, the unrestrained tongue breeds evil. That no one can tame the tongue is all the more astounding when seen against the backdrop of humanity's success in taming the natural world.[24]

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19 Friedrich Buchsel, '*krinō*', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976).

20 Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 166.

21 Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*, 165.

22 Johnson, *Letter of James,* 265.

23 Johnson, *Letter of James,* 259.

24 J. W. MacGorman, 'An Exposition of James 3', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1986): 31–36.

Our capacity to control the tongue is rooted in the theological foundation that humanity has been created in God's image. James uses both the present tense and the perfect tense of *damazō*, 'to tame', to emphasize the continuing process by which humans are subduing creation and to show that the process is rooted in the divine mandate.[25] Indeed, *damazō* reflects the original Hebrew term *kabash*, used in Genesis 1:28 in reference to humanity's responsibility to subdue the earth.[26]

In vv. 7–8, James's OT references continue to gain strength. James anticipates the reference to creation in God's image (v. 9) with his list of creatures and humanity's dominion over them in v. 7. James's allusion to the fecundity of life created by God's speech contrasts starkly with the destruction that can be caused by the untamed human tongue. Furthermore, the reference to 'deadly poison' may also evoke the poisonous words of the serpent in Genesis 3.

> [9]With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse humans, who have been created in the likeness of God. [10]From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. It should not be this way, my brothers and sisters.

James's OT references come to fruition in v. 9 with the completion of a paraphrase of Genesis 1:26–28. James even momentarily abandons metaphor to emphasize his core message: humans, as beings created in the likeness of God, must subdue their tongue. The word for likeness, *homoiōsis*, is found only here in the NT and is rare even in the Greek Septuagint translation of the OT, making the reference to Genesis 1:26 'almost certainly deliberate'.[27] The reference to 'blessing' in v. 10 strengthens the connection.

In Genesis 1:28, God blesses Adam and Eve, commanding them to fill the earth and rule over its creatures. Phyllis Bird asserts that God's blessing activates and directs the process toward its goal.[28] By way of contrast, James points out that cursing another being distorts the divine purpose of our capacity of speech. Further, because humans have been created in God's image, cursing a human is tantamount to cursing God. Douglas Moo explains that 'the ancient curse was far more than abusive language; it called on God, in effect, to cut a person off from any possible blessing and to consign that person to Hell.'[29] Thus, cursing opposes the very foundations of creation. To curse is to wish death upon one to whom God has given life.[30] James's statement in v. 10 is simple but profound, carrying with it the thrust of the whole passage: 'It should not be this way.'

> [11]Does a spring pour out from the same opening the sweet and the bitter? [12]Nor is the fig tree able to produce olives, or the grapevine figs, my brothers and sisters; nor can salty water produce fresh.

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25 McCartney, *James,* 191.

26 The only other usage of *damazō* in the NT is Mark 5:4, where no one was strong enough to subdue the Gerasene demoniac.

27 McCartney, *James,* 192.

28 Phyllis A. Bird, '"Male and Female He Created Them": Genesis 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation', *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 129–59.

29 Moo, *Letter of James*, 163.

30 James Riley Strange, *The Moral World of James: Setting the Epistle in Its Greco-Roman and Judaic Environments* (Studies in Biblical Literature, vol. 136; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 25.

In the final two verses of the passage, James returns to his use of metaphors, with a continuing emphasis on diametric contrasts. James reinforces his point that 'things should not be this way' with further illustrations. Each illustration points out how ridiculous, even impossible, it is for a thing of one kind to produce something of a completely different kind.

Comparisons of kind were common in Greek literature and elsewhere in the Bible. In Matthew 7:16, Jesus says, 'You will know them from their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn plants or figs from thistles?' James does not quote Jesus' words directly, but he expresses the same concept in the style of wisdom sages. Thus, James brings the unit to a succinct, pithy conclusion by illustrating how words expose the true condition of the heart and the health of the Christian community.

Genesis 1–3 in James 3:1–12

In 3:1–12, James almost certainly references the creation account. Just as God created the universe with his perfect words, humans are called to reflect God's image by speaking only words that create wholeness. Alternately, just as the deceptive words of Satan fostered death, unrestrained speech fosters destruction. By referencing the creation account, James presents his hearers with a standard against which they should measure themselves: the very likeness of God.

In the creation account, the word of God is a formal component of the creation process. After God speaks, the activity that has been described is fulfilled apart from God's continued activity. When God calls the earth to sprout vegetation, his word is powerful enough to effect the completion of the process without hands-on maintenance.[31] As the power to create and sustain life belongs to God alone, God incorporates the 'means of perpetuity' into the design of the universe, imparting the power of reproduction to Adam and all other created life.[32]

Having been created in God's image, humans are tasked with subduing or taming the earth and its creatures. Humans first exercise the power of speech over creatures in Genesis 2:19, when Adam is given the responsibility of naming. The naming of animals may even reflect God's creative acts upon the earth, in that Adam creates new words.[33] Robert Wall expounds upon James's Genesis reference in 3:7–8:

> The division of tamed animals into 'every beast and bird of nature, every reptile and fish' [in James 3:7–8] follows the creation story … and envisages the 'proper' order of creation: the Creator gives to human creation the responsibility of 'taming' the nonhuman creation. The accusation of an apparent lack of control, since 'no person is able to tame the tongue', is further indication of a fallen creation in need of restoration.[34]

31 William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 40.

32 Bird, 'Male and Female', 147.

33 Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*, 251.

34 Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 172.

James clarifies humanity's need for restoration while providing the standard to which humanity needs to be restored. As humans use wholesome language, they reflect the image of God.

Speech can be used in a destructive manner, which distorts God's image. One's speech may expose a presumptuous attitude toward God or a mindset that does not accept God's sovereignty. The warning against boasting in James 3:5 may subtly allude to the desire for self-promotion that spurred Adam and Eve's disobedience in Genesis 3:4–6. 'Language is … an awesome power by which humans can either structure life according to the "word of truth" … or make a structure of meaning in which God is omitted, ignored, or denied.'[35] Failure to control speech defiles the one who speaks and taints everyone who hears with the destructive nature of evil and sin.[36]

Accordingly, the reference to 'deadly poison' may allude to the venomous words of the serpent in Genesis 3:1–5. The malevolent and manipulative words of the serpent contrast implicitly with God's speech. In Genesis 1–2, God speaks the world into existence, along with various ecological features and a diversity of created beings. Through the life-giving power of his words, the earth becomes a perfect whole, entrusted to humanity's care. In contrast, the serpent uses his tongue to foster death and destruction as he manipulates Adam and Eve. With the question, 'Did God truly say … ?' the serpent sets his own speech in direct opposition to that of God (Gen 3:1). As Adam and Eve comply with the words of the serpent, they fracture the wholeness of their relationship with one another, with God and with creation.

The most overt references to Genesis 1–3 appear in James 3:9, as James makes use of the rare term 'image' in conjunction with 'curse' and 'blessing'. Humanity was created in the image of God for the purpose of stewarding the earth and flourishing upon it. When an individual curses another human, he or she behaves in a manner that is antithetical to humanity's created purpose—caring for creation in God's image.

Generally, James is not overt in his references to Genesis; instead, his argument is crafty and subtle. The chain of echoes and allusions in vv. 1–6 gradually gains strength until he reaches his paraphrase of Genesis 1:26–28 in vv. 7–10. The Genesis paraphrase and the following break in metaphorical language make vv. 7–10 stand out as the heart of James's argument and the point he most wants his readers to hear: 'It should not be this way.' Just as Adam and Eve's disobedience resulted in their expulsion from the Garden, destructive words distance the speaker from the divine presence.

Unlike other wisdom sages, James does not end on an optimistic note. J. W. MacGorman states, 'He simply [leaves] his readers with the taste of brine in their mouths and move[s] on.'[37] Why does James end his discourse on such an abrupt and harsh note? I propose that James's solution is a subtle, almost subliminal plea to succeed where Adam and Eve failed. He does not appeal overtly for submission to God as a means by which the tongue may be tamed. Rather, his astute words

35 Johnson, *Letter of James,* 251.
36 Strange, *The Moral World of James*, 25.
37 MacGorman, 'An Exposition of James 3', 34.

encourage hearers to reflect God's image by deploying the tongue in a positive manner, using language to foster life and wholeness.

Application

As I complete this article, a polarizing election season in the United States is drawing to a close and James' appeal to tame the tongue seems as relevant as when it was first written. Instead of modelling honest and civil discourse, those occupying or campaigning for the highest levels of government slander and publicly humiliate one another. In the United States, the exaggerated and divisive rhetoric between the Republican and Democratic parties has trickled down to every level of society. Verbal skirmishes threaten to destroy friends and families on a daily basis. As a pastor, I routinely deal with the fallout from such conflicts.

On a larger scale, riots and physical violence have become such a regular occurrence that the fabric of society sometimes seems to be deteriorating. Although words can't be held solely responsible, we would do well to remember that 'A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a hurtful word incites anger' (Prov 15:1). Harsh words will continue to incite anger and breed divisiveness until they are countered with words that foster peace.

Some of the most influential figures throughout history have used the power of speech to impact world events. The evil words of Adolf Hitler garnered enough support to transform Germany into a totalitarian state and convince the nation to acquiesce to his programme of extermination. Conversely, Martin Luther King Jr., the great icon of the American civil-rights movement, spoke words that fostered equality and peaceful resistance to oppression. His poignant words still echo today. Similarly, Nelson Mandela spoke against human-rights abuses in South Africa, eventually negotiating an end to apartheid after being released from prison. Our own Lord, Jesus Christ, spoke words that inspired peaceful resistance to institutionalized religion and oppressive paradigms.

In contrast to divisive messages that overlook the lifestyle for which we were created, James alludes to Genesis 1–3 to define the nature of purity and wholeness in relation to speech. Language reflects God's original creative acts, and in using language, humans reflect the image of God. When the power of speech is misused, the image of God is distorted and individuals are distanced from his presence. The untamed tongue can even be regarded as a characteristic of fallenness, which is the ultimate cause of separation between God and humanity.[38] Thus, taming the tongue is a vital enterprise for any individual who seeks to draw near to God.

Ideas of purity and wholeness apply not only to the individual but to the community. Impure speech can defile the whole 'body' of believers and create communal division. Thus, James' purpose is not only to encourage purity in individuals, but to foster wholeness within the community of faith. For the present-day Christ-follower, purity in speech draws the individual closer to God and creates wholeness within the body of Christ. Conversely, harmful or divisive speech may be indicative of disorder or ill health within one's faith community. Like the words of

38 Karen H. Jobes, *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 225.

the serpent in Genesis 3, acrimonious speech can bring forth destruction and discord even within seemingly harmonious faith communities.

Further, reflecting the image of God also entails serving as his life-giving representative to the world. The community of faith should foster peace and wholeness both internally and externally. From individual church congregations to denominations to the global church, the people of God have an opportunity to model constructive dialogue despite important differences in theology and practice. Although Western society prizes individualism over collectivism, we must always remember that we form one body of Christ.

James vividly reminds the believing community, both past and present, that speech carries power. In a highly polarized world, the church has a unique opportunity to promote reconciliation with life-giving words. Moreover, as stewards of creation and agents of restoration, members of the body of Christ have a responsibility to reflect God's image by modelling wholeness and speaking truth in a broken world.

Suggested sermon outline for James 3:1–12

1. Introduction
    a. Illustration of a setting in which words have fostered division or conflict.
    b. Illustration of a situation in which words have produced peace, healing or restoration.
    c. Sermon overview: James 3:1–12 reminds us that because we are created in God's image, we have a responsibility to use our words to foster wholeness and peace.
    d. Main theme of the passage: In 3:1–12, James illustrates the power of words and emphasizes that one's speech reveals the true condition of the heart.
    e. Objective: Consider your own patterns of speech and evaluate how well you are reflecting God's image.
2. Exegesis of James 3:1–12
    a. James 3:1–2
        (1) To whom is James speaking? All who follow Christ
        (2) Why? To exhort disciplined, holy speech
    b. James 3:3–5a
        (1) Large entities are directed by a small part; biblical and modern examples
        (2) The relation of the tongue to previous examples
    c. James 3:5b–6
        (1) How does the tongue destroy? Pride and selfishness of the individual
        (2) Impact on the body of believers
    d. James 3:7–9
        (1) Allusions to Genesis: (i) creation by the word of God, (ii) humans as the image of God and stewards of creation, and (iii) destructive words of the serpent

(2) Words have the power to create or destroy

e. James 3:10–12

(1) Impossibility of producing fruit inconsistent with one's nature

(2) Words reveal the condition of the heart

3. Application

a. Individual: Evaluate your own patterns of speech to see what they reveal about the condition of your heart. What can you change so as to better reflect God's image?

b. Communal: Live out the redemption of Christ by reflecting the holy and pure kingdom of God through life-giving speech. Hold one another accountable with gentleness and grace.

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Evangelical Engagement with Barth: A Modest Proposal

C. Ryan Fields

Karl Barth, one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, is too important for evangelicals to ignore but not easy to evaluate. Barth reacted against liberalizing tendencies with a strong emphasis on the centrality of Christ and the power of Scripture, but his theology also contained some innovations that deviate from evangelical tradition. This article surveys evaluations of Barth by English-speaking evangelicals and offers well-informed suggestions on how to appropriate Barth's work.

On the hundredth anniversary of Karl Barth's birth, Kenneth Kantzer, often described as the 'academic dean of neo-evangelicalism', began his reflections with these words: 'During his lifetime, Karl Barth was a very controversial figure. In 1986, 100 years after his birth, he is still a controversial figure.' As Kantzer explained, some have lauded Barth as the greatest theologian since the apostle Paul, while others have condemned him as a fraud who sought to intentionally deceive the church by repackaging liberal theology in evangelical verbiage to make it sound like traditional Protestant orthodoxy.[1] Kantzer concluded by admonishing his readers to 'thank God for Karl Barth … but read him with your eyes open.'[2]

Definitively assessing Barth's achievements and legacy from an evangelical perspective has been notoriously difficult. In 2020 Barth is still a controversial, polarizing and perplexing figure. However, since Kantzer's time a new stage of grappling with Barth, and perhaps even a renaissance of Barthian studies, has occurred within evangelical theology.[3] Kevin Vanhoozer commends the efforts of evangelical scholars to better understand this often-caricatured theologian. Vanhoozer summarizes evangelical responses of Barth as 'something of a tragicomedy of errors, complete with mistaken identities, dramatic ironies, and

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1 Kenneth S. Kantzer, 'Thank God for Karl Barth, but …', *Christianity Today* 30, no. 4 (October 1986): 14. As an example of the latter view, Cornelius Van Til, noted that because 'this enemy comes in the guise of a friend he is all the more dangerous.' See Gregory G. Bolich, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 67.

2 Kantzer, 'Thank God for Karl Barth', 14–15.

3 For example, two major edited volumes on evangelical engagement with Barth appeared within a two-year period: Sung Wook Chung's *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) and David Gibson and Daniel Strange's *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

outright misunderstandings', fluctuating between those who have been overly 'hot' and overly 'cool' regarding what redemptive value Barth's work could have for the evangelical project.[4]

In this paper, I propose that we should not let extreme interpretations of Barth prevent us from attaining a more nuanced grasp of his theological insights—one that recognizes the complexities (and even inconsistencies) of his theology, its potential to strengthen evangelical theology, and also its lack of resonance with certain evangelical theological instincts. Neither simplistically rejecting nor wholeheartedly embracing Barth's theology, we should enter into critical dialogue with Barth's work. I demonstrate what such critical dialogue might look like for evangelicals by examining three areas of Barth's theology: his doctrines of Scripture, the Trinity and election.

Whose Barth?

Barth's life is complex and his influence is tough to overestimate. Born in Basel, Switzerland in 1886 and trained for pastoral ministry amidst liberal Protestant teaching, Barth broke away from liberalism around the outbreak of World War I after seeing his former professors, including Adolf von Harnack, sign a declaration supporting German military action and largely equating German culture with the best of Christian civilization. This break was particularly prominent in the second edition of his *Commentary on Romans* (1922), where he articulated foundations of what came to be known as 'neo-orthodoxy' in protest against the humanistic theological assumptions of the day. Barth's commentary on Romans was later described as falling 'like a bombshell on the theologians' playground',[5] because it boldly asserted more traditional doctrines with a modern twist, emphasizing the otherness of God, the gulf between God and humanity, and the claim that only God can overcome that gulf by speaking words of confrontation to humans blinded by idolatry.

Though Barth began his career as a pastor, he became a professor of theology in Germany during the inter-war period. With the rise of Hitler, Barth led the Confessing Church and played a central role in composing the 1934 Barmen Declaration, which rejected Nazi influence on the church and emphasized Christians' allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ rather than to false lords such as the Führer. Barth's resistance cost him his faculty position at the University of Bonn, but this enabled his return to Basel, where he accepted a post in systematic theology. Here he composed his most enduring theological contribution, the *Church Dogmatics* (still unfinished when he died in 1968). Barth was probably the most influential theologian of the early twentieth century and ranks as one of the most significant theological voices in modern history.

One key problem in engaging with Barth is the ever-pressing question of whose Barth we are talking about. His massive corpus does not provide many signposts to

4 Kevin Vanhoozer, 'A Person of the Book: Barth on Biblical Authority and Interpretation', in Chung, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, 26–27, 37.

5 Karl Adam was the first to use this language to describe Barth's impact in 1926, as referenced in J. McConnachie, 'The Teaching of Karl Barth', *Hibbert Journal* 25 (1926–1927): 385.

guide us towards properly understanding him—and sometimes it even contains conflicting signposts. Carl Trueman claimed, 'There sometimes seem as many Barths as there are Barthians.'[6]

George Hunsinger, in *How to Read Karl Barth*, proposes at least six different possible 'readings' of Barth: actualist, particularist, objectivist, personalist, realist and rationalist. This complexity suggests that multiple models and interpretative frameworks must be employed to understand the whole of Barth's complex project.[7] We can also conclude with Hunsinger that Barth's organizing principle is absolutely clear: 'From start to finish the centrality of Jesus Christ is never in question.'[8] There is no dispute that Barth is a nuanced theologian (requiring many readings) and a Christocentric one (prompting a constant return to Jesus as theology's centre).

