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Editorial

We present in this number a selection of articles which explore a range of important theological and practical issues. We commence at the broadest level with an authoritative review of the relation between theology and science by Lutheran theologian, Dr Ted Peters of The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, in Berkeley California. Then Dr Rolf Hille of Albrecht Bengel Haus, Tübingen, discusses philosophical aspects of Modernity and Post-modernity, with a focus on the understanding of humanity. Finally, in this section, Dr Gordon Lewis of Denver Seminary, Colorado advances an argument to show how cross-cultural communication is made possible by general revelation.

This leads us to a more detailed examination of the question of culture and the life and mission of the church at the local level, provided by Dr Eshetu Abate who reflects on the situation in his homeland of Ethiopia. A similar study by Andrew Lord of the United Kingdom focuses on hermeneutical and cultural aspects of the Christian mission in Israel–Palestine. Rounding off this group, New Zealander, Dr John Roxborough, draws attention to the importance of understanding minority Christianity, not only because of recent dramatic changes in the geography of Christianity, but also for various strategic reasons.

The last two articles are detailed Bible studies addressing fundamental issues. Dr John J. Davis of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary revisits a key text on the role of ministry leaders to argue that recent dominant interpretations are exegetically questionable and need correction, resulting in a sharpened role for these leaders. James Chacko of India reflects on the significance of the apostle Paul's collection of money from his missionary churches for the church in Jerusalem, suggesting that the contemporary collection should have less to do with the worship service and more with the restoration of the unity of the church.

From science and philosophy to missions, theology and exegesis, these articles are indicative of the range of concerns and interests of this journal as we move into the new century. The letter to the Hebrews presents a vivid picture of our Lord Jesus as the 'pioneer and perfecter of our faith' and a call for us who are 'surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses' to be inspired and empowered so we can 'run with perseverance the race that is set before us' ([12:1-2](#)). While the context of this passage is the pressure of persecution and the danger of discouragement, the global challenges we face today in intellectual, social and spiritual terms are no less demanding. We are called upon to 'consider Jesus' and apply our mind as well as our will and faith to understand the times in which we live, and, like the wise scribe of the parable, bring out of our storeroom 'new treasures as well as old' ([Mt. 13:52](#)).

David Parker, Editor

Theology and Science: Where are We?

Ted Peters

Keywords: Natural science, scientism, evolution, scientific creationism, consonance, New Age, critical realism, natural theology, revelation

Is the war being fought between evolution and creationism characteristic of the larger relationship between science and theology? Is warfare the best extended metaphor for

understanding how scientific knowledge and Christian faith get along? The battle metaphor goes back to the late nineteenth century, most probably due to the influence of the notorious book by A.D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*.¹ But, we will ask here: does the image of a declared state of war accurately describe the current interaction between theological thinking and natural science? No, not completely.

We could say that a revolution is underway. But this revolution is turning us toward greater peace, not toward new battles. It is a revolution that adds complexity and nuance so that it is no longer accurate to see science and theology merely as pitched enemies. The revolution is being led by an unpredicted and astounding intellectual trend, namely, the re-asking of the God-question within the orbit of scientific discussion about the natural world. The raising of theological questions within the scientific camp does not fit neatly into the warfare model.

The warfare model is not the only one. Some of us work with a model of separation. We assume that science and religion are separate, unable to conflict because they are sovereign in different spheres. They allegedly speak different languages. So we erect a high wall of separation between church and laboratory. Yet, now as the peaceful revolution is beginning to take hold, this separation is increasingly recognized as most unfortunate. It is unfortunate because we all are aware that there is but one reality. So sooner or later we will become dissatisfied with consigning our differences to separate ghettos of knowledge.

The pre-revolutionary separatists and the revolutionary scientists represent only part of the picture. There is another group of quiet revolutionaries who since the 1960s have been looking for parallels, points of contact, consonance, crossovers, and confluences. Their emerging new discipline, as yet without a name, is studying developments in natural science—especially physics and the life sciences—and is engaging in serious reflection on various loci of Christian doctrine. Scientists and theologians are engaged in a common search for shared understanding. The search is not merely for a shared discipline. They are not looking merely for rapprochement between separate fields of inquiry. Rather, scientists and theologians are aiming for increased knowledge, for an actual advance in the human understanding of reality. Until a name comes along, we will refer to this new enterprise as *Theology and Natural Science*.