But three significant interpretive questions, proposed by Henri Blocher, must also shape our reading of Barth. The first involves Barth's self-professed emphasis on Jesus Christ as the centre of his theology: is his overriding concern with Christ more Christomonic (i.e. seeing Christ as the singular representation of God, to the extent of overriding the Trinity) than Christocentric? The second key question concerns how Barth's theology changed over time and how these changes should thus influence our reading of Barth at different periods in his career. Third, Blocher wonders to what extent we should presume that Barth is consistent with himself.[9] A thorough investigation of these questions is beyond the scope of the present essay. I will assume that Barth is essentially Christocentric, that the various periods of his theological career contain more continuity than discontinuity, and that his inconsistencies, though generating no small debate among Barth scholars, do not ultimately prevent us from discerning and assessing the main emphases of his theological career.

A brief history of evangelical reception

Sung Wook Chung states, 'The evangelical reception of the theology of Karl Barth has been complicated. … We have a variety of responses to Barth's theology … because evangelical theology is increasingly becoming a diversified, not a uniform, movement.'[10] We can generally divide evangelical reactions to Barth into three categories: rejection of a dangerous threat, appropriation of the work of a faithful partner, and critical dialogue with a conversation partner who is to be neither fully rejected nor appropriated but mined for redemptive value.[11]

The earliest evangelical response to Barth was largely one of rejection, perhaps best represented by Cornelius Van Til, though it would also characterize the views of Fred Klooster, Gordon H. Clack, Charles Ryrie, John Warrick Montgomery,

6 Carl Trueman, 'Preface', in Gibson and Strange, *Engaging with Barth*, 14.

7 George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4, 7.

8 Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 8.

9 Henri Blocher, 'Karl Barth's Christocentric Method', in Gibson and Strange, *Engaging with Barth*, 23, 26–27.

10 Chung, 'Preface', in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, xix.

11 On these categories, see Richard Albert Mohler Jr., *Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative Models of Response* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1989), 7–8.

Francis Schaeffer and Carl F. H. Henry.[12] Van Til declared concerning Barth, 'Our purpose then is frankly polemical. We would rally the forces of the Reformed Faith and behind them those of evangelical Christianity against this new enemy.'[13] Gregory Bolich wrote, 'Under the influence of Van Til and various evangelical colleagues the work of Barth was declared off limits to a generation of evangelicals.'[14] Though Van Til's later critiques were somewhat more nuanced, he largely urged repudiation of what he considered the greatest danger to orthodox Christianity on the world scene. Van Til clearly wore the model of rejection on his sleeve (or, in this case, on his dust jacket).

A second group of evangelical responses can be characterized as engaging in critical dialogue. This model is perhaps best represented by G. C. Berkouwer, though Clark Pinnock and Donald Bloesch would also fit in this category.[15] Berkouwer went to great lengths both to commend Barth's overall emphasis on the triumph of grace and to question whether 'in spite of the appearance of honoring the motif of grace, the riches and totality of the gospel [are] obscured.'[16] Despite his warnings, Berkouwer did not reject Barth, respecting his 'evangelical intentions' and affirming that evangelicals could learn much from this brilliant theologian.[17]

Finally, the evangelicals willing to largely appropriate Barth may be best represented by Bernard Ramm, with Edward John Carnell, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance also part of this group.[18] Ramm ranks close to or perhaps even alongside Carl Henry in influencing the landscape of post–World War II evangelicalism. Ramm's view of Barth warmed during his career; in his culminating work *After Fundamentalism* (1983), he described Barth as one who engaged in orthodox theology while taking full account of the Enlightenment project that fundamentalists ignored. Although he still included a brief list of reservations about Barth in the book's appendix, Ramm concluded, 'Of all the efforts of theologians to come to terms with the Enlightenment, Karl Barth's theology has been the most thorough. He thereby offers to evangelical theology a paradigm of how best to come to terms with the Enlightenment.'[19]

A modest proposal for evangelical engagement

It seems clear that the extremes of outright rejection and uncritical reception cannot suitably guide evangelical engagement with Barth. David Gibson and Daniel Strange state, 'Barth offers too much simply to ignore and the gateway he provides to the

12 Mohler, *Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth*, iv–v.

13 Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 33.

14 Gregory G. Bolich, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 66–67.

15 Mohler, *Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth*, v.

16 G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 204.

17 Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth*, 90.

18 Mohler, *Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth,* vi.

19 Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983), vii.

tradition is too absorbingly rich and imaginative, too multifaceted, to be simplistically rejected.' But on the other hand, they also argue that uncritical appropriation, as seen in Ramm, ultimately fails to help evangelicals perceive that 'in key places Barth has not seen further and higher than those on whose shoulders he stands.' Gibson and Strange conclude, 'An evangelicalism that appropriates Barth's theology without substantial criticism will be an evangelicalism that is impoverished in central aspects of its witness and confession of the gospel.'[20]

So the remaining option is to engage in critical dialogue with Barth. But what does this involve? Certainly, it does not mean taking a neutral position or never passing judgement on aspects of Barth's theology. It does mean treating Barth as a conversation partner and probing thoughtfully for both pitfalls and promising features in his work. As Gibson and Strange note, 'Where Barth is wrong, the consequences may be extremely serious for a variety of theological and pastoral issues, and these concerns need to be highlighted.' But this possibility only points to the need for further engagement to discern exactly where those places are and why Barth should be seen as having faltered there.[21]

We will now briefly examine three case studies to gain a sense of what this critical dialogue might look like with regard to Barth's doctrines of Scripture, the Trinity and election.

An evangelical response to Barth's doctrine of Scripture: postponing judgement

Barth taught that the Bible *becomes* the Word of God for us as God graciously enables this to occur. This is quite a high view of the Bible but not quite the equivalent of the common evangelical understanding of biblical inerrancy. Barth's 'indirect identity thesis' declines to say that the Bible *is* the Word of God, because, in his view, that would limit God's freedom to reveal himself as he so chooses.

But Barth also insisted that we cannot treat the Bible as a book like all other books, for this fails to acknowledge Scripture's utter uniqueness as the text which God has made, and promises to make again, the Word of God—the place where we encounter God in his self-revelation (especially as Scripture is proclaimed by the Church).

In this sense, Barth resisted both conservative and liberal views of the Bible. He believed that we should view Scripture not merely as a *source* (either of God himself, according to conservatives, or reflecting the authors and their cultural, historical and religious backgrounds according to liberals) but as a *witness*. Barth contended that the Bible is unique because of its function as a collection of authorized witnesses to the Word (namely, the prophets and apostles) whom God in his sovereign freedom has used to speak to us as Lord of the church. When God sees fit, the Bible witnesses to the Word, enabling an encounter with Jesus Christ whose words cut to the bone, rebuke our idolatries, reassure us of His grace and train us in what it looks like to follow Christ as the risen Lord.

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20 David Gibson and Daniel Strange, 'Introduction', in *Engaging with Barth*, 18–19.

21 Gibson and Strange, 'Introduction', 18.

Barth thus believed that church life must be dominated by exegesis of the Bible; indeed, his final words to his students in Bonn as the Nazi tide was rolling in were 'Exegesis, exegesis, exegesis!' This is not only because he saw Scripture as the foundation of proper dogmatics, but also because he believed that only studying and meditating on Scripture could sustain and empower the church to bear witness even amidst the refining fire of Nazi atrocities.

Barth's doctrine of Scripture has often been rejected by evangelicals over the issue of biblical infallibility. Kantzer summarized evangelical concerns in this way: '[Barth] found error not only in the historical and scientific but also in the theological teaching of Scripture … [and] evangelicals object … to Barth's teaching that the Scriptures must contain falsehoods because error is essential to their full humanity.'[22] Kevin Vanhoozer observes that evangelicals are, more than any other descriptor, 'a people of the book', and that they thus have found Barth's distinction between the Word of God (i.e. Jesus Christ) and the words of men (i.e. Scripture) quite disconcerting.[23] Barth's indirect identity thesis has caused many evangelicals to reject his doctrine of Scripture, or even to reject him completely as a useful theologian.

But does Barth's doctrine of Scripture deserve such a complete rebuke? We must ask to what extent Barth's doctrine of Scripture actually departs from an evangelical one. Bruce McCormack argues that 'Barth's doctrine of Scripture has more in common with … the evangelical doctrine of Scripture than is often realized. They are compatible doctrines, even if they are not identical.' McCormack says that Barth's 'dynamic infallibilism' gives rise to a very high view of the authority of the Bible that is demonstrated in both theory (what he explicitly teaches) and practice (what he does in his dogmatic work).[24]

Also, evangelical engagement with Barth may have placed undue emphasis on his doctrine of Scripture when this was not, in Barth's mind, a matter of first importance (especially in the *Church Dogmatics*). McCormack believes evangelicals have failed to see that '[Barth's] doctrine of Scripture … stands on the periphery' while 'his exposition of election, Trinity, and Christology … [are] matters that stand, for him, at the very center.'[25] Even Mark Thompson, who raises significant concerns about Barth's doctrine of Scripture, acknowledges, 'It is true that what Barth has to say about the nature of scripture is a function of other, more primary, dogmatic convictions.'[26]

Thompson represents, in many ways, evangelical worries about Barth's doctrine of Scripture. One concern he raises is that Barth's doctrine of Scripture may have fallen victim to an overriding concern for the freedom of God. He argues that Barth's

22 Kenneth S. Kantzer, 'Biblical Authority: Where Both Fundamentalists and Neoevangelicals Are Right', *Christianity Today* 27, no. 15 (1983): 11.

23 Vanhoozer, 'A Person of the Book', 26.

24 Bruce L. McCormack, 'The Being of Holy Scripture Is in Becoming: Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism', in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 73–74.

25 McCormack, 'The Being of Holy Scripture', 75.

26 Mark D. Thompson, 'Witness to the Word: On Barth's Doctrine of Scripture', in Gibson and Strange, *Engaging with Barth*, 176.

'notion of lordship as absolute freedom … has been determined apart from and prior to God's own expression of his freedom in creation, covenant, incarnation and the commissioning of Scripture.' Thompson adds, 'While Barth would no doubt agree that God must himself determine the nature of his own lordship, he does not appear to consider that God might bind himself to the word he speaks and that he commissions the prophets and apostles to write.' This valid concern prompts us to realize that Barth's theological system sometimes squelches the authoritative voice of Scripture about itself that Barth professes to be standing under. Thompson adds another crucial concern: 'Barth himself has been accused (quite reasonably in my view) of having collapsed the Spirit's illumination into the concept of revelation.'[27] In other words, Barth has overlooked how the doctrine of illumination can assist us in proclaiming an inerrant text without falling into bibliolatry or using the text to domesticate and even master the divine.

In contrast, Vanhoozer is more sympathetic. He believes that the framework of speech act theory can help evangelicals see ways in which Barth's doctrine of Scripture can correct their own blind spots, and he argues specifically that Barth helps us to more fully consider the *effect* of Scripture's proclamation upon its readers.[28] For Vanhoozer, Barth helps us see that 'the Bible *becomes* what it is when the illuminating Spirit ministers [its statements] in order to bring about the divinely intended ... effects.'[29] Yet Vanhoozer also comments that the evangelical doctrine of Scripture provides a critique of Barth through the same speech act lens, for evangelicals are quick (and right) to note that effects depend on (true) statements and that a doctrine of Scripture is not satisfactory until we have understood how the Bible has its being in *both* such statements and their effects.[30]

Vanhoozer further examines Barth's unwillingness to allow God to be 'bound' to the text of Scripture, asking him rhetorically, 'Is God so free that God's speech is exempt from the normal obligations that accrue to the uttering of a promise?'[31] The answer is clearly no, and the implication is that Vanhoozer, like Thompson, sees Barth as overlooking God's willingness to bind himself by making the covenant promises that we find in Scripture.

This analysis suggests that Barth's doctrine of Scripture deserves careful examination, and that we should not rush to exclude him from consideration—and lose out on his many wonderful contributions. As Thompson notes, 'The person with whom we are engaging is not an enemy but a fellow disciple of Jesus Christ.'[32] Ramm cautions that 'There are some hard problems to face to make his theory workable' but ultimately concludes that 'in my opinion his is the best attempt in modern times … to correlate biblical criticism, divine revelation, divine inspiration, divine authority of Scripture, and its place as the Word of God in the church.'[33] And

27 Thompson, 'Witness to the Word', 179, 180, 189.
28 Vanhoozer, 'A Person of the Book', 58.
29 Vanhoozer, 'A Person of the Book', 59.
30 Vanhoozer, 'A Person of the Book', 58-59.
31 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 157.
32 Thompson, 'Witness to the Word', 196.
33 Bernard Ramm, 'Helps from Karl Barth', in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 125.

John Morrison offers high praise for Barth's stance, especially in an unfriendly cultural context: 'Despite all philosophical, philological, epistemological, and cultural-theological pressures to reject pre-modern, "orthodox" conclusions, Karl Barth still asserted that Holy Scripture *is* that Word of God which, by the Spirit, can "become" the Word of God … to one who hears in faith.'[34] Vanhoozer concludes that when we engage with Barth on Scripture, 'It is not so much a matter of becoming Barthian but of learning whatever there is to learn about how better rightly to view and handle the Scriptures. Whatever is true in Barth's doctrine of Scripture, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on these things.'[35] It is in our best interest as evangelicals to postpone judgement and stick with Barth even when his doctrine of Scripture doesn't exactly match our own.

An evangelical response to Barth's doctrine of the Trinity: careful appropriation

For Barth, the Trinity isn't just one theological point amongst many, but the central locus of theology, one that shapes Christian dogmatics all the way down. That is because theology properly deals with what God has revealed, and for Barth, what God has revealed is not primarily *propositions* about himself, but rather *himself*. The incarnation is the great evidence of this, and so for Barth, once we accept Scripture's testimony regarding Jesus as God incarnate, we are committed to a Trinitarian understanding of who God is.

Barth's *Church Dogmatics* makes this clear from the outset. There Barth recognizes a parallel between the Trinitarian nature of God and the inner structure of revelation. Specifically, he describes God as the subject, predicate, and object of revelation, or as the revealer (giver), the process of revelation (act of giving), and the end result of revelation (the gift). The biblical concept of revelation thus assumes the doctrine of the Trinity because it conceives of a threefold yet single Lordship of God in self-revelation. Indeed, for Barth, 'The doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian, in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation.'[36] Accordingly, all of God's acts revealed in Scripture are acts of the triune God, even if some of them belong more properly to one particular person. (Barth preferred to refer to 'modes of being' rather than to 'persons' in the Trinity, but this should not be confused with the heresy of modalism, which he rejected along with the heresy of tritheism).

In this way, Barth holds that theology must begin with the Trinity because it must begin with the 'concrete givenness' of God; we can't speak of Scripture as witness unless there is a God who has chosen to reveal himself, and there is no God other than the One who is triune. Theology, to be distinctively Christian, must start with the triune God who is an utterly free Lord, even before his gracious (and utterly loving) self-revelation. And that revelation is found centrally in the person and

34 John D. Morrison, 'Barth, Barthians, and Evangelicals: Reassessing the Question of the Relation of Holy Scripture and the Word of God', *Trinity Journal* 25 (Spring 2004): 213.

35 Vanhoozer, 'A Person of the Book', 59.

36 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 301.

history of Jesus Christ, such that a Christological concentration, informed by a robust doctrine of the Trinity, becomes the touchstone for all proper theology.

Roger Olsen and Christopher Hall comment that the great surprise of twentieth-century theology was 'the revival and revitalization of Trinitarian thought' and go on to note that 'Karl Barth inaugurated the revival.'[37] Vanhoozer sees Barth's work as a rebuke to evangelicals, declaring that 'in light of Barth's achievement, the outstanding story of twentieth-century evangelical theology is its benign neglect of the Trinity.'[38] Vanhoozer goes on to link this neglect with a certain malaise in contemporary evangelical theology, saying that 'one important reason for this malaise was the tendency to treat the doctrine of the Trinity (when it *was* treated rather than neglected) in a merely notional way rather than as the operative concept of the distinctly Christian God of the gospel.'[39] Stanley Grenz similarly praises Barth for 'rediscovering the Triune God', for both Christian theology generally and evangelical theology specifically.[40]

Some evangelicals, even while thankful for Barth's role in a much-needed Trinitarian revival, have raised concerns with his doctrine of the Trinity. Michael Ovey's most serious objection is that Barth defines modalism more narrowly than patristic theologians did and thus doesn't fully escape the charge by Jürgen Moltmann and others that Barth's theology is a triumph for third-century Sabellianism, which treated Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three modes of God but not as three distinct persons. Ovey argues that, contrary to what Barth asserts, he does not do enough to prevent the blurring of distinctions between the Father, Son and Spirit.[41]

Ovey is also concerned that Barth's emphasis on the reflexiveness of intra-Trinitarian relations is out of keeping with the New Testament evidence. Ovey examines John 5 particularly and notes how Barth's reflexive Trinitarian conception causes many problems for the idea of intra-Trinitarian love, causing statements such as 'The Father loves the Son' to sound like the Father's 'private love of himself'.[42] Because of these concerns, Ovey concludes that Barth's positive contribution to Trinitarian theology is undermined by his departures from orthodoxy and from the biblical material.

Ovey raises important points of concern, especially because evangelical theologians would never want to appropriate a Trinitarian theology that departs from an orthodox position. However, it is not clear whether Barth has indeed left the bounds of orthodoxy; Barth insists that he most certainly has not, and many of his interpreters would agree. More importantly, Ovey's concerns have no bearing on Barth's most significant contribution, namely bringing Trinitarian theology back to the centre of dogmatics. We should not necessarily seek to appropriate all the minor

37 Roger E. Olsen and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 95.

38 Vanhoozer, 'The Triune God of the Gospel', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26.

39 Vanhoozer, 'The Triune God of the Gospel', 17–18.

40 Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004).

41 Michael J. Ovey, 'A Private Love? Karl Barth and the Triune God', in Gibson and Strange, *Engaging with Barth*, 222.

42 Ovey, 'A Private Love?' 228–31.

details of Barth's Trinitarian formulation, but his overall shift from a unitarian to a Trinitarian starting point for theology is to be celebrated and imitated.

Indeed, evangelical theology's need for just this contribution is easily seen when we survey the standard evangelical systematic theologies today. As Vanhoozer notes, their well-established order of discussing God's existence, nature and attributes prior to any discussion of the Trinity proves that 'evangelical theologians live in the house that Thomas [Aquinas] built', a house that largely became the dilapidated shack of 19th-century liberal theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher.[43] Trinitarian theology is an area where we desperately need to appropriate Barth's message, even as we continue to investigate the valid concerns of Ovey and others. A careful appropriation of his insights would require understanding what Barth actually said, assessing how consistent he was throughout his career, and further investigating whether his position is in line with Christian orthodoxy and the testimony of Scripture.

An evangelical response to Barth's doctrine of election: decided rejection

With regard to the doctrine of election, Barth was 'a bold innovator'.[44] Barth not only reinvigorated the conversation around election but actually reframed the debate in several significant ways, beginning with his redefinition of the very concept of election itself. Whereas it was understood by most Christian traditions as the election of particular people unto salvation from eternity past (according to God's predestination), Barth understood it primarily as 'God's self-determination toward humanity in Jesus Christ'.[45]

A second, related innovation concerned the object of election; in the classical tradition, the direct object of election is humanity, but for Barth the direct object of election is Jesus Christ. There is only one elect man, Jesus, and all human beings are indirectly elected through identification with Him. Interestingly, there is a significant complement to this innovation: Jesus Christ is also the only reprobate one, being rejected on the cross as the representative for all humanity. In this way, Barth brings together the doctrines of election and reprobation in a way that 'retained the double dimension of the traditional Reformed doctrine of predestination including election and rejection … reformulating it innovatively into a double predestination of Jesus Christ alone from his christocentric perspective.'[46]

And as if that weren't enough innovation, Barth also argues that Christ is not only the object of election, but also its subject. Whereas the Christian tradition has understood the subject of election to be the Father, Barth understands Jesus Christ

43 Vanhoozer, 'The Triune God of the Gospel', 19–20. Vanhoozer seeks to draw out the potential, but not necessarily inevitable, implications of following Aquinas in moving from God's attributes, including his oneness, to a discussion of his Trinitarian nature. Schleiermacher serves as just one example, albeit an influential one, of how such an ordering of the doctrine of God can lead to the doctrine of the Trinity playing a peripheral, rather than a central, role in one's theological system.

44 Chung, 'A Bold Innovator: Barth on God and Election', in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, 60.

45 Chung, 'A Bold Innovator', 71.

46 Chung, 'A Bold Innovator', 73.

as 'the electing God and the elect human'. As McCormack comments, 'The latter half of the thesis occasions no great surprise. … It is the first half of the thesis, however, which has proved startling.'[47]

What are we to make of these stunning innovations? Some evangelical theologians have welcomed the developments with open arms as a way to bypass a doctrine that has often divided believers (e.g. Calvinists and Arminians) and alienated unbelievers. One such voice is that of Donald Bloesch, who proclaims that 'Barth has made it possible for the church to preach predestination, judgment, and hell in the context of God's unfathomable love without minimizing the seriousness of the state of unbelief.'[48] Grenz and Olson celebrate the accomplishment as doing away with the 'terrible decree of double predestination [that] divides humankind into the saved and the damned'.[49] And McCormack states triumphantly, 'I am confident that the greatest contribution of Karl Barth to the development of church doctrine will be located in his doctrine of election. It was here that he provided his most valuable corrective to classical teaching.'[50] For these theologians, appropriation of Barth's work on the doctrine of election is strongly advised.

But I find stronger reasons for rejecting these innovations. David Gibson shows that Barth's Christocentrism drives him to conclusions that seem to go against a straightforward reading of Romans 9–11. Gibson argues that at times Barth's 'interpretation of Scripture … was often commandeered by doctrinal interests' and demonstrates that in the case of Romans 9–11, 'Barth's overall thesis—that the election of Jesus is imaged in the election of the community with the attendant result that none in the community can be separated from the love of God in Christ—exerts such a pressure that the details of the text have [been] distorted under its weight. … Barth's argument is not the direction in which Romans 9 points.'[51]

Oliver Crisp highlights another problem, showing (definitively in my view) that Barth's doctrine of reprobation is caught between the 'rock' of universalism and the 'hard place' of inconsistency, neither of which is acceptable to evangelical theologians.[52] Given that Barth seems to want to deny that his doctrine of election is universalistic, Crisp concludes that it is internally disordered and ultimately indefensible.[53]

Chung provides a third reason for rejecting Barth's doctrine of election: his description of the Son of God as both the subject and the object of election goes

47 Bruce McCormack, 'Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology', *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 94.

48 Donald Bloesch, 'Karl Barth: Appreciation and Reservations', in McKim, *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, 127.

49 Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 74.

50 McCormack, 'Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology', 92.

51 David Gibson, 'The Day of God's Mercy: Romans 9–11 in Barth's Doctrine of Election', in Gibson and Strange, *Engaging with Barth*, 144, 161.

52 Oliver D. Crisp, 'Karl Barth and Jonathan Edwards on Reprobation (and Hell)', in Gibson and Strange, *Engaging with Barth*, 301.

53 For a very convincing argument in this regard, see Oliver Crisp, 'On Barth's Denial of Universalism', *Themelios* 29, no. 1 (2003): 18–29.

against the clear teaching of Scripture. He concludes, 'If we accept seriously the teachings of the Bible that God (the Father) elected the church … in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3–6), then we cannot endorse Barth's doctrine of election as being faithful to the Word of God.'[54]

It seems that when it comes to Barth's doctrine of election we must opt for decided rejection, leaving Barth behind where he set forth innovations that ultimately depart from the path of biblical fidelity. Barth was cognizant of the controversial nature of his doctrine of election, stating, 'I … am fully aware that it is no secondary matter if I deviate here. … This is the rent in the cloak of my orthodoxy.'[55] Ultimately, rejecting a particular doctrinal innovation that departs from biblical teaching is exactly what Barth himself would have encouraged us to do, since he said that the goal of his dogmatic project was 'to listen to what Scripture is saying and to tell you what I hear'.[56]

Conclusion

How evangelicals should engage with Barth is a pressing question because of his lasting influence and impressive theological accomplishments. Michael Horton says that Barth 'altered the theological landscape of neo-Protestantism … [and] radically revised evangelical and Reformed doctrine. … [He] remains an important figure to be reckoned with, neither to be lightly dismissed nor to be uncritically embraced.'[57] Given Barth's importance, the many nuances of his theology and the diverse responses to him by evangelicals, critical dialogue is an appropriate position while we continually seek to understand what Barth really said and how best to interpret his overall theological project (including how to resolve the inconsistencies that emerge when his entire theological corpus is examined). Moreover, such multi-faceted engagement with Barth is 'a subservient task to the wider programme of constructive theological thinking that seeks to articulate the gospel for the contemporary world'.[58]

Thankfully, we have positive examples of thoughtful interaction with Barth in scholars such as Henri Blocher and Kevin Vanhoozer. Their middle way is sometimes crowded out by their louder, more polemical colleagues, but their critical dialogue rightly follows Berkouwer's example in balancing careful appropriation of aspects of Barth's work with rejection of other aspects, while reserving the right to postpone judgement when necessary. Most importantly, amidst their disagreements with Barth they maintain a profound respect for him as a towering theologian who can help us 'carry forward the discussion of central elements of Christian orthodoxy', even if he did not conform to that orthodoxy at every step.[59] I hope that this essay may encourage us to follow Kenneth Kantzer in giving thanks for Karl Barth while reading him with our eyes open.

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54 Chung, 'A Bold Innovator', 76.
55 Quoted in Gibson, 'The Day of God's Mercy', 136.
56 Quoted in Gibson, 'The Day of God's Mercy', 167.
57 Michael Horton, 'A Stony Jar: The Legacy of Karl Barth for Evangelical Theology', in Gibson and Strange, *Engaging with Barth*, 348, 381.
58 Gibson and Strange, 'Introduction', 19.
59 Trueman, 'Preface', 15.

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The Puzzle of Institutional Inertia in Theological Education

Jana Holiday and Linda Cannell with James D. McLennan

Theological institutions must sustain their core values while not resisting necessary change. The authors draw on their extensive experience in theological education and board governance to address how four groups of stakeholders—administrators, faculty, students and boards—can resist institutional inertia.

Movies set in the era when the horse and buggy were giving way to the automobile often show them travelling together on the same roads—not without mutual annoyance. For some years after its invention in 1893, the 'horseless carriage' looked much like the horse-drawn buggy. In time, it would look nothing like its distant predecessor.

Humans persistently reinvent their world. Resistance to such changes is not surprising. The puzzle is why some sectors seem less adaptable than others. Transportation has changed phenomenally since the 1930s, but change in theological education has long been described as glacial. Those of us who have inhabited theological institutions for some years are familiar with persisting concerns about inadequate curriculum, lack of resources, limited teaching effectiveness, and structures and practices that hinder meaningful progress.[1]

Yet, as Edward Farley observed in 1983, the 'history of theological schools is a history of constant reform.' In his view, the persisting concerns and complaints are mostly about symptoms. 'Curiously', he noted, 'the present chorus of criticism does not call for reform in the sense of either a new institution or a new conceptual framework.'[2] He then identified reform movements that successfully effected large-

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1 The authors of this article have North America as their primary frame of reference, but we believe that our colleagues in other parts of the world may notice similar characteristics in their own contexts, and so we hope that our discussion will serve them as well.

2 Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 3.

scale change. His book helped to launch more than a decade of vigorous discussion and thoughtful writing among an unprecedented variety of stakeholders in theological schools.

However, although certain changes in curriculum and structure emerged, the hoped-for extent of change did not materialize. Farley called for a return to theological education grounded in wisdom (sapiential knowledge), praxis and spirituality, but attempts to fulfil his vision still seem to be limited largely to periodic course modifications or concerns over what he would call symptoms. It seems that humans will tolerate inertia and protect the status quo until something unavoidable occurs that cannot be dealt with by the usual means. (Perhaps a pandemic is that something.)

This article focuses on the puzzle of institutional inertia in theological schools. We consider the roles of four groups of stakeholders: administrators (especially presidents and chief academic officers), faculty, students and trustees.

The nature of institutions

Inevitably, the institutional church created schools to train leaders. But if left unexamined and unchecked, the desire for institutional effectiveness often contributes to the perpetuation of procedures and programmes, even if they seem to hinder the achievement of the intended purposes.

Stakeholders in theological institutions are coming to understand that preoccupation with building institutions may blunt education's ability to foster lifelong learning, spirituality, community and responsible service. When opportunities for theological education are presented merely as a choice among similar institutions, new or reconfigured programmes along with infusions of capital will not by themselves resolve persisting criticisms or overcome institutional inertia.

However, even though the assumption that the way to do theological education is to build a school is itself seriously limiting, the solution is not necessarily to do away with schools. The critical question for stakeholders is to what extent institutionalized theological education can accomplish essential purposes and adapt to the inevitable processes of change. Increasingly, we are recognizing that theological education cannot be wholly contained in a schooling institution, nor should it be defined in institutional terms. A theology school is simply one way of doing theological education.

As you read the following discussion of four groups of key stakeholders, ask yourself: What is most important about the role each plays in assisting the progress of the institution through the effects of change? What are the challenges relating to partnership with other stakeholders?

Presidents and chief academic officers

Understanding institutional dynamics and expectations becomes more difficult to the extent that leaders of theological schools come to their task with limited experience in theological education administration. Although most top administrators come from the ranks of faculty, deans and provosts, increasing

numbers are coming from pastorates, denominational leadership, parachurch and mission leadership or even the business world.

Once chiefly the academic voice and moral compass for stakeholders, the president is now primarily an administrator of an increasingly complex institution. Moreover, fulfilling these responsibilities effectively is more difficult given the short tenure of chief administrators. Gin and Wang reported in 2020, 'On average, presidents reported being in their current positions for 5.9 years, deans for 5.6 years.'[3] Although this tenure does not seem overly brief, in an academic environment it is troubling. As one university president lamented, 'It takes us five years to stop what we've been doing, five years to debate what we should be doing, and five more years to implement.'[4]

Smart leaders learn

Limited tenure and lack of background in theological education administration contribute to two frequently identified weaknesses amongst chief administrators of colleges and universities: fundraising and leadership.[5] Following are possibilities for development in both areas.

Fundraising. William G. Enright, former director of the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and also a former pastor, is uniquely qualified to provide guidance to presidents of theological schools and congregational leaders. We asked him for his advice to presidents of theological schools about fundraising, and he offered these comments:

> Several years ago, I was privileged to lead a seminar on fundraising for the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). My audience consisted of presidents of theological schools from across North America. What caught me by surprise was the angst these highly competent and gifted leaders felt on discovering fundraising to be a major part of their job description.
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> The president of any non-profit organization is responsible for building and leading the development team charged with raising the money that will enable their institution to carry out its calling. Directors of development and development staff were participants in nearly every seminar I led as director of the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving. What did I learn from these institutional servants? Their success or failure hinged on the degree to which their president or CEO was personally involved in fundraising by cultivating and spending time with donors.
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> 'Fundraising is the gentle art of teaching people the joy of giving!' In his little classic *The Spirituality of Fundraising*, Henri Nouwen describes fundraising as a way to invite people into mission for the advancing of the kingdom of God. In

3 David Wang and Debbie Gin. 'Changing Landscapes—Insights from ATS Studies on Leadership', *Colloquy Online* (Association of Theological Schools), April 2020, 1, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday3.

4 Daniel Fusch (ed.), 'The Changing Presidency in Higher Education: Presidential Dialogues' (2015), 6, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday4.

5 See Jeffrey Selingo, Sonny Chheng and Cole Clark, 'Pathways to the University Presidency', *Deloitte Insights*, April 2017, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday5.

recent years, the fundraising world has experienced a seismic shift. Historically, fundraising was institution-centred. Today, fundraising is increasingly donor-centred as donors have more charitable giving choices than ever before.

While fundraising for the mother church in Jerusalem, savvy Saint Paul noted that 'God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor 9:7), which begs the question: What makes for a cheerful giver? While people of faith are called to be generous stewards of all they have received from the hands of a generous God, they are also called to be discerning as they sort through their giving opportunities. What, then, captures donors' hearts and minds and sparks their imaginations, inspiring generous giving? I would suggest three things: (1) stories of changed lives that reflect the difference an institution is making as it lives its mission; (2) communications that are personal, donor-friendly and data-driven; (3) new and innovative ventures that reflect timeless institutional values now being reoriented to address the needs of a changing culture.

Two current economic realities underscore the challenges facing fundraisers. First, nationally the number of annual donors is decreasing, reflecting the economic challenges facing middle-class givers. As a result, institutions are increasingly dependent on the generosity of major donors for their well-being. Second, the spectre of COVID-19 finds every non-profit treading uncharted waters as the economy falters. Andy Crouch, a partner for theology and culture at *Praxis* and past editor at *Christianity Today,* writes with sobering prescience, 'We need to treat COVID-19 as an economic and cultural blizzard—a once-in-a-lifetime change that is likely to affect our lives and organizations for years.'[6]

The Lilly Family School of Philanthropy offers two useful resources in this regard: an executive certificate specifically in religious fundraising, and a more general course on principles and techniques of fundraising.

Overcoming angst around the challenge of fundraising for theological schools requires both a personal and a cultural re-visioning. Nouwen argued that the priority for fundraisers is to teach people joy in giving. Enright agrees, stressing that this view makes fundraising a mission in which all stakeholders in theological institutions can participate. Further, far from being a necessary chore, fundraising can advance the financial health of institutions by developing partners who are generous stewards.

Leadership development. Persistent challenges of ensuring sufficient financing, developing a relevant curriculum, effective faculty development and institutional maintenance, plus the current threats from COVID-19 (e.g. student, staff and faculty safety, development of new and often unfamiliar modes of learning, and added financial stress) require a significantly improved level of training. Historically, chief administrators learned on the job, but school trustees should encourage and enable continuing professional development for the president and all chief administrators. Here are a few sample options (primarily for US-based academic leaders).

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6 See Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker and Dave Blanchard, 'Leading Beyond the Blizzard: Why Every Organization Is Now a Startup', *Praxis Journal*, 20 March 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday6a; Patrick Rooney and Jon Bergdoll, 'What Happens to Charitable Giving When the Economy Falters?' *The Conversation*, 23 March 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday6b.

- ATS has an annual gathering for new and experienced presidents (https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday01) that provides collegiality and workshops and can lead to mentoring opportunities for new presidents. A similar gathering is offered to new and experienced CAOs (https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday02).
- Most US regions have at least one top-ranked university offering highly rated programmes in higher education administration. Among such programmes are the Harvard Graduate School of Education and short-term executive education seminars at Harvard Kennedy School: https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday03.
- American Council on Education Fellows Program: https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday04
- You can also find relevant professional development opportunities through such organizations as NAFSA: Association of International Educators (https://www.nafsa.org) and Leadership in Higher Education conferences (https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday05).

Faculty

Faculty members aren't differentiated simply by academic disciplines or years of experience; certain distinct forms of faculty involvement in theological schools can also be identified. Knowing these differences contributes to understanding why some faculty value learning in community and others are less involved, or why some engage in conversation and action towards institutional change while others are content with the status quo. Discerning faculty experience and motivations can help administrators plan effective professional development and assess their potential involvement as team members. Faculty members typically fall into one or more of the following six categories.

1. Younger faculty, especially those new to the school, seek to understand its culture and how the practices of the institution and other faculty will affect them. They may want certain things to change but are usually consumed with course preparation and seldom willing to rock the boat.
2. Relatively established faculty members, on the other hand, are less interested in the school's functional aspects, though most will honour its vision. They are typically concerned with career advancement and becoming experts in their discipline. As long as they are supported, able to continue development in their own discipline, and on track towards achieving tenure, they will be content.
3. Many faculty members are gifted educators who stimulate students' minds and hearts. Most institutions have faculty who facilitate transformative learning and foster lifelong learning—sometimes despite restrictions created by institutional structures. However, these faculty tend to prioritize fostering learning rather than being a catalyst for institutional change.
4. Some established faculty members become stagnant in course design and teaching. These faculty are typically not skilled in the art of teaching; they focus on delivering their content and have little interest in enhancing student

learning. They tend to be tolerated by students who feel they need the credit, and they can be unpredictable or even unjust in assignments and examinations. Faculty members in this condition generally have other interests that take priority (e.g. external projects, research and writing, speaking at conferences) and are therefore invested in maintaining the institutional status quo.

5. Other faculty may not be skilled teachers but are valued because they truly love their subject, want students to love it, and genuinely care about their students' development. Because they are primarily invested in their discipline and their students, they too have little interest in becoming catalysts for institutional change.
6. Although non-tenure-track positions have become more common due to budgetary constraints, most institutions still encourage or require faculty to seek tenure after a certain number of years. Not surprisingly, tenured faculty want a stable institution to support them as they pursue research in their discipline, writing, attendance and presentation at meetings of their particular academic organizations, and, in some cases, significant service projects.