In this article I will briefly outline eight different ways in which science and religion are currently thought to be related.² I will note that the dominant view—the truce by separation view—in academic circles is what I label the ‘two-language theory’, but I will go on to point out that the advancing frontier is taking us in the direction of hypothetical consonance. Then I will turn to the central methodological issue, namely, the classic concern for the relation between faith and reason. I will conclude with my own observations regarding the merits of hypothetical consonance and the value of making a theological interpretation of nature so that we can see the natural cosmos as divine creation.

Who are the key partners in this emerging conversation between natural science and Christian theology? Rather than sharply contrasting what we can know by faith and what we can know by reason, Nancey Murphy and Wentzel van Huyssteen along with others are maximizing the overlap. Those looking for consonance in cosmology, evolutionary theory, genetics, and such subject areas include frontier thinkers such as Ian Barbour,

¹ 1. A.D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*, 2 volumes (New York: Dover, 1896; 1960).

² 2. The lineup of contending forces I offer here is revised from that sketched previously in my Preface to *Cosmos as Creation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), pp. 13–17. For a detailed explanation, see extended note at end of this article.

Willem Drees, Philip Hefner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, Robert John Russell, and Thomas Torrance. In Australia, we must note that Paul Davies, Mark Worthing, and Denis Edwards are emerging as world leaders in this growing field.

EIGHT WAYS OF RELATING SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

Not everyone views the relationship between science and religion in the same way. If we extend the metaphor of warfare, we can see that relationships vary from pitched battle to an uneasy truce.

1. Scientism

Scientism, sometimes called ‘naturalism’ or ‘scientific materialism’ or ‘secular humanism’, seeks war with total victory for one side. Scientism, like other ‘... isms’, is an ideology, this one built upon the assumption that science provides all the knowledge that we can acquire. There is only one reality, the natural, and science has a monopoly on the knowledge we possess about nature.³ Religion, which claims to purvey knowledge about things supernatural, provides only pseudo-knowledge—that is, false impressions about *non-existent fictions*.

Some decades ago, British philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell told a BBC audience that ‘what science cannot tell us, mankind cannot know’. At mid century astronomer Fred Hoyle argued that the Jewish and Christian religions have become outdated by modern science. He explained religious behaviour as escapist, as pursued by people who seek illusory security from the mysteries of the universe.⁴

More recently, physicists Stephen Hawking and the late Carl Sagan have teamed up to assert that the cosmos is all there is or was or ever will be, and to assert that there was no absolute beginning at the onset of the Big Bang. Why no beginning? Had there been an absolute beginning, then time would have an edge; and beyond this edge we could dimly glimpse a transcendent reality such as a creator God. But this is intolerable to scientism. So, by describing the cosmos as temporally self-contained, Sagan could write confidently in the introduction to Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time* about ‘the absence of God’ on the grounds that there is ‘nothing for a Creator to do’.⁵ In the warfare between science and theology, scientism demands elimination of the enemy.

2. Scientific Imperialism

Scientific Imperialism is Scientism in a slightly different form. Rather than eliminating the enemy, scientific imperialism seeks to conquer the territory formerly possessed by theology and claim it as its own. Whereas scientism is atheistic; scientific imperialism

³ 3. Langdon Gilkey, *Nature, Reality, and the Sacred: The Nexus of Science and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 14.

⁴ 4. Fred Hoyle, *The Nature of the Universe* (New York: Mentor, 1950), p. 125.

⁵ 5. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988), p. 136; see: Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980). Co-discoverer of the double helix structure of DNA, Francis Crick reduces what religious people used to believe to be the disembodied soul to ‘nothing but a pack of neurons’. All of our joys and sorrows, our memories and ambitions, our sense of personal identity and free will, ‘are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules’. *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), 3. For aggressive anti-religious secular humanism see Paul Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1985) and the journal published by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, *The Skeptical Inquirer*.