Faculty professional development

Most schools include a budget line for professional development. However, before funds are allocated, consider rethinking two familiar processes: the performance review and the faculty contract.

The annual performance review is particularly under-appreciated as a way to promote institutional progress. However, it can be a strategic factor in professional development planning and can allow faculty to offer their perspectives on institutional development (or inertia) and present new ideas.

Ideally, the interview should cover what the faculty member desires for his or her future in areas that are mutually accepted as important. Self-examination questions such as the following may be distributed before the interview:[7]

- What feedback have I had that provides consistent evidence of teaching improvement?
- What have I been doing apart from teaching (e.g. service outside the institution, some responsibility undertaken in the institution)?
- What personal challenges, if any, are affecting my work?
- Do I have skills that are not being used by the institution—or skills or abilities I would like to develop and see used?
- What areas would I like to see improved in the institution this coming year?

7 For additional information and questions to adapt for faculty performance reviews, see Samuel Cuthbert, *Get Rid of the Performance Review* (New York: Business Plus, 2010) and Christopher Lee, *Performance Conversations: An Alternative to Appraisals* (Tucson, AZ: Fenestra Books, 2006), esp. 243–46.

Along with the above questions, these could be posed to the faculty member during the interview:

- In what ways am I or is the system supporting your work or impeding your effectiveness?
- What would enhance your effectiveness?
- How do you believe your work is integrated with the work of other faculty and staff and with the school's mission?
- What vocation-related experience have you had this past year that has given you the greatest satisfaction?
- Do you have questions for me?

Most faculty contracts identify salary and benefits, the number of credit hours or courses a faculty member is expected to teach, and perhaps some expected level of committee involvement. But contracts can also reflect negotiated faculty development. For example, they could contain agreed-upon course teaching reductions to allow time for new course preparation or revision of an existing course, or funding and time for a significant service opportunity, writing or research.

Professional development options

In addition to conferences or guild-based professional development events, consider the following options.

1. Identify and individualize specific areas of development related to the experience and motivation of faculty members. For example:
   - Identify specific ways to help the faculty member gain greater expertise in his or her discipline.
   - Examine various instructional design elements. Ask the faculty member: What seems to be most effective in fostering student learning in your discipline? What specific instructional competencies do you want to learn more about? What have you found most useful (or not useful) with regard to using technology to support learning in your discipline? What modes of assessment have helped you foster student learning?
   - Plan, practice and reflect on interdisciplinary teaching.
   - Provide institutional leadership experience. Ask the faculty member what experiences you can provide that would help him or her assess interest in a possible career development pathway.
2. Create options that will foster a faculty 'community of practice'. For example:
   - Arrange regular opportunities (with refreshments) for faculty to gather and share effective teaching and assessment practices.
   - After a workshop on interdisciplinary instruction, leave a time slot open for any faculty to bring their classes together for interdisciplinary conversation.
   - Purchase a variety of books on instruction and keep them in the faculty lounge or other accessible area. Encourage faculty to take a book, read it, and discuss what they have read with their colleagues.
3. Use faculty development options to energize the institution. For example:

- During a project- or problem-based learning workshop, have faculty identify an issue that is important in your context. They can then work together in interdisciplinary teams to fashion a problem statement and a learning strategy.
- Faculty departments could work together to plan how their subject areas may be applied to a local situation.
- Invite students of colour to make a presentation to faculty on what they and the institution might do to enhance minority students' learning and reach out to the community.

Team building

Standard team assignments are not likely to attract the sort of creativity that an institution needs when stuck in inertia. Most often, teams exist to advance departmental purposes and internal institutional projects. Yet significant faculty expertise is available to energize the institution's response to social and ethical issues in society. Effective use of that expertise will require policy changes in critical areas—in particular, tenure and promotion criteria and increasing the flexibility of teaching assignments.

Typically, a team is a small group of people with complementary abilities, focused on a specific purpose. Key factors in developing teams that can foster institutional change include the following:

- Involve faculty teams that do real work with meaningful outcomes.
- Build teams that are diverse in experience, ethnicity, gender, abilities and interests. Focus on capacities and potential contributions, not feelings of entitlement or seniority.
- Form multidisciplinary teams, since solutions to pressing issues are often found at the intersection of areas of knowledge and practice.
- Envision different teams that will help to fulfil the institution's purposes. For instance, a faculty team could explore the meaning of scholarship and recommend development opportunities; faculty and staff teams could form a short-term task force to resolve an issue or design a strategy; a team composed of faculty, staff and administrative leadership could propose strategies for institutional outreach; a team of faculty and student members could evaluate a programme innovation.
- Invite teams to share stories of how they are making a difference in people's lives.
- Invite teams to reflect critically on their work together as a team.
- Create a functional support system for teams: adequate budget and other resources, negotiated released time, communication.

Faculty may begrudge the time teamwork takes away from what they consider their real work. Encourage willingness to spend time together by providing supports such as meals, social gatherings, time away at an attractive location, and team-based professional development.

Institutional citizenship

Faculty can come to see teams as a valuable aspect of their role in the institution, but Daniel Treier (PhD programme director and professor of theology at Wheaton College) warns that institutions are sometimes tempted 'to use faculty members as marketable cogs in poorly-funded machines'. We asked him to elaborate, and he explained, 'Administrators serve the institutional mission by treating faculty members as stakeholders rather than mere resources, but also by calling faculty members to advance the institutional mission rather than simply their self-interest', especially when 'faculty members are tempted to use institutions as salary providers for their scholarly research and personally desired teaching opportunities.'

Treier stresses that the relationship between theological institutions and faculty is at its best when seen as a 'symbiotic citizenship'. Faculty members may sometimes need to resist efforts by the institutions to use them as resources to impress consumers. But at the same time, 'faculty members also need to recognize institutional service and good citizenship as vital ways of supporting student learning and sustaining their scholarly disciplines.'

The movement from inertia to growth requires a different view of and engagement between faculty and the institution, such that faculty are not viewed simply as means to an end but as people worthy of investment. Done well, this investment leads to professional growth, which in turn can contribute to institutional progress.

A growing body of research suggests that faculty citizenship, along with fostering a culture where faculty thrive, is vital to institutional vitality. Tite Tiénou, dean emeritus at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, describes this concept as 'the behavior and practices of faculty members that promote and strengthen their fit within institutional culture and contribute to personal and institutional well-being'.[8] Tiénou notes, 'Without a careful assessment of its ethos, any academic institution can, unwittingly, become a system that inhibits the development of a culture where citizenship is valued because of this inherent tension between anarchy and bureaucracy.'[9] Navigating the space between the chaos of anarchy and the stifling of bureaucracy is the space citizens inhabit—and citizens are optimal change agents!

In practical terms, faculty citizenship means participating in and contributing to the 'life together' of their institutions. It means learning the language and culture of the institution, growing increasingly familiar with its history, symbols and guiding documents. Faculty citizenship includes a commitment to service to society, nationally and internationally; accepting this responsibility increases the institution's capacity for similar service and collaboration.

As theological institutions internationally contextualize their educational and organizational models, opportunities for international teams arise. Technological access is increasingly possible in many countries and, with attention to time zones,

8 Tite Tiénou, 'Faculty as Institutional Citizens: An Invisible but Essential Aspect of Vital Sustainability', *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* 4, no. 1 (November 2018): 25, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday8.

9 Tiénou, 'Institutional Citizens', 29.

faculty from theological schools around the world can learn from one another and share insight about how to best serve the church and world.

Significantly, a joint commitment between the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) and ATS has created the basis for mutual dialogue and communication about issues that affect theological education internationally:

> Acknowledging the importance to theological education of global awareness and engagement informed by the principles, values, and virtues of educational quality and improvement, mutual respect and collegiality, cooperation and collaboration, intentional networking and support, pluralism and diversity, and sustainability and contextuality in the light of their particular ecclesial and faith traditions and commitments—[ICETE and ATS], relying on God's grace, commit to seek God's help, pray for and accompany each other, and continue to share their hope to be faithful to the work to which they are called: the improvement and enhancement of quality theological education in the service of ministry, to the glory of God and for the fulfillment of God's purposes.[10]

Accrediting agencies manage the tension of ensuring that schools are honest about what they purport to do and how they do it, while protecting space for freedom of innovation. Recently, ATS has used its Educational Models and Projects grants to encourage innovation.[11] The new standards that ATS recently adopted have shifted to a principle-focused approach that will help to avoid fostering 'cookie-cutter' institutions.[12] Member schools and agencies within ATS and ICETE are committed to addressing the difficulties within accreditation that may have hampered development in theological education in the past.[13]

Students as influencers

Students are the stakeholders whose faces we see daily, whose tuition fees support a good portion of the budget, and whose choices of where to study and what classes to take impact faculty and staff livelihoods. Some schools have official means of soliciting input from students (e.g. student satisfaction surveys, student governments, town hall meetings). However, students are with us for only two to four years and then move on; unfortunately, many theological schools do not engage alumni effectively in the school's continued development.

Although students may become somewhat engaged with the life of the institution, their intent is to study for a degree or other credential. They may be aware of some of the effects of institutional inertia, but it is seldom their primary focus. When they do express concern about frustrating pedagogy, unmet expectations, loneliness, unrealistic workloads or anxiety, it can be difficult to hear them without dismissing the concern as 'the way it's always been in academia'—

10 From the preamble; access the full affirmations at https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday10.
11 ATS, 'Three Innovative Educational Models', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday11.
12 ATS, 'What's New', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday12.
13 Technically, ICETE itself is not an accrediting agency but a network of accrediting agencies serving eight global regions. See https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday13 for a statement of commitment that reflects the increasing flexibility of global standards.

meaning that there is little desire to change, an attitude which does not significantly mitigate institutional inertia.

Most students are new to the culture of theological education, but they are not education neophytes (having received many years of formal education), and they do think about God and their place in ministry. Though not expert academics, they are not passive observers. They are *influencers*.

In our broader society, social media influencers build relationships with a niche community, which they leverage to sway consumers on the Internet. Similarly, in an educational context, student influencers foster a relationship with institutional stakeholders whom they leverage to sway decisions, resources and even educational styles within the institution. Influencers are highly engaged culture-shapers who help people rally around things that matter. Part of the formation process with student influencers involves strengthening their capacity to discern what is of value and what are appropriate means of urging change.

Developing students as constructive institutional influencers requires a significant investment of time, trust and dialogue. Kay, Dunne and Hutchinson note, 'The key concept is that students themselves take responsibility for bringing about change, based on their own research on aspects of learning and teaching.'[14] However, a hospitable culture must be created to enable students to take on that mantle of responsibility. Authentic relationships, exhortation to biblical patterns of communication, and modelling civil and richly textured dialogue are all vital aspects of building partnerships with student influencers.

Particularly since we are engaged in the formation of ministers, following the directions for conflict resolution in Matthew 18, while speaking in the pattern of Colossians 3:12 (with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience), contributes to their learning and shapes community life. As students wrestle with anxiety and negotiate transitions in their lives, the vision of who they can be and of their potential as influencers must continually be put before them. Sometimes, timely conversations can challenge a student to become an influencer. Here are two examples.

A student complains about workload in a course

Student: The professor says the school cares about student formation, but it can't happen in this class because we're overloaded with reading and other assignments.

Empathetic reframe: It sounds as if work is hindering your own formation. What do you believe God wants you to learn this semester?

Student: I am learning to rely on him more, but I need to prioritize what is most important.

Empowerment coaching: How might you share with your professor what it's like for you to juggle family, church, mental health and school? How could you ask for ideas on how to deal with everything and maintain your own spiritual formation?

14 Janice Kay, Elisabeth Dunne and James Hutchinson, 'Rethinking the Values of Higher Education—Students as Change Agents?' *Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education* (Gloucester, UK), 2010, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444holiday14.

A student comes to an administrator with a concern about a lack of gender and ethnic diversity in the readings and lectures for a particular class

Student: This faculty member is so out of touch—there's no one who thinks like me represented in this class, and this institution will never be a place where I belong.

Empathetic reframe: I am sorry. Without diverse voices, perhaps you feel as though you're not invited into the conversation. In spite of this situation, or perhaps because of it, what might God want you to learn this semester?

Student: I need to be more attentive to others who may feel like they don't belong. I could communicate that we need a more complete picture of what we are studying to increase potential impact on future ministries.

Empowerment coaching: Are there ways you could help this faculty member understand what you have noticed and how it has affected you? Could you bring a friend with you to such a conversation if needed? In what ways could you share your experience as well as hearing faculty members' reasons for their resource and pedagogical choices?

Developing students as influencers means helping them to live responsibly into their role as change agents, and as alumni who continue to influence the institution's progress. We are building for years we cannot yet envision and imagining the leaders who will take us there—those who currently sit in our classrooms and chat with us in the lunch line.

The board of directors: guardians or stewards?

The president's ultimate direction comes from trustees, but board members often need guidance in understanding how they can serve the institution most effectively. Shared vision, mutual trust and understanding of the board's role in relation to mission and purpose are essential to the school's continued development.

An ineffective president will allow board members to see only isolated parts of the institution (in the worst case, only those parts that won't undermine his or her leadership). An effective president in collaboration with an effective board will resist micro-managing selected issues or focusing on one aspect of an institution (typically finances) to the detriment of overall development.

Typically, board responsibility is described in three major areas: fiduciary (financial health and accountability), strategic (mission and purpose), and generative (creative thinking).[15] But boards will be less than effective in each of these areas if they miss, or fail to read accurately, important trends in the cultural flow of the times, and if they fail to make the critical decision as to whether they are *guardians* or *stewards* with regard to how current trends will affect the future of the organization's mission and programmes.

Board members often don't see the significance of their responsibility to steward the mission and purpose of the organization; instead, they act as guardians. What is the difference and why is the distinction important?

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15 Richard Chait, William Ryan and Barbara Taylor, *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 6.

The steward

Scripture speaks often about stewardship and the appropriate actions of stewards. The term is used of those entrusted with the care of people and households, but it seems to signify a broader responsibility in that the steward is often empowered to make decisions about matters related to those in their care (e.g. Joseph in Genesis 39:4–5; 44:1, 4; Paul's description of himself and his colleagues as stewards of the mysteries of God in 1 Corinthians 4:1–2). Furthermore, Paul's description of his ministry role suggests that stewards do not function out of their own power, but rather from the power of the Spirit of God at work within them (see Phil 4). The steward seeks to understand cultural patterns, makes strategic connections among important factors, is receptive to necessary changes and is accountable for decisions made in relation to those changes.

The guardian

The guardian, in this instance, is one whose thinking and orientation are anchored in the past and protective of traditions that likely have lost their meaning and purpose. Guardians are often anxious about the future and distrust 'new blood' who offer new ideas or raise different perspectives. In Scripture, 'guardian' has a more generative meaning. For example, the covenant is the guardian of the agreement between God and Israel (Gal 3:23–24). The word is also used in the sense of 'taking care of', or as a protection in the sense of 'putting a hedge around' (Is 5:5; Mt 21:33). Guardians looked after those incapable of managing their own affairs (Gal 4:2). When a board assumes the role of guardian and becomes merely a protector of traditions and existing practices, its generative quality on behalf of an organization is lost. As an illustration, consider Jesus' many responses to the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 3, 5, 9, 12, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23!).

Signs that the board as guardian is hindering development

When the guardian mindset is determined to resist change, it can be perceived in attitude shifts, the placement of feelings before all else, and generalized and vague insecurities. Here are some signs that a board is not supporting the healthy progress of the organization it serves.

1. The 'we've always done it this way' factor.
   - We are the *protectors* of our history, reputation, image and message
   - We watch out for 'slippage' (an often-undefined concept, as members typically can't verbalize what they are seeking to avoid)
2. The 'stop the camera' factor:
   - If it isn't broken, don't fix it
   - We are better than our competition already (meaning that we don't need to worry about making changes)
3. The 'we must be sure about this before …' caveat:
   - Is this the right timing? the right decision?
   - Are we choosing the right people?

4. The 'we are the police' role: the board is concerned about boundaries (i.e. maintaining and protecting its policies). As a result, a policy of 'overlapping' is enforced, i.e. current board members tightly micro-manage new board choices and ensure that new members conform to established practices. (In itself, overlapping is not bad governance, as it helps to ensure continuity and transmission of knowledge, but it is bad policy if its aim is to control incoming board members.)

5. The 'what will the alumni think?' syndrome: members continually elicit the opinion of previous board members—often to justify a decision or to gather ammunition against proposals they oppose. The board is paralysed by these persistent efforts to involve prior members.

6. The 'how would [a particular person] feel about … ?' factor: all conversation starts with concern for how others would feel about decisions being considered by the board. Sensitivity to stakeholder reactions makes sense generally, but in this 'guardian' pattern the dominant intent is for well-processed, rational prior policy to prevail. Any decision may elicit feelings from various concerned persons, but they should not control the outcome.

In contrast, the future of theological institutions is well served when the board of directors functions appropriately as guardian in some areas and as steward in others. On one hand, the board must be the guardian of the school's core values and commitments, holding fast with regard to legitimate concerns:

- *Doctrinal integrity:* the board supports the organization by assessing possible drift away from the core tenets of the school's belief system.
- *Maintaining direction:* this must be distinguished from the tendency to hold on to the past. An organization is always moving in some direction; the board should help to ascertain that proposed new directions are consistent with core commitments and values.
- *Clarifying distinctives:* One board responsibility is to ensure that core commitments and values are clear to potential new board members.
- *Charting the course* is also a vital component of an organization's strategy. The board helps to bring definition to the future course of the ministry. New members will join in the refinement and implementation of plans.

On the other hand, the board must be a good steward of the institution's resources in times of transition. Over time, board members will step down due to age, diminished energy, a change in responsibilities or other reasons. At the same time, the expectations and assumptions of the culture and society within which the board functions and from which new members are drawn shifts constantly. A successful board continually examines its practices and policies in light of these realities and responds to new challenges as a steward of resources, not as a guardian of how things have always been.

The greatest challenge facing stewards is to recruit new members in a way that preserves the fundamental commitments of the organization, yet allows new members to inject new thinking and energy. Fear and uncertainty should not be the controlling emotions at these 'handover' intersections. It is not appropriate for any ministry's leadership to be derailed by such thinking and actions. We must always

remember two fundamental commitments: (1) God has a plan and a will for the future and he is in charge; (2) our faith in this plan helps us not to be paralysed by the unknowns in a situation.

Trust in God's designs and in the Spirit's ability to lead a community into truth and responsible action is part of the adventure of leadership. Effective board members are appropriately accountable; they guard against a narrow, restrictive mindset and are able to take a leap of faith when necessary. Effective guardians and stewards accept the reality of conflict and differences of opinion, and they learn to intervene with grace and civility. They resist the temptation to isolate themselves and actively invite voices from the margins. New ideas and perspectives are considered as the school considers possible ways forward.

Conclusion

Can the puzzle of institutional inertia be solved? Probably not completely. There is a developmental principle at work that affects every human organism and, consequently, every organization. Developmental processes move constantly from stability to instability, and then through a process of adaptation to a new stability. This new stability should be at a higher, more complex or more mature stage of development. Although people and organizations naturally desire stability, it is not normative. All created things (including institutions) must be pushed out of static mode in order to grow. The decisions made at these times affect future development.

The Spirit of God is most evident and active in times of transition or instability. Perhaps institutional inertia will become less of a puzzle if we realize that times of transition offer the opportunity for individuals and institutions to discover who they are and to build capacity to imagine and live into a new future.

ERT (2020) 44:4, 351–358

What Are the 'Gates of Hades' in Matthew 16:18?

Chris Gousmett

Matthew 16:18 contains one of Jesus' most obscure remarks, as he assures Peter (and us) that the 'gates of Hades' will not overcome the church. But gates are stationary objects that don't normally overcome anything. What was Jesus promising? This article shows the weakness of prevailing interpretations and argues for an expansive metaphorical alternative.

When we encounter continual difficulties in interpreting a biblical text, or when traditional approaches produce paradoxical results, we have probably taken a wrong turn at some point. One such text is Matthew 16:18, where Jesus tells Simon Peter, 'On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it' (NIV).

Commentators have offered numerous, varied and conflicting interpretations as to what it means for the church not to be overcome by the gates of Hades.[1] In this article, I advance an interpretation which has had little support, but which I believe overcomes these conflicts: the gates are metaphorical, referring to the government or decisions of Hades, and not to actual physical gates.

Traditional interpretations

The common interpretations of Matthew 16:18 can be grouped into three main categories, with variations within each approach. I should also mention briefly a fourth category that does not receive much support today: the patristic interpretation of the gates as those who persecute the church but are not able to finally overcome it, or as heretics who cause trouble for the church.[2] For instance,

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1 For a history of the interpretation of this text, see Jack P. Lewis, '"The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail against It" (Matt 16:18): A Study of the History of Interpretation', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 3 (September 1995): 349–67.

2 John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Transfiguration*, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (available at https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444gousmett2), vol. 96, cols. 554–55. This approach was continued by

Theophylact, an 11th-century Byzantine writer, summarized the patristic approach in this way:

> The gates of hades are those persecutors who from time to time would send the Christians to hades. But the heretics, too, are gates leading to hades. … For if we have been established on the confession of Christ, the gates of hades, which are our sins, will not prevail against us.[3]

But this spiritualization does not solve the exegetical problem; it just evades it.

What are the other options? The first possibility is that the gates will not be able to resist the church when it attacks Hades from the outside. However, why would the church want to enter into Hades? Second, perhaps the gates will not be able to resist the church as it breaks out of Hades from the inside. But why would the church be inside Hades, needing to break out? Third, one could propose that the gates will not be able to overcome the church when Hades attacks it. But why would the gates of Hades be attacking the church, given that gates are not offensive weapons? Although solutions have been offered for these problems, I do not find them persuasive.

Let us look more closely at the arguments for each interpretation, starting with the idea that the church will break into Hades to release the spirits of those held captive. Here, Hades is seen as equivalent to death, so the verse means that the redeeming work of Christ can overcome death. Ridderbos takes this line:

> The picture that it evokes is one of a fortress or prison with thick, impregnable gates, where death is king and the dead are held captive. … The church of Christ, however, will not be 'overcome' by this power of death. Jesus spoke here as one who was stronger than death and who would cause His church to share in His victory over it.[4]

But we do not find any indication in Scripture that it is the church's task to release the spirits of the dead from Hades. The gospel is always directed to those still living, not the dead.

In the second interpretation, those breaking out from Hades are thought to be the spirits of the dead, who are enabled by the power of the risen Christ to come forth from death just as Christ has also been freed from death, so that they can enter into heaven now that the gates of heaven have been opened by Christ's redeeming work. In a similar vein, the gates of Hades (seen as representing the power of death,

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Thomas Aquinas: 'And who are the gates of hell? Heretics, because just as one enters into a house through a gate, so one enters into hell through these.' Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 13-28*, trans. Jeremy Holmes (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013), 100.

3 Theophylact, 'Excerpts from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444gousmett3.

4 H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 304. Cornelis Vonk takes a similar line, seeing the 'gates of Hades' as the power of natural death, which will not overcome the disciples in spite of the coming persecution. Vonk, *Matthew: Opening the Scriptures*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2014), 152.

with reference to passages such as Isaiah 38:10), are thus unable to prevail against the church,[5] and so are unable to hold the dead in.

But this is problematic. It suggests that Matthew 16:18 describes the church releasing the dead from Hades after the resurrection of Christ (either once or on a continuing basis).[6] But nowhere do we read of the spirits of the dead going from Hades to heaven at the resurrection of Christ. In any case, why would Christ make what seems to be a promise of enduring preservation if he was referring only to a single event that would occur at Christ's resurrection?

Interpretations suggesting that the dead are coming out from Hades result solely from the need to find some reason why the gates of Hades are unable to prevail against the church. In this view, the church must be either going in or coming out (or both, as a rescue mission into Hades which then returns with its freed captives).[7] But there is no reference in Scripture to the church making any forays into Hades for any reason, or needing to escape from Hades. Bultmann, for instance, observes that there is no reason to suppose that the church has been imprisoned in Hades and needs to be released from there.[8]

The third option, that the gates would attack the church, raises a number of questions. What sort of attack is intended if the gates themselves are actively attacking? If the gates are simply a synecdoche for Hades, why speak of the 'gates of Hades' and not simply of Hades itself? As Joel Marcus states:

> Why does Matthew's Jesus use such a roundabout way to express his point? Even given the equation 'gates = city = inhabitants of city', would it not have been easier and clearer simply to say, '*Hades*, or *the powers of Hades*, will not overcome the church'? Why is the reference to gates necessary?[9]

Further, what does it mean for Hades to attack the church? One suggestion is that the gates of Hades are opening to let the attacking demons out, with the gates being a metonymy for the whole of Hades and its denizens. Variations of this view have

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5 Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 253–54. Douglas R. A. Hare says there is 'general agreement' that the gates refer to the power of death, in *Matthew: Interpretation—a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1993), 191. See also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2009), 428–29.

6 Hare, *Matthew*, 191; Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 2: *The Churchbook. Matthew 13-28*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2004), 131–32. See also J. Jeremias, 'Pylē', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 923–27.

7 Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 232–33, argues that this is the case: 'As Jesus' exorcisms are attacks against the demoniac powers associated with the realm of death (cf. 8:28–34) and are the conquest of the satanic kingdom (cf. 12:25–29), so the church will not be prevented by the gates of Hades from conquering the realm of Hades (perhaps in the sense of freeing the dead from it).'

8 Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 139 n. 2.

9 Joel Marcus, 'The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt. 16:18–19)', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 446.

been held by Calvin,[10] Warren Carter,[11] Jeffrey Gibbs[12] and Marcus, who suggests, 'The image in Matthew is of the rulers of the underworld bursting forward *from the gates* of their heavily guarded, walled city to attack God's people on earth.'[13] But again, why does Jesus say that the gates will not prevail if he meant not actual gates, but demonic rulers coming through the gates?

What does it mean for gates to 'prevail'?

One key question in the verse is the meaning of the term *katischuō* (to overcome or prevail). The interpretations of this verb align with the views as to whether the church is seeking to pass through the gates (either in or out) or the gates are attacking the church. The first possibility is that the gates will not prevail due to being unable to withstand those attacking it from either the inside or outside and seeking to pass through the gateway. Alternatively, if they are offensive weapons, the gates may not prevail because they fail to be victorious against those whom they are attacking.[14]

The problem with the first option is that in this verse *katischuō* is active, not passive, so it seems unlikely that the verb means simply being unable to resist those breaking in or out. The gates must be actively engaged in some way. But if we see the gates as active, as in the view which sees them attacking the church, again we have the problem of how gates can attack:

> Perhaps the main difficulty for interpreters has been posed by the perception that the verb *katischusousin* (normally translated 'prevail over') and the phrase *pulai hudos* ('gates of Hades) tend to pull the meaning in opposite directions, so that only one or the other can be given its most natural sense. It has also proved difficult to move from imagery to that to which the imagery is to be applied.[15]

John Nolland states the common view that Hades here refers to the realm of the dead or the threat of death, while possible meanings for *katischuein* include 'be stronger than', 'make themselves strong against', 'gain power over' or 'prevail over':[16]

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10 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d. [Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847–1850]), 247. This view is repeated by William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 649, who says that this is 'the promise of the victory of Christ's church over the forces of evil'.

11 Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 335.

12 Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2-20:34*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2010), 321–22. The other sources mentioned by Gibbs are David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012), 174; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 632–33.

13 Marcus, 'The Gates of Hades', 445.

14 Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 425.

15 John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans; Bletchley: Paternoster, 2005), 674.

16 Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 674.

> Though scholars have recognised the difficulty with 'the gates of Hades' as an image of an aggressor, most of them have felt obliged to take the image this way because of what they have understood to be the semantic possibilities of *katischuein*.[17]

Joel Marcus cites Jeremias to the effect that '*katischuein* + genitive is always active in meaning (= "to vanquish"), never passive (= "to resist successfully"). The gates, therefore, would seem to be attacking the church.'[18]

Some interpreters try to find a connection with Matthew 16:19, where Jesus promises to Peter that he will be given the keys of the kingdom of heaven;[19] they thus make a contrast between the gates of the kingdom of heaven (implied in Matthew 16:19, since Peter's keys would presumably open the gates) and the gates of Hades.[20] Hence, Marcus suggests that the keys of the kingdom of heaven do not let something in (departed saints entering heaven) but, as in verse 18, let something out, namely the extension of God's dominion from the heavenly sphere to the earthly one.[21] But the keys given to Peter are not for the purpose of letting something out of heaven, or to extend God's kingdom, but to bind and to loose.

Is there an alternative?

Are we missing something here? Can we come at this interpretive challenge from another angle and attain a more satisfactory understanding of what Christ has promised the church? I believe that we can avoid the wrong turns which have led us into this morass of interpretation by rethinking what is meant by the 'gates' of Hades, rather than struggling to find a way in which the gates could try to 'prevail' without stretching the possibilities of Greek grammar.

To recap: we need an interpretation which can (a) give a coherent referent for the gates; (b) offer an appropriate meaning for Hades in this context; (c) retain the active sense of 'prevail', thus discarding views which see the gates as strong enough to withstand attack; (d) explain what active offensive is taking place against the church, since the church is under attack ('will not prevail against it'), not Hades; and (e) finally, indicate how this promise is connected to the 'rock' on which the church is built.

There is another approach, not so widely known and suggested by only a few scholars, which I find to resolve the problems satisfactorily.

What are the gates?

Gates in the Old Testament can be real or metaphorical (just as the 'heart' can be the physical organ or the spiritual centre of a person). The gates in Matthew 16:18 seem to be metaphorical, just as the rock and the keys in the surrounding verses are metaphorical. But what would the metaphorical meaning of the gates signify? The

17 Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 675.
18 Marcus, 'The Gates of Hades', 444, citing Jeremias, 'Pylē', 926 n. 26.
19 Marcus takes this approach in 'The Gates of Hades', 446–55.
20 Marcus, 'The Gates of Hades', 446.
21 Marcus, 'The Gates of Hades', 447.

suggestion by Marcus discussed above involves a change from physical gates to a metaphor for the rulers of evil who attack the church. Although this is moving in the right direction, I do not think that Jesus is using a military image but one of government and of administering justice—in this case, evil government and injustice.

The gates in an Old Testament city were not just a means of entry and exit, which could be closed for protection against enemies. They were also a focal point for the administration of justice and the settlement of disputes, where the wisdom of the elders could be heard. There the poor could seek out justice; arguments were settled, problems resolved and guidance given. The elders, judges, prophets and even kings (1 Kings 22:10) would sit at the gates to hear disputes and make sure that society was running smoothly.

A classic case of this kind of activity at the gate appears in Ruth 4. Boaz wishes to exercise the right of the redeemer to marry Ruth, but a closer relative has a prior right. The situation is resolved at the gate; in front of the elders, the other relative relinquishes his right and Boaz asserts his intention to marry Ruth.

In Proverbs 31, the 'wise woman' has a good reputation, which becomes known when her husband sits down at the city gates among the elders. He was not just socializing but taking his place as a respected leader, contributing to the discussions about determining justice and administering the city.

The poor are to be protected when they seek justice at the gate (Prov 22:22), whereas Amos laments over those who do injustice to the poor at the gate (Amos 5:10–15). Fools are afraid to open their mouths at the gate because they have no wisdom (Prov 24:7).

Other passages in which the gates are places at which justice and wisdom is administered to the people include Genesis 23:10, 18; Deuteronomy 21:19, 22:15, 25:7; Joshua 20:4; 2 Samuel 15:2; Job 29:7, 31:27; Psalms 69:12, 127:5; Proverbs 1:21; Proverbs 31:23; Isaiah 29:21; Lamentations 5:14; Jeremiah 36:10; Ezekiel 11:1-13; Zechariah 8:16. Albert Barnes comments on how 'gates' are understood in this light:

> Ancient cities were surrounded by walls. In the gates by which they were entered were the principal places for holding courts, transacting business, and deliberating on public matters. … The word 'gates', therefore, is used for counsels, designs, machinations, evil purposes.[22]

So then, what meaning could the 'gates' have in Matthew 16:18? Simply this: the wisdom, the judgement, and the governance decisions and counsels made in this world at the gates of Hades (under the power of death, darkness, evil) will not prevail against the church. The church will, in contrast, in the Spirit of Christ and in the light of the Scriptures, speak truth, justice, wisdom and peace to all who come to receive guidance and resolution of disputes.

> Hence 'the gates' here may represent the evil designs planned by the powers of hell to overthrow the Church, the wiles and machinations of the devil and his angels, Hades being taken, not as the abode of the dead, but as the realm of Satan. Neither malignant spirits nor their allies, such as sin, persecution, heresy, shall

22 Albert Barnes, 'Barnes' Notes on the Bible', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444gousmett22.

> be able to wreck the eternal building which Christ was founding. Combining the two expositions, we may say that Christ herein promises that neither the power of death nor the power of the devil shall prevail against it (*katischusousin autēs*), shall overpower it, keep it in subjection.[23]

Charles Ellicott also hints at this approach, although he then assimilates the gates to a military image instead of a broader one oriented towards the administration of justice:

> As the gates of the Eastern city were the scene at once of kingly judgment (2 Samuel 15:2) and of the council of the elders (Proverbs 31:23), they became the natural symbol of the polity which ruled there. And so the promise declared that all the powers of Hades, all the forces of destruction that attack and in the long run overpower other societies, should attack, but not overpower, the ecclesia of which Christ was the Founder.[24]

William Barclay also mentions this interpretation. He cites Deuteronomy 21:19 and 25:7, which instruct people who have been wronged to go to the gate, the place of government, to receive justice. 'So then', he writes, 'the phrase would mean: The powers, government of Hades would not prevail against the Church.'[25]

This church of which Jesus spoke, to be formed after his ascension, would be associated in the minds of the early church with the assembly of citizens in Greek society, which made political and judicial decisions on behalf of the community. Hence, the church in its deliberative decisions, led by the Holy Spirit into the truth, would bring heavenly wisdom to bear on the problems that the church would have to resolve.

The wisdom Christ gives to the church will be more than sufficient to withstand the errors of the powers of death which are arrayed against it, for the church is grounded in Peter's confession, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' Jesus commends Peter for this confession and says that it was revealed to him by the Father in heaven, and that as a result 'the gates of Hades will not prevail' against the church. If we hold fast to the same confession that Christ is indeed the Son of the living God, and if we trust that the Father will reveal truth and wisdom to us through the Spirit, then we will indeed have wisdom against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart"' (1 Cor 1:18–19). Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world? Has he not given his people the wisdom which will prevent the gates of Hades from prevailing against us?

The same theme is seen also in James 3:13–18, where the 'wisdom from below' is contrasted with the 'wisdom from above'. The gates of Hades—i.e. the wisdom

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23 'Matthew 16', Pulpit Commentary, https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444gousmett23.

24 'Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers', https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444gousmett24.

25 William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1957), 158. Barclay does not express a preference for any of the three interpretations he lists, but he concludes, 'However we take it, this phrase triumphantly expresses the indestructibility of Christ and His Church' (p. 159).

from below—are unlike the pure, peaceable wisdom from above, which the Spirit has given to the church. Similarly, it was said of Stephen, 'But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke' (Acts 6:10). His enemies could not 'prevail' against Stephen; the only way to stop him was to kill him.

The church, then, is to rely on the wisdom of God, given through the Spirit and grounded in the Scriptures, for all that we do: our study, our scholarship, our politics, our education, our family life, our economy, our art, everything without exception. When we bring this wisdom to bear on every area of life, the gates of Hades—its purported but false wisdom, its misconstrued justice, its oppressive decisions against the poor and the powerless—will not be able to prevail against us.

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Observations on Apologetics and Its Relation to Contemporary Christian Mission

Thomas Schirrmacher

Christians often think of apologetics as something that only academics do, but actually it has been an essential part of Christian mission ever since the book of Acts. This article offers penetrating reflections on the meaning of apologetics today and how all Christians should equip themselves to do it.

The classical justification for apologetics can be found in 1 Peter 3:15b-16, which provides the basis for the name given to this activity: 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason (Greek *apologia*) for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.'

If one understands apologetics as the thoughtful defence of the Christian faith against non-believers and mission more generally as the proclamation of the Christian message to non-believers, then the two concepts, though different, are so interrelated that they are difficult to separate from each other. Gerhard Ruhbach, for example, says with respect to the early church, 'If the missionary sermon states what the Gospel consists of, then apologetics responds to critical objections or unfounded prejudices against the Gospel.'[1] On the one hand, the distinction is justified; on the other hand, it is hard to demonstrate clearly in concrete situations. For in the early church, missionary sermons responded to listeners' typical objections and thoughts by presenting apologetics as to what is essential and different about the Christian message.

Translating the Christian message into a new language or making the message understandable to new audiences (1 Cor 9:19–23) involves responding to their culture, thinking and concerns and addressing the specific reasons that could lead to a rejection of the message. The same applies to every sermon delivered in Christian worship.

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1 Gerhard Ruhbach, 'Apologeten, altkirchliche', *Evangelisches Lexikon für Theologie und Gemeinde,* vol. 1 (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1998), 98.

Conversely, the defence of the Christian message does not aim purely at self-assurance. Rather, it gives reasons for our own faith to others. In the process, it also always hopes that our counterpart, after listening to our depiction of the hope within us, will make Jesus Christ his or her own hope.

The relationship between this pair of terms can be understood in three different ways, as discussed in the next three sections.

The apologetics of the Christian mission

We see apologetics within Christian mission in the apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans.[2] Mission is not a marginal Christian activity but is rather inseparably connected with the central message of the gospel and is even rooted in the essence of God himself.[3] Therefore, there can be no defence of missions that does not amount to a defence of the Christian faith itself, as Romans demonstrates. Conversely, there can also be no form of Christian apologetics which does not sketch the contents and special features of the Christian message, and which does not also think through, justify, explain and defend the missionary side of Christianity.

We can see the relationship between apologetics and missions negatively in that those who have stopped defending the absolute claims of Christianity over against other religions have soon, if not at the same time, abandoned central beliefs historically found in all Christian denominations.

Since the very function of missions has been fundamentally questioned in the Western world amidst the rise of a pluralistic theology of religion, the apologetics of Christian missions has nowadays become a necessary component of every defence of the Christian faith.

Apologetics as missions

Apologetics is also always important for the believing church. Every member of the church should learn to respond to questions from those around them in a thoughtful manner and to evangelize in a relevant way. It is not only new converts who retain within them much of the thinking found in their surrounding environment and need solid answers to this thinking. Rather, according to Paul, all Christians are subject to ways of thinking that come from the spirit of their age and their environment (the 'world'). Instead of adapting to that thinking, they should be renewed in their thinking through constant testing and transformation (Rom 12:1–2).

Only in this way can Christians avoid becoming confirmed to the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times (Rom 12:1). Therefore, the *Zeitgeist* should not be viewed as existing primarily in the 'evil world out there'; it is in our heads. Only those who are prepared to ask themselves again and again, in a self-critical way, what the standards of their thinking are and where they lead can change their thinking and then also their actions.

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2 Thomas Schirrmacher, 'Paulus—Theologe und Missionar: Gedanken anhand des Römerbriefes', *Evangelikale Missiologie* 27, no. 1 (2011): 3–20; Thomas Schirrmacher, *Der Römerbrief*, 2 vols. (Nuremberg: VTR; Hamburg, RVB, 2002).

3 Thomas Schirrmacher, *Missio Dei* (Bonn: VKW, 2011).

In addition to being able to give an account for what they believe, Christians must also invest time in understanding other schools of thought, so that they can answer the questions raised by followers of other worldviews in a meaningful way.

Many aspects of the surrounding environment, such as prevailing philosophies and cultural practices, penetrate the Christian community in very fundamental ways. For this reason, it is not astonishing that there has always also been an apologetics against heresies within the body of Christ, as well as apologetics between Catholics and Protestants. In the nineteenth century, Catholics used the word mainly as a technical term for arguing against Protestant theology. For the same reason, in the early church, apologetics became known as the 'mother of dogmatics'. In academic theology, apologetics is part of systematic theology alongside dogmatics and ethics, and in its practical application it is also a segment of practical theology.

Finally, since the emergence of various varieties of liberal theology and historical-critical methods that raised questions about the historical foundations of the Christian faith, a special apologetic has been needed in this area. Thus, for example, Pope Benedict XVI contended in his book on Jesus that nothing has done more to destroy faith than certain varieties of historical-critical theology.[4] Therefore, his exegesis of the Gospels, in which he works out his understanding of what constitutes the centre and essence of the Christian faith, has strongly apologetic traits. (Neither Pope Benedict nor I intend to rule out all use of historical and scientific methods in investigating the texts of Scripture.)

Insofar as apologetics responds to criticism from outside the faith community and reacts to the respective environment (i.e. to other religions, philosophies and cultures as well as everyday reality), it is in effect missionary work even if it apparently addresses Christians.

And insofar as mission efforts never proclaim the gospel in a pure form devoid of culture—as if the gospel could be read in the same fashion everywhere and at all times, with no reference to cultural contexts—but rather seek to proclaim the gospel in a culturally relevant manner, mission also always has a strongly apologetic component. For example, the four New Testament Gospels, which were addressed to different target audiences, each contain a different apologetic component, even though they all proclaim 'the gospel'.

Academic apologetics in organized world missions

Specialist resources in apologetics

We now turn to the role of technical apologetics in organized world missions. But to provide a meaningful answer to this question, we must narrow the meaning of both terms. On one hand, we cannot simply define missions as every expression of the Christian faith that becomes visible to non-believers. Rather, it is the practical execution of organized efforts to present the gospel to the world. On the other hand, apologetics here does not mean every attempt to defend the faith but, rather, a conscious practice of addressing common questions or challenges to the Christian faith and thinking through, explaining and defending Christian positions. Today,

4 Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus von Nazareth*, vol. 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 2007).

this activity occurs mostly via academic apologetics in theology, philosophy, the natural sciences or other relevant subjects by Christian clergy or educated Christian lay individuals.

One important aspect of the question here concerns how much we need specialized resources in apologetics. To what extent is a missionary dependent on the results of an apologist's work, or to what extent must missionaries themselves become apologists? Conversely, how much must the apologist necessarily learn and know from missionaries' experiences so that his apologetics remain relevant?

Here we leave aside the fact that the Holy Spirit gives gifts which, depending on the situation, can enable a missionary to function in a highly intellectual manner or even to develop completely new ways of proclaiming Christianity. This same factor of Spirit-enablement also applies to learning a foreign language for world missions work or the ability to exhibit empathy, i.e. to put oneself in the shoes of another individual. Abilities and spiritual gifts are distributed to differing degrees here and are applied with varying degrees of success. At this point, we are not concerned in detail with how the two tasks of apologetics and missions are distributed among committed Christians, but fundamentally with how, overall, the two tasks should be carried out.

We certainly cannot conclude that apologetics should happen only in an academic context, such as in public debates on university campuses with academic representatives of other religions and worldviews. Instead, apologetics is closely connected with the responding to the culture and language of one's listeners.

Apologetics reached its first peak in church history around the second and third centuries. These so-called 'apologists' played an important role in the formulation of Christian confessions, but almost all of them also thought fundamentally about how missions should look. The Epistle to Diognetus, for instance, is a defence of the Christian faith dating from the third century by an unknown author, which at the same time prescribed missionary principles.

The medieval apologists to Islam always also made fundamental missiological observations, as can be clearly seen in the work of Peter the Venerable (1092–1156) and Raimundus Lullus (1232–1316). Martin Luther had the Koran translated from Arabic so that he could better study and refute Islam. He linked this work to fundamental considerations as to how to present the gospel to Turks.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the fathers of modern missiology were all masters of apologetics. One source referred to German missiology pioneers Gustav Warneck and Franz Michael Zahn as both 'masters of polemical apologetics'.[5] Warneck's colleague Theodor Christlieb, who held a doctorate in philosophy, was not only a promoter of evangelization in Germany but also a missionary to the educated and an author of apologetic works.[6]

5 Werner Ustorf, 'Missionswissenschaft', *Theologische Realenzyklopädie,* vol. 23 (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2000), 90.

6 Thomas Schirrmacher, *Theodor Christlieb* (Wuppertal: Telos, 1985).

Research on language and culture

To proclaim the gospel in another language and another culture—or even within one's own culture to a particular target group—it is necessary to study how others speak, think, feel and live. When we do this, every response to the other person's thought world is also intentionally or unintentionally an answer to it—that is, an apologetic.

For example, if we want to enter into a meaningful conversation with Indonesian Muslims about the Christian faith, we must be willing to gain a deep understanding of our dialogue partners. This may mean studying languages and cultures—perhaps even island by island—and also learning what most distinguishes Indonesian Islam from other forms of Islam, what makes it more peaceful, and where its challenges lie.

Although Christians belong only to Christ and are subject only to his word, this does not mean that they should view their own culture or other cultures critically. On the contrary, they are obliged, out of love, to adjust to the culture of others. Paul explains this principle of evangelism in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, precisely in the context of affirming his own freedom:

> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Christians are responsible not only for articulating the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, but also for ensuring that it is properly understood. Obviously, Christians can live even in their own culture in such a way that they are poorly understood by others. In this situation, they can become obstacles hindering others from receiving the gospel (1 Cor 9:12).

The mere fact that the one gospel of Jesus Christ, as contained in the Bible, is presented in the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) to four different target groups proves that Jesus' words were not disseminated solely in his original language and cultural context, but in multiple forms so that as many people as possible could understand it. Jesus' own addresses were not delivered in their original language but in an understandable translation. When it is reported in the New Testament that apostles and Christians proclaimed 'the Word of God', that does not mean that they simply read the texts of Scripture, but that they presented the message in a suitable fashion to their immediate listeners. To this day, sermons do not consist of reading long Bible texts in the original languages of the Bible. Instead, preachers typically read a Bible text, interpret it, and apply it to listeners' life situations.

This is also the reason why the Bible must be translated into every conceivable

language and why the gospel can and should be expressed in every dialect and every cultural form.

The apologetic side of mission stems from the nature of conversion

When the World Evangelical Alliance, along with the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, jointly signed the ecumenical declaration 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' in 2011, we stated things that many Christians consider self-evident. For example, that document notes that Christian mission should occur in the spirit of Jesus—without violating the human dignity of others; without coercion, corruption or deception; without state aid or social or cultural pressure. Faith means placing one's deep personal trust in God. This arises from word and testimony, through which an individual hears the message and is moved to understand and embrace it by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Once we have agreed that the sole acceptable way to express the gospel to others is through conversation, personal concern and living as a positive example, and that all this is aimed at helping the other person to believe, trust and hope in Christ—and furthermore, if we grant that all this communication and demonstration must occur in the receiving individual's time, culture, language, thought world and personal circumstances—then apologetics automatically becomes indispensable. In short, anyone who rejects the idea of forced conversion must follow the path of apologia and, in a friendly and modest manner, must seek to explain to others again and again the reasons why we have trusted in Christ and why they should do so. This is exactly the message of 1 Peter 3:15–16.

This is also precisely what Jesus means when he says that one should not precipitously follow him. Jesus gave the illustration that whoever wants to build a tower must first consider how he will finance it (Lk 14:27–33). The conversation, the intellectual exchange (understanding 'intellectual' here in the broadest possible sense), and the explanation of one's own faith through dialogue are all part of the path that mission efforts must take.

The example of Paul's address at the Areopagus

Whereas Paul largely justified his case regarding the Jews from Scripture (e.g. Acts 13:26–41; Rom 2), in his mission to the Gentiles he frequently resorted to reasonable argumentation procedures, borrowing from the wisdom of the Greeks. He could appeal to the judgement of his listeners (1 Cor 10:15), connect to ideas of the Stoics and Epicureans (Acts 17:16–34) or to Roman concepts of God (Acts 14:8–18), or rely on conclusions derived from nature (Rom 1:18–32).

According to the book of Acts, the apostles started the discussion at the point where their paths and those of their hearers parted ways, but they based their arguments on common prerequisites for thinking. Therefore, when they engaged with Jews, they did not argue over creation or the inspiration of the Old Testament; they proceeded directly into a discussion about Jesus Christ. When they interacted with Gentiles, they went back much further and also discussed creation, presupposing what was taught and seen about the Creator in the respective culture as well as in biblical testimony (e.g. Acts 14:8–18; 17:16–34). For this reason, Paul was able to prove the existence of a creator in his famous address at the Areopagus

in Athens (Acts 17:16–34) by quoting Greek philosophers without explicitly referring to biblical testimony.

This address demonstrates that Paul studied Greek philosophers intensively and planned his address especially for his listeners. He did not simply resort to generally known sayings, but also to remote texts. In Titus 1:12, Paul quoted the poet Epimenides, to whom he also appealed in Acts 17; indeed, he used a line which has a direct link to the Epimenides quotation in Acts 17:28. Paul critically picks up on philosophers and paraphrases their thoughts, for instance when he refers to the fact that God does not need any help from human beings (Acts 17:25)—a thought which contradicted Greek religious practice but can be found almost literally in Plato, Euripides and other Greek philosophers.

Paul's address in Athens shows how important it is to study other religions and worldviews and their texts and to adapt oneself to their followers in thought and language. This message thus becomes a prime example of a missionary sermon, in both content and procedure. In Acts 14:15–17, Paul proceeded quite similarly in dealing with the admirers of Zeus, although we do not encounter any quotations from philosophers there—perhaps because the audience was less educated or because the report is briefer. Many commentators have pointed out that the speech in Acts 17 is merely a practical implementation of Romans 1.

Apologetics was formerly more public

Apologetics should be an integral part of any training for world missions, and missions should not underestimate the necessity and impact of apologetics along with that of diverse ways of preaching. It is not part of the essence of Christianity to follow someone blindly; rather, adopting the Christian faith involves understanding with firm conviction what and why one believes. That feature of Christian faith must also repeatedly be made clear to the outside world.

Conversely, the research and reflective work of apologists is helpful for missions only if it does not isolate itself but rather learns from the experiences of world missions and preceding attempts to think through issues in missiology.

Public, academic apologetics, in the form of lectures or public panel discussions with those who think differently, is one practical mission method. Unfortunately, public apologetics used to occupy more space in world missions than it does today. For example, the German missionary Karl Gottlieb Pfander engaged effectively in public discussion with Islamic theologians on several continents. In the Anglo-Saxon world, where such public debates still occur frequently, their development has been somewhat different than in the rest of the Western world including Germany, where such public engagements are rare and are perceived by many as aggressive or dogmatic.

Today, this kind of debate has shifted more to the Internet, where it is very widespread. The apologetic interaction between Islam and Christianity on the Internet and on social media, for example, can no longer be overlooked. Not only are there tens of thousands of relevant pages on the Internet, but pertinent forums are accessed daily by millions of people. In view of this development, Christian missionaries urgently need the support of committed experts who have both

thoroughly studied their counterparts and can provide viable answers to key questions.

Can apologetics convert?

No less an individual than Karl Barth has argued that apologetics cannot lead any human being to faith, since it takes unbelief as its starting point, so to speak. Rather, Barth stated, dogmatics based on the Word of God must be the starting point of proclamation.[7] As much as I understand Barth's concern, and as much as it is correct that the task of apologetics is not to reinvent faith but to defend it and make it understandable, he himself is guilty of self-contradiction here, for Barth's dogmatics also has strong apologetic traits, insofar as he grapples with everything and everyone along the way.

It is also a widespread view that apologetics can only remove obstacles but cannot replace the proclamation of the gospel. However, according to 1 Peter 3:15–16, Christians are to defend not only particular, commonly discussed aspects of classical apologetics, such as the question of whether one can prove the existence of God, but generally our Christian hope in all its facets. Therefore, proclamation cannot help but include addressing issues raised by a counterpart within the contents of the Christian message. There can be no artificial dividing line between refutation of arguments and explanation of the alternative.

Of course, apologetics by itself can convert no one. But according to the Reformers, this is true for the proclamation of the gospel as well. God's word works on the hearts of people, no matter in which special way it is spoken, as the Holy Spirit enlightens people's hearts and minds. Indeed, As 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' states, 'Christians affirm that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit' (cf. John 16:7–9; Acts 10:44–47). They know that the Spirit blows where he wills, in a way that no man can control (cf. John 3:8).

Why shouldn't this principle also apply to reasonable discussions arising from questions, doubts or attacks by those who think differently? The practical experience of people who talk about they have encountered God also shows that persuasion by this method actually occurs again and again.

Today, more than ever, science and research determine our everyday lives. Moreover, thanks to globalization and the Internet, all debates, including those about the Christian faith, have become globalized. Accordingly, we need apologetic missionaries and missionary apologists more than ever. As my colleague Rolf Hille has said, 'In the consciously post-Christian culture of European modernity, no retreat is called for. Rather, the strength of the apologetic mission is once again required.'[8]

7 Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. I/1 (Zürich: TVZ, 1932), 24–35.

8 Rolf Hille, 'Apologetik', *Evangelisches Lexikon für Theologie und Gemeinde*, 1:102.

Questions to consider

1 Peter 3:15–16 refers to doing apologetics 'with gentleness and respect'. What does that mean to you practically?

Do you find public panel discussions and debates between Christians and others useful? Why or why not?

Can people be converted with the help of apologetics?

What significance should apologetics and apologetic knowledge have in the everyday life of a local church?

Useful sources

'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World', 28 June 2011: https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444witness.

Christine Schirrmacher, 'The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century', in Jacques Waardenburg (ed.), *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 270–79.

Elmer Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defence of Proselytizing and Persuasion* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 2011).

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The Reconstruction of Evangelism by Liberal Protestants: An Evangelical Response

Elmer Thiessen

Many voices—both secular and religious—argue that it is inappropriate in a religiously pluralistic world for evangelicals to call all people to repentance and faith in Christ. This article, by a leading evangelical expert on the ethics of evangelism, uses a recently published book critical of traditional evangelism as a starting point to explore how evangelicals should respond to such objections.

One of the most pressing issues facing evangelicals today is how to call other people to repentance and faith in Christ winsomely and unapologetically in a pluralistic world that prefers to talk about tolerance and has a lot of difficulty with any truth claims. One can get a clear idea of this challenge by reading how a more liberal Christian tries to reconstruct the whole idea of evangelism.

Bryan Stone of Boston University attempts such a reconstruction in his recent book *Evangelism after Pluralism.*[1] This is Stone's second book on the ethics of evangelism and witness; his earlier book is entitled *Evangelism after Christendom.*[2] The word 'after' in the title of both books is significant: Stone is offering us a new paradigm of evangelism for our contemporary pluralistic world.

In both books, Stone critiques the old paradigm of evangelism, understood as the verbal proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. Stone believes that our present age of religious diversity needs an alternative kind of evangelism, one focussed on embodied witness. I find this approach to be very prevalent among Christians today, not only among liberal mainline Protestants but also in my own

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1 Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism: The Ethics of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

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

Mennonite denomination and even among quite a few evangelicals.[3] As a result, I believe that those of us who maintain a traditional view of evangelism must urgently respond to the line of thinking that Stone represents.

Stone takes a broad view of evangelism: 'All that a Christian is and does is a witness to the gospel and may thus be properly taken as evangelistic' (p. 79). He describes the gospel as 'a new way of life' and salvation as not 'an experience to be passively received or a set of propositions to be assented to,' but 'a *way* to be embarked upon, a *way* we forgive each other's sins, a *way* we love and include those who are different from us, a *way* we welcome the poor, a *way* we love our enemies … and a *way* the world's hierarchies are turned upside down in Christlike patterns of fellowship' (p. 9). As he says over and over, 'Ethics is evangelism.'[4]

Like most evangelicals, I agree that embodied witness is very important. Indeed, in my later book I identify 'incarnational witness' as a foundational guideline for ethical evangelism. 'Ethical evangelism embodies the good news being proclaimed. Ethical evangelists are people of good character, living exemplary lives and doing good deeds. They speak and act with a clear conscience before God and man.'[5] But I do not say that incarnational witness *is* evangelism. Instead, I describe it as an essential ingredient of ethical evangelism, where evangelism is understood as proclamation of the gospel.

Stone's reconstructed notion of evangelism is not in keeping with a New Testament definition of evangelism. Michael Green, in his masterful study of evangelism in the early church, highlights three main word groups used to capture the core meaning of evangelism: *euaggelizesthai* (to 'tell good news'), *marturein* (to 'bear witness'), and *kērussein* (to 'proclaim').[6] Jesus himself began his ministry by preaching the good news (Lk 4:18). In Luke 24:48, Jesus commissions the disciples to be his 'witnesses of these things.' The book of Acts begins with the apostles once again being commissioned to 'be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). The word 'witness' as used in Luke and Acts was primarily a legal term for testifying to facts and events or vouching for truths.

The early disciples clearly acted in obedience to this mandate, proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Messiah verbally. Paul, after his own dramatic conversion, tirelessly travelled the known world, pleading with Jews and Gentiles to find salvation in Jesus

3 Dick Benner, former editor of the *Canadian Mennonite*, wrote an editorial entitled 'Evangelism Redefined' (19 March 2012) which is very much in line with Stone's argument. Benner redefines evangelism as peacemaking and working for justice. Mennonites like to talk about 'evangelism in overalls', to use the title of a filmstrip created by the Mennonite Central Committee some years ago. Many evangelicals advocate 'lifestyle evangelism' or the proclamation of the gospel in 'word and deed' as though lifestyle and deeds can themselves proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. For a good overview of differing Christian responses to the relation between evangelism and embodied witness, see Cecelia Lynch and Tanya B. Schwartz, 'Humanitarianism's Proselytism Problem', *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (2016): 636–46.

4 Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 9, 17, 28, 97, 100.

5 Elmer John Thiessen, *The Scandal of Evangelism: A Biblical Study of the Ethics of Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 113.

6 Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 76.

Christ. If our concept of evangelism doesn't include verbal proclamation of the good news, then we are no longer consistent with the witness of the New Testament.

Moreover, the New Testament makes a clear distinction between evangelism as proclamation and what Stone and other liberal Protestants call embodied witness. Jesus spoke both of preaching the gospel *and* of releasing the captives, healing the blind and freeing the oppressed (Lk 4:18–19; 9:2). The early believers prayed fervently for boldness in proclaiming the gospel, *and* also that God would give them the power to heal and to perform miraculous signs and wonders (Acts 4:29–30). Peter urges believers to live 'good lives' and to do 'good deeds', but also to 'be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (1 Pet 2:12, 3:15).

Repeatedly, we see a clear distinction between doing good and giving verbal explanations as to why we believe, and Christians are expected to do both. So if we want to follow Jesus' way, we must distinguish between incarnational witness and evangelism as proclamation, at both a conceptual and a practical level.

Stone even criticizes Ronald Sider, one of the contemporary US evangelicals most associated with an emphasis on social action, for maintaining that 'it is confusing and misleading' to identify social action with evangelism.[7] I grant that accepting this distinction raises some problems with regard to the proper relationship between evangelism and social action. But I don't think these problems are insurmountable.[8] The New Testament makes it clear that the church must do both. Sometimes we will do them at the same time, sometimes separately. But we must never equate the two, and we should certainly not think we are fulfilling the church's mission if we limit ourselves to social action.

Another problem with Stone's melding of evangelism and social action is that actions alone cannot speak unambiguously. Giving aid to a foreigner, for example, can be interpreted as an act of Christian love, but it could also be the work of a terrorist organization seeking to win people's allegiance. Only if actions are interpreted using words can they begin to speak in a less ambiguous manner.

The Christian gospel is a wonderful story of God's actions to redeem a world badly distorted by sin. This biblical story cannot be told by mere actions; it needs to be expressed in words. That is why Paul asked rhetorically, 'How can people come to believe if they have not heard the gospel? And how can they hear the gospel unless someone preaches it to them?' (Rom 10:14). Interestingly, Stone refers to this specific passage when he highlights the beauty of the gospel and the importance of living 'beautifully before a watching world' (p. 133). But Paul is clearly talking about verbal proclamation of the gospel in this passage.

Stone repeatedly expresses concern about understanding salvation as individual and interior. He faults evangelicals for believing 'that salvation is primarily about the individual, is other-worldly in orientation (focused on determining one's afterlife status), and is therefore "spiritual" in the narrow sense of being private and interior. What is missing is a robust sense that salvation is inherently social from the outset, precisely because it is an incorporation into the body of Christ' (p. 98).

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7 Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 97.

8 For a response to these problems see my *Scandal of Evangelism*, chap. 10.

There are a number of problems here. Evangelicals would agree that salvation involves incorporation into the body of Christ, but it is as individuals that we are incorporated into the church. It is not a question of either-or; both things happen at the same time. Jesus repeatedly highlighted the need for an individual response to his message, stating, 'I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Lk 5:32; see also Jn 3:5).

I fully agree that some evangelicals have focussed too much on personal salvation as determining their afterlife status, but many others, from the Micah Network to the World Evangelical Alliance, have displayed a robust sense of the social implications of salvation for the present life. Sin is both personal and structural. The conversion of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1–10) included both a turning away from personal sin and an effort to make restitution for his participation in an unjust system of tax collection. For him, as it should be for all of us, salvation was both individual and social. Sadly, too many Christians today have the opposite problem, concentrating exclusively on the social dimensions of salvation. In their preoccupation with systemic evil, they forget that systemic evil always involves people who are sinners and who need internal transformation.

So far, I have been dissecting Stone's reconstructed notion of evangelism; I will now turn to his critique of the old paradigm of evangelism. Stone explores three dominant characteristics of the modern world: empire, the nation-state and its military power, and a consumer culture. These factors are important to Stone because he believes they have shaped and distorted how Christians (especially evangelicals) understand and practice evangelism. His objections can be grouped into three clusters—which again deserve careful examination because the objections are shared by many Christians, including some evangelicals.

The first cluster has to do with coercion. Stone argues that the church has been shaped 'by a pervasive culture of violence, war-making, and coercion' (p. 76). By implication, evangelism as proclamation is also seen as violent and coercive by its very nature. Stone tends to see the persuasive dimension of evangelism as coercive. He expresses concerns about 'the desire to triumph—to convince others, to shore up the truth, to eliminate the refusability of the gospel' (p. 138). In his epilogue, 'The Meaninglessness of Apologetics', he uses military language to describe traditional evangelism as 'conquering, defending, securing, and grasping' (p. 140).

Stone's second objection is that evangelism has been shaped by our consumer culture, resulting in a competitive spirit and a 'marketplace rationality' (p. 85). Stone argues that a focus on conversion lends itself to 'the logic of production, competition, or winning' (p. 17), as well as to a preoccupation with results and church growth (pp. 13, 17, 29, 94). He contrasts his own 'witness-oriented evangelism' with my view, which he calls 'results-oriented evangelism' (p. 24).

Stone's third cluster of objections to traditional evangelism grows out of the values favored in liberal pluralistic democracies. Although he affirms that 'a commitment to religious diversity does not mean we would need to be ashamed of the gospel,' it seems that the reality of religious diversity does rule out 'in-your-face evangelism' (p. 136). 'Christian evangelism must ever remain uninterested in competing for space in the world or triumphing over other faiths in a crowded market of options' (p. 116). Stone has trouble with the assumption of the 'singularity'

of truth that underpins evangelism (p. 130), and he worries about the arrogance of those who claim to have the absolute truth when evangelizing (p. 110). He also thinks that such an approach leads to intolerance and 'diminish[es] the importance of and respect for those who have been rendered "other"' (p. 12).

How should evangelicals respond to these objections? I want to suggest three lines of response. First, I believe it is important for us to admit that some of Stone's objections are valid. Evangelicals have sometimes failed to practice evangelism in ethical ways. We have sometimes been intolerant and coercive, or too preoccupied with numerical results and church growth. We need to repent of our past and present failures in presenting the gospel of Jesus in Jesus' way. We also need to repent of our failure sometimes to miss the broader social dimensions of the mission of the church.

Second, we should boldly answer the objections raised by Stone, other liberal Protestants and secular critics of evangelism. As a starting point, Stone's objections to evangelism as traditionally understood are essentially the same as those made by atheists, agnostics and other opponents of Christianity. This similarity suggests that liberal Protestants like Stone may have accommodated themselves too much to secular liberal culture and postmodern relativism.

Also, Stone's objections seem both ambiguous and too sweeping. At times, he suggests that evangelism has often been tainted by the values of empire, militarism and consumer culture. But how often? Evangelicals have every right to demand evidence for such claims, because presumably an evangelism not tainted by these values would be permissible. On the other hand, Stone (and many mainline Protestants and secularists) often appear to make the stronger claim that evangelism is coercive or intolerant by its very nature. This is to win the argument by arbitrary definition. Rather than making sweeping generalizations about problems with evangelism, Stone and other critics should engage in the hard work of distinguishing between ethical and unethical forms of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The claim that evangelism as proclamation is coercive and even violent by its very nature rests on an arbitrary interpretative grid ('critical theory') which sees all human interactions as power plays. Such an interpretive gird is self-refuting. On that basis, Stone's book would also be violent because he argues against evangelicals such as Ron Sider and me. We also need to ask exactly what we mean by coercion and violence. Non-coercive and non-violent persuasion is possible. And surely it would be terribly unfair to allow everyone else to be engaged in persuasion except evangelicals! (Incidentally, many evangelicals committed to evangelism as proclamation are just as opposed to coercion and violence as he is. Some of us are even pacifists!)

And it is disingenuous for Stone to suggest that his own support for 'embodied witness' has no persuasive purpose. He is trying to persuade—i.e. he is hoping for 'conversions'—as much as we are. Stone himself is forced to admit that his approach to embodied witness 'hopes for the begetting, passing along, or reproduction of faith' (p. 119).

Stone's linkage between evangelism and our consumer culture is also problematic. Though I agree that people should never be treated simply as consumers, consumption is simply part of human nature. So again, a more careful

delineation is needed, this time between ethical and unethical consumption and competition.

Concerns about intolerance and exclusive truth claims in a world of religious diversity have led many liberal Protestants to conclude that silent witness is better than evangelism. Stone even points to Jesus who 'when put on trial before the world's religious, political, and intellectual authorities, was silent' (p. 140). But this instance surely does not justify the general conclusion that Christians should be silent in the face of religious pluralism. Jesus proclaimed the good news even while living in the context of a plurality of religions and worldviews. Paul was a bold evangelist in very metropolitan cities where religious pluralism was obvious. Religious diversity is not a new phenomenon, as Stone and far too many contemporary thinkers seem to assume. On the contrary, the gospel was proclaimed in the midst of pluralism right from the beginning. And it is possible to proclaim and defend the good news in ways that are tolerant, humble, and respectful of other beliefs and worldviews.[9]

But to do so—moving to my third response to the challenges of sceptics like Stone—an evangelical response to objections to evangelism should include paying more attention to Scriptural exhortations about the ethics of doing evangelism. The apostle Peter exhorted us to live such exemplary lives and to be so involved in doing good that people will invite us to engage in evangelism, but he went on to say that this must be done 'with gentleness and respect' (1 Pet 3:15-16). Paul also dealt repeatedly with the ethics of evangelism (1 Thess 2:1–6; 1 Cor 2:1–5; 2 Cor 4:1–2). Evangelicals should have a code of ethics for doing evangelism. Thankfully, considerable attention has been paid to this task in the last decade or so. For example, the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches, and the Vatican's Pontifical Council on Inter-religious Dialogue collaborated in producing a document entitled, 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct', released in 2011.[10] This document emphasizes that Christian witness (or evangelism) must uphold the dignity of persons, avoid all forms of coercion and the abuse of power, and respect other people and their beliefs.

Once we have reflected on the ethics of evangelism, we must consistently *practise* ethical evangelism, never acting as if the end justifies any means. The manner in which we evangelize must reflect the message we proclaim.

A world characterized by religious diversity still needs to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, evangelical Christians must engage in the challenging work of building the kingdom of God here on earth, both incarnationally and by proclamation.

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9 For a more detailed response to these objections, see Elmer John Thiessen, The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion (Crownhill, Milton Keynes: Paternoster; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), part II. In part IV of my book, I develop criteria to distinguish between ethical and unethical evangelism. Unfortunately, Stone devotes a chapter to criticizing my position but does not deal with these sections of my book.

10 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' can be found at https://worldea.org/yourls/ert444witness. The central objective of my book *The Scandal of Evangelism* is to develop guidelines for ethical evangelism, based on an inductive study mainly of the New Testament.

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Book Reviews

Chris Keith, Helen K. Bond, Christine Jacobi and Jens Schröter, eds.,
The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries, vol. 1: From Paul to Josephus: Literary Receptions of Jesus in the First Century CE

Peter Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life*

Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, ed., *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narratives and Missiology*

Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener, *Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don't Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture*

Andrew Wilson, *Spirit and Sacrament: An Invitation to Eucharismatic Worship*

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The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries, vol. 1: From Paul to Josephus: Literary Receptions of Jesus in the First Century CE
Chris Keith, Helen K. Bond, Christine Jacobi and Jens Schröter, eds.

London: Bloomsbury, 2019

Reviewed by H. H. Drake Williams III, Associate Professor of New Testament, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium

The investigation of memory in early Christianity has developed greatly in the past several years, as a result of memory discussions based on the writings of Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assman, Barry Schwartz, Harold Riesenfeld, Birger Gerhardsson, Bart Ehrman, Kenneth Bailey, James Dunn, Michael Bird, Dale Alison and Craig Keener. In *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries*, an international cast of more than 70 contributors provides a methodologically sophisticated resource in this growing field. The essays in these three volumes demonstrate the reception history of Jesus and the Jesus tradition in the first three centuries of Christianity. It is a ground-breaking work that provides a wealth of information.

The opening essay by the four editors is especially valuable for this series. It answers such foundational questions as what is meant by 'Jesus', tradition and reception. The editors encourage the reader to think beyond discussions of the New

Testament canon and consider how the memory of Jesus was preserved in a variety of texts and traditions as well as in artwork.

The opening article also explains the *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) approach by which all the other articles proceed. Each essay focuses on how the past was remembered in these sources in the first three centuries. They are concerned with reception rather than with redaction (i.e. the editing of received material). Evangelicals will appreciate how these volumes move away from form and redaction criticism.

Each chapter in volume 1 examines the place of Jesus within the work under consideration. All of them begin from the starting point that Jesus was a man from Galilee and was crucified. But each chapter then asks, 'Who is Jesus for this author?' and also 'What kind of tradition is the author working with—a broad set of malleable themes and *topoi*, or more specific (Synoptic-like) material with recognizable linguistic structures and content?'

Each chapter also investigates specific Jesus traditions unique to a particular author, amongst the wide variety of traditions that circulated about Jesus. Instead of simply declaring the Synoptic Gospels to be the tradition that represents the ideal memory of Jesus, the essays consider other memories of Jesus that may have been preserved through non-canonical works. This is a helpful approach since the canonical gospels were written later than much of the New Testament. It allows the reader to examine more thoroughly individual remembrances of Jesus that may be distinct from the canonical gospels and are frequently overlooked.

Each chapter follows the same organizational pattern: introduction, distinct portrayal of Jesus, reception of Jesus, a general conclusion, and further reading. This method makes comparison between chapters easy, and it also provides a good basis for understanding how Jesus' identity was formed within each community.

In the first volume, eighteen authors address various texts that would have influenced the Christian movement. Along with the texts contained in our New Testament, there are separate articles on Q, the longer ending of Mark's gospel, the pericope on the adulterous woman from John 7:53–8:11, and John 21. The volume also includes articles on later Christian writings such as the *Didache* and *1 Clement*, plus a discussion of the memory of Jesus in Josephus' *Testimonium Flavianum*. The coverage of Josephus adds a valuable perspective alongside the Christian receptions of Jesus.

Evangelicals will appreciate the sequential placement and understanding of these investigations. Although investigation of Q is a debated issue in New Testament studies, it has broad support in scholarly circles. The chapters on the three disputed New Testament passages (the longer ending of Mark, the adulterous woman and John 21) provide a unique means to compare these sections of the gospels with received ones.

Evangelicals will be disappointed to find Ephesians, Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles omitted from the first volume. The editors treat these biblical books as composed in the second century. These New Testament books and the *Gospel of Thomas* (which some date to the first century) are all considered in the second volume.

This first volume provides an excellent resource for those working on the reception of Jesus in the New Testament and early Christianity. It brings attention

to both canonical and non-canonical literature that influenced understandings of the memory of Jesus.

Benedict XVI: A Life
Peter Seewald

Munich: Droemer Verlag, 2020
Hb., 1150 pp.

Reviewed by Rolf Hille, retired professor of systematic theology at Freie Theologische Hochschule in Giessen, Germany and former chair of the WEA Theological Commission

Longtime German journalist Peter Seewald has produced a monumental work on the work of Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI. The author has accompanied the emeritus pontiff for over 25 years and has excellent insider knowledge. The book is written in an easy-to-read, exciting style. It provides detailed and reliable information about the inner workings of the Catholic Church, the Vatican, and the Second Vatican Council.

Benedict's development is presented effectively against the backdrop of political, cultural, and social events, as is apparent in Seewald's research on Ratzinger's family history and his youth in Upper Bavaria, Germany. (As Benedict's later life is fairly well known, in the limited space available for this review I will focus on how Seewald treats some of his most formative early experiences.)

Joseph Ratzinger was born on 16 April 1927 as the third child of a policeman and a cook, both of whom were devout Catholics. They raised their children in a life of faith from the very beginning, amidst the politically troubled times of the Weimar Republic and its severe economic tremors. Joseph's father was very interested in politics and a declared opponent of emerging National Socialism. As a teenage soldier, Joseph had to do military service in a Flak defence unit at age sixteen. He was even a prisoner of war for a short time.

Seewald highlights Ratzinger's connection to the Archbishop of Cologne, Josef Cardinal Frings, as significant for church history. While teaching at the University of Bonn in the early 1960s, Ratzinger had embraced Pope John XXIII's desire for reform as his own, wanting to get beyond the medieval language and the scholastic mindset of the First Vatican Council. The Christian faith, he believed, should be conveyed to the modern world in such a way that people of the twentieth century can understand it and follow it. But the content of the faith or the dogmatic substance must not be degraded. After hearing a lecture by Ratzinger, Frings began using the young scholar as his ghostwriter, enabling Ratzinger to take part in the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) as a Frings advisor. The speeches, written in Latin for the blind cardinal, were overwhelmingly accepted by the Council Fathers and had a lasting influence on the decisions of the church assembly.

Seewald is not afraid to discuss internal conflicts and intrigues in the Catholic Church. One prominent example is the relationship between Ratzinger and Swiss theologian Hans Küng, which is a common thread running through the entire work.

Nearly the same age, these two Catholics both rose to academic honours at a young age. The two 'teenagers' of the faculty at Tübingen (where Ratzinger taught from 1966 to 1969), as Küng called them, had already met at the Second Vatican Council. But over time, their theological paths increasingly grew apart. The 1968 student movement played a major part in this development, as Ratzinger was deeply frightened by its radicalization. As a professor, he perceived a strong sense of secularization among Catholic theology students. Küng wanted to see a different, fundamentally modern church, whereas Ratzinger was concerned with the inner renewal of the church through God's Word and the sacraments.

Küng knew how to use the media to get his concerns aired during the Council. In contrast, even during the Council and especially afterwards, Ratzinger would fight, in his academic teaching and church leadership positions, for the sovereignty of interpretation regarding the church assembly. He objected that 'the spirit of the Council' was being played off privately against the clear wording of the Council texts. Ratzinger believed that the content of the Second Vatican Council was being twisted into its very opposite.

At Tübingen, Ratzinger also vehemently opposed the mixing of the gospel with Marxist historical analysis and class-struggle ideology, as he perceived it among the revolutionary students. This conflict became very important in Ratzinger's later activity as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as he became involved in a heated dispute between Rome and Latin American liberation theology.

However, the turmoil of the 1968 student revolution also led Ratzinger into a connection that would be particularly important for evangelicals. In Tübingen, he initiated an ecumenical discussion and prayer group with the Protestant theology professors Ulrich Wickert and Peter Beyerhaus. The Protestant New Testament scholars Martin Hengel and Peter Stuhlmacher from Tübingen later gave exegetical lectures to Benedict, which he used in developing arguments for his three books on Jesus. Beyerhaus saw in his personal relationship with Ratzinger a successful model of a future 'confessional ecumenism'.

Seewald writes with clear sympathy for the pontiff. Nevertheless, the former *Der Spiegel* editor is by no means uncritical of the Pope. He complains about Ratzinger's placability, which had a particularly negative impact on some difficult decisions regarding personnel.

Ratzinger's theological debates and his battles in church politics cast an illuminating light on the main denominational trends of our present time. Three lines can be identified. First, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are determined to stick to the biblical message as received through the church fathers. The same applies to the churches that emerged from the sixteenth-century Reformation with their confessions on Scripture, Christ and justification by grace and faith alone. Because of the so-called *solas* of the Reformation period, despite all ecumenical approaches, there remain clear differences between Rome and the Protestant churches. Still, both of these confessional families have opposed the liberal form of Christianity that has emerged since the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment theologians subordinate the Christian tradition to the rationalist philosophy of modern times and its scientific thinking. In doing so, they abandon important biblical tenets and represent a form of modern or post-modern

Christianity. For evangelical Christians, this results in an increasing alignment with Rome against the liberal movements within their own churches with regard to the inspiration of Scripture, confessing Christ, and the Trinity.

This biographical account of Benedict XVI and his teaching shows that maintaining and clarifying the distinction between early Christian teaching and modern liberalism remains a key theological task.

World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narratives and Missiology
Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, ed.

Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2020
Pb., 200 pp.

Reviewed by Peirong Lin, Research Coordinator of the Theological Concerns Department, World Evangelical Alliance

This book is a fascinating account of global Christianity as found in Western Europe. Its objectives are (1) to document untold stories of Christians from the majority world living in Europe, (2) to describe new diaspora missionary activities in Europe, and (3) to examine the complex diaspora identity of first- and second-generation migrants.

The book takes an interdisciplinary approach to achieving its objectives. The book's three sections cover issues of diasporic identity, missional narratives and missiological insights, respectively. The chapters focus on a wide range of contexts, such as the multicultural missionary identity of diaspora Christians in Germany, Pentecostal immigrant churches in Sweden, British missionaries in Italy, the British Gujarati context, and African diaspora Christianity. The authors are well equipped to address their chosen topics because of the unique mix of their personal identities and research interests.

Here are some highlights that I took away from this book:

The migrant God. In the *missio Dei*, we can see how the triune God moved in His mission. God the Father came to his people, the Israelites, and 'dwelt among them'; similarly, Jesus came to earth and made his dwelling among us (Jn 1:14). His life journey reflected the challenges of being a migrant. The Holy Spirit finds its dwelling within each individual believer (1 Cor 3:16). Consequently, as followers of this migrant God, migrants can bravely follow His lead and live out the Great Commission in a host country far from home.

Clear documentation of migrants and missionary journeys. The stories outlined were unguarded and provided ample details as to the challenges felt, the actions taken and the subsequent theological reflections made in light of the overall experiences. This clear documentation is useful in increasing the resources available on global Christianity.

The church's role. Several chapters discussed the challenges faced by migrants. At times, the church was identified as a place where these challenges were acutely felt; in other instances the church was a source of support. The book makes clear

how the church as a social institution can influence the migrant's assimilation in the host country.

Questions for missions. There are more mission opportunities for Christians in Europe, as one no longer needs to travel far to reach people from other lands. The traditional mission field is now in one's backyard. One main critique of how missions are carried out concerns the lack of input received from the natives. Often, strategies arise from a Western understanding of Christianity that can seem to perpetuate colonial stereotypes. Another significant trend is the arrival of Christian migrants from contexts that are highly evangelistic, and how these migrants can mediate between the gospel and the secular culture.

Suggestions on responding better to world Christianity at church. Several interesting suggestions in this category are offered. For example, one author contends that the 'doctrine of the trinity demands that we see Jesus with the eyes of the Spirit so that our own prejudices and politics do not blind us to the obedience to which the Father calls his people.' Another author stressed creating a *multicultural* church (one where the leadership and church structure include diverse participation), not just a *multi-coloured* church (i.e. one with diversity in the congregation). Truly exhibiting unity in diversity requires more than a diverse membership.

This book is a welcome contribution as it presents the perspectives of world Christianity through insider voices. It broadens the range of perspectives on missions in Europe, and the insiders discuss issues in a constructive manner before providing further reflection. As a Christian from the majority world (Singapore) now living in Europe, I found that I resonated with some of the stories and reflections presented.

Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don't Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture
Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener

Bloomington, MN, USA: Chosen Books, 2019
Pb., 232 pp., index

Reviewed by Geoffrey Butler, PhD student, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto

Provocatively titled yet generously crafted, Brown and Keener's volume is gracious toward pre-tribulationists while decidedly rejecting their understanding of the end times. Despite the authors' academic *bona fides* and their rigorous interaction with the biblical languages, this work is not primarily intended for a scholarly audience. The content is replete with personal anecdotes and careful explanations, making the book accessible to (even aimed at) the typical layperson.

Both authors acknowledge that they were pre-tribulationists earlier in their Christian lives. Both have strong ties to the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, which has historically been quite friendly to both pre-tribulationism and dispensationalism. However, through a combination of personal experience,

interaction with historical theology, and engagement with the Scriptures used to argue for such doctrines, both found their initial understanding to be wanting.

One of Brown and Keener's greatest strengths is their consistent appeal to both Scripture and church history to make their case. Part I, while focusing broadly on the reasons why many Christians reject pre-tribulationism, aims to demonstrate the relative novelty of the doctrine and the dispensational system undergirding it, which was unheard of prior to the 1830s. Though premillennialism traces its roots to the likes of Irenaeus, Papias and Justin Martyr, Brown and Keener note that one searches in vain for the promotion of a pre-tribulation rapture in the writings of any church fathers, medieval theologians or Reformers.

Part II thoroughly analyses the Scriptural texts cited in support of pre-tribulationism, with counter-arguments grounded in the post-tribulational understanding. Chapter 6 is dedicated to one of the former's central complications, in their opinion: the lack of any biblical distinction between the rapture and the Second Coming. Brown and Keener defend their own post-tribulationist position in chapter 7 by answering pre-tribulational objections. In particular, the authors object to the idea that believers must be removed from earth prior to the outpouring of God's wrath. Here, amillennial and postmillennial advocates might be disappointed to find their views are given scant attention; the authors state that other millennial positions are beyond the scope of this book, even while acknowledging their relevance to this conversation.

Perhaps the most consequential aspect of Brown and Keener's work is Part III, which focuses on the implications of one's eschatology. In their estimation, pre-tribulationism is overly pessimistic about the church and its mission in the last days. Classical dispensationalism, they note, has traditionally asserted that the church age will ultimately end in failure. Not only is this view difficult to harmonize with the many biblical references that refer to believers as 'victors' or 'overcomers', but it seems to be flatly contradicted by the plethora of recent statistics (cited in chapter 10) that demonstrate the 'staggering' growth of Christianity on a global scale.

The authors also insist that rejecting dispensationalism, contrary to widespread claims, does not amount to an embrace of 'replacement theology' in which the nation of Israel is no longer a factor in the purposes of God. Brown, himself a messianic Jew, notes that Israel and the church are not 'distinct and separate entities'. Yet he also demonstrates how a non-dispensationalist can still hold that the Jewish people, not the church, will fulfil the Old Testament promises made specifically to them. This aspect of the book is ripe for further development; although it provides an alternative framework to the dispensational system, its proponents would likely require more detailed explanation to be convinced.

The authors' discussion of the widespread persecution of believers internationally should also give pause to the average Western reader. Keener's heart-wrenching tale of teaching sixty pastors in Yelwa, Nigeria, only to hear of their slaughter at the hands of Boko Haram two years later, comes as a sobering reminder to believers of all eschatological convictions that exemption from tribulation is hardly the norm for the global body of Christ. They point out that any Christians who take Scripture seriously should expect persecution, and their concern that pre-tribulationists may sometimes fail to do so as an implication of their eschatology is

worth reflecting on. One also detects a weariness of date setting for the Second Coming that, while repudiated by responsible dispensationalists, has proven all too problematic at the popular level.

Keener and Brown will not convince all pre-tribulational adherents, particularly in some Pentecostal-Charismatic or fundamentalist circles where this view is perceived as a core distinctive; however, their irenic tone and well-reasoned arguments should be carefully considered. Although the Christian church has historically recognized eschatology as a secondary issue, that does not make it unimportant. Indeed, given the serious consequences of one's assumptions concerning the end times as outlined in the book, believers would do well to carefully consider Brown and Keener's case.

Spirit and Sacrament: An Invitation to Eucharismatic Worship
Andrew Wilson

Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 2019
Pb., 144 pp., index

Reviewed by Geoffrey Butler, PhD student, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto

Many readers may quickly identify with the sentiment expressed in Matt Chandler's foreword to this book: 'I loved the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and longed to take communion weekly, but I also loved watching people come alive in the gifts God had given them … having excited anticipation of what God might do as we gathered.' The premise of Wilson's volume is that the church need not choose between these options. Rather, it should embrace a 'theological vision' that is both sacramental and charismatic, treasuring the ancient practices and creeds of the Christian tradition while eager to experience a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He labels this vision, quite creatively, 'eucharismatic'.

Wilson is rightly critical of churches who decry formalism and chase after the latest cultural fad, yet also of traditionalists who disparage the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in its entirety. He argues not only that this relatively recent movement has exerted a remarkable influence on global Christianity, but that historic Christendom has actually been much more 'charismatic' than one might think. His second chapter, which is focused on a 'theology of gift', helpfully reminds his audience that although all good things ultimately find their origin in God's goodwill toward humanity—such as food, government or even creation itself—all may be used improperly. The solution, then, is not to reject such gifts outright, but to use them responsibly. So it is with sacraments and spiritual gifts, which must be received with thanksgiving but grounded in a proper theology of stewardship.

Although readers may disagree with Wilson's assertion that in many Western churches 'we find it easier to lament than rejoice', the central thesis that the Christian life should be characterized by joy and exuberance is a sound one. The Pentecostal-Charismatic church can make a unique contribution to his eucharismatic vision, since they tend to feature representing Jesus 'as triumphant and risen' and speak of

rejoicing much more frequently than lament. But Wilson cautions against a weak theology of suffering that makes biblical lament virtually impossible. Wilson also wisely acknowledges that achieving a balance will look different depending on one's geographical context; that is, how one holds rejoicing and lament in tension may look different for an Asian congregation than in Europe.

Wilson's fourth and fifth chapters, respectively, focus on the eucharistic and charismatic dimensions of worship. His statement, 'Show me your architecture and I'll show you your theology', while likely to meet with protest from some low-church evangelicals, is indeed thought-provoking. Many contemporary Christians proclaim that the church is a body of individuals and not the building itself, as if architecture is somehow irrelevant. However, few would deny the beauty of the natural world, which testifies to the glory of God. So too do the high, vaulted ceilings or the stained glass of a stately cathedral. Even more consequential is the focal point of the structure, whether it be a pulpit, altar or icon. Wilson's point is not to attack non-liturgical churches but to emphasize that signs and symbols matter, in a pushback against 'the fuzzy, shallow Gnosticism that characterizes Western culture today'. Far from endorsing empty symbolism, he charges that physical structures and actions—which also include anointing with oil, miracles or speaking in tongues—are so powerful precisely because they testify to the power of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

What makes Wilson's case so strong, is its firm grounding in both historic tradition and sacred Scripture, while carefully granting primacy to the latter. The presence of the Holy Spirit and the celebration of the sacraments are integral to his eucharismatic vision precisely because they are integral to the New Testament's depiction of the church. Some from those traditions that are historically neither sacramental nor charismatic in their ethos may take offence at Wilson's chiding of those congregations as 'stuck in Bible-church no-man's-land'. But Wilson's challenge is applicable to virtually any local context, regardless of the tradition. Few churches have arrived at the healthy balance of the spontaneous and the liturgical that he envisions. However, all things considered, it is a balance worth pursuing. For the Christian who longs for a faith anchored in the historic doctrines and practices of the church yet sensitive to how the Spirit continues to guide and empower the people of God today, this book will be both refreshing and encouraging.

The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope
Munther Isaac

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020
Pb., 256 pp.

Reviewed by Samuel T. Logan, Jr.,
associate international director of the World Reformed Fellowship

As I read this book, I spent as much time highlighting important passages as I spent reading. It would probably have been more efficient to leave the important pages

unhighlighted. That's how excellent, powerful, challenging and convicting the book is.

Dr. Isaac displays a unique combination of biblical understanding, historical knowledge and personal experience. He knows the Bible and the history of the Middle East, and he has lived—and continues to live—in the context of both. As a result, his chapter entitled 'The Bible, the Land, and the Modern State of Israel' presents the best discussion that I have ever read of what the land of Israel means in Scripture and in modern history.

Isaac is as provocative as he is knowledgeable. His chapter 'Blessed Are the Peacemakers', which uses the Sermon on the Mount as its starting point, reminds me of other 'dangerous' biblical passages such as Isaiah 58:6–12 and Matthew 25:31–46. It will challenge you more than all the heavy theological debates you have ever entered.

Chapter 10 of the book, on 'Letters of Hope', provides an eschatological answer to the question asked at least 14 times in the Bible: "How long, Lord?" (see Psalms 13 and 35; Habakkuk 1). That chapter ends with these powerful words: 'The Intervention has already taken place. Get busy working!'

I have one caveat about this fine book. It arises from Isaac's discussion of the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' Isaac examines the parable of the Good Samaritan, noting that 'the teacher of the law was seeking to draw a circle around himself and to ask Jesus, "Where do I draw the circle? Who is inside—so that I can be sure to love them; who is outside—so I can be free of my obligation to love them?"'

In discussing the implications of this question, Isaac recalls his background as a conservative Presbyterian, where 'we learned the errors of liberal Presbyterians, the Pentecostals, Arminianism (versus Calvinism), and the Baptists, of course, who did not baptize their children. We even opposed loud music in the church. Division had no end. The circle kept shrinking.'

Isaac rightly concludes that 'Jesus challenges us in this text to treat all peoples as neighbours', and he encourages Western evangelicals to follow the suggestion by Colin Chapman, who teaches theology in Beirut, to think about our relation to Muslims whenever we read 'Samaritans' in the Gospels.

But I do wish Isaac had addressed one question more directly: 'What exactly would it look like for Palestinian evangelicals to treat Jewish Israelis as neighbours?' This does not, in any way, reduce the responsibility for Jewish Israelis (or global evangelicals) to treat Palestinians as neighbours.

As genuinely horrible as life on 'the other side of the wall' is, the historical reality of the Holocaust must be considered when considering what loving Israeli neighbours really means. Isaac does discuss, at length and accurately, the role of the Holocaust in reinforcing support for Israel by many global evangelicals. But I would like to have seen a fuller examination of how a Palestinian Christian should treat as a 'neighbour' the Israel soldier whose grandmother still bears her concentration camp tattoo and who therefore fears what might happen again if Israel doesn't have its own, totally secure state. Even if that fear may seem irrational today, irrationality does not mitigate anyone's responsibility to be neighbourly.

Certainly, the reality of the Holocaust in no way justifies any lack of love for Palestinian neighbours on the part of Israelis. But I would like to have seen, in this

superb book, a bit more discussion of how the Palestinians, or any of us, can love as a 'neighbour' someone whom we view as harming us. That is a spiritual lesson with which many of us need help.