affirms the existence of something divine but claims knowledge of the divine comes from scientific research rather than religious revelation. 'Science has actually advanced to the point where what were formerly religious questions can be seriously tackled . . . [by] the new physics', writes Adelaide physicist Paul Davies.⁶ What Davies does is to demonstrate how the field of physics transcends itself, opening us in the direction of the divine reality. 'I belong to a group of scientists', he writes, 'who do not subscribe to a conventional religion but nevertheless deny that the universe is a purposeless accident. ... There must, it seems to me, be a deeper level of explanation. Whether one wishes to call that deeper level "God" is a matter of taste and definition.'⁷

Physicist Frank Tipler takes imperialism to the academic extreme. Claiming that quantum theory combined with Big Bang and thermodynamics can provide a better explanation than Christianity for the future resurrection of the dead, Tipler declares that theology should become a branch of physics.⁸

3. Ecclesiastical Authoritarianism

Ecclesiastical Authoritarianism is the defensive tactic followed by some in the Roman Catholic tradition who perceive science and scientism as a threat. Presuming a two step route to truth in which natural reason is followed by divine revelation, theological dogma is here ceded authority over science on the grounds that it is founded on God's revelation. In 1864 Pope Pius IX promulgated *The Syllabus of Errors*, wherein item 57 stated it to be an error to think that science and philosophy could withdraw from ecclesiastical authority. A century later the Second Vatican Council dropped the defences by declaring the natural sciences to be free from ecclesiastical authority and called them 'autonomous' disciplines (*Gaudium et Spes*: 59). Pope John Paul II, who has a serious interest in fostering dialogue between theology and the natural sciences, is negotiating a new peace between faith and reason.⁹

4. Scientific Creationism

⁶ 6. Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone, 1983), p. ix.

⁷ 7. Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 16. In reviewing Davies' new book, *The Fifth Miracle: The Search for the Origin and Meaning of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), Philip Hefner alerts us to the manner in which Davies challenges science to go beyond its current limits. 'The Fifth Miracle has an important subtext, which presses the claim: the current understanding of nature's laws is insufficient to understand the origin of life. Religious people have perennially perceived such insufficiencies as occasions to invoke the action of God.' 'Mysterious Beginnings', *Christian Century*, 116:17, pp. 522-623 (June 2-9, 1999), p. 622. Davies does not invoke a religious God-of-the-gaps to fill the insufficiency, of course, but rather presses science to expand to fill this gap with a fuller understanding of nature.

⁸ 8. Frank Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. ix, 10, 17, 247. Tipler borrows some eschatological theology from Wolfhart Pannenberg and places it within the scientific eschatology of physicist Freeman Dyson, *Infinite in All Directions* (New York: Harper, 1988).

⁹ 9. *John Paul II On Science and Religion: Reflections on the New View from Rome*, ed. by Robert John Russell, William R. Stoeger, and George V. Coyne (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, and Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1990). In October 1992 the pope completed a 13 year study of the Galileo affair, proclaiming that the church erred in condemning the astronomer for disobeying orders regarding the teaching of Copernicus' heliocentric theory of the universe. John Paul II described Galileo as 'a sincere believer' who was 'more perceptive [in the interpretation of Scripture] than the theologians who opposed him'. Because in the myths of scientism Galileo is touted as a martyr for truth over against the narrow-mindedness of theology, Owen Gingerich took the occasion to write to clear up the facts. One noteworthy fact is that Galileo was never condemned for heresy, only disobedience. 'How Galileo Changed the Rules of Science', *Sky and Telescope*, 85:3 (March 1993) pp. 32-26.

Scientific Creationism, sometimes called ‘creation science’, is not a Protestant version of church authoritarianism even though it is frequently so mistaken. The grandparents of today’s scientific creationists were fundamentalists, to be sure, and fundamentalism appealed to biblical authority in a fashion parallel to the Roman Catholic appeal to church authority. Yet there is a marked difference between fundamentalist authoritarianism and contemporary creation science. Today’s creation scientists are willing to argue their case in the arena of science, not biblical authority. They assume that biblical truth and scientific truth belong to the same domain. When there is a conflict between a scientific assertion and a religious assertion, then we allegedly have a conflict in scientific theories. The creationists argue that the book of Genesis is itself a theory which tells us how the world was physically created: God fixed the distinct kinds (species) of organisms at the point of original creation. They did not evolve. Geological and biological facts attest to biblical truth, they argue.

With regard to theological commitments, scientific creationists typically affirm (1) the creation of the world out of nothing; (2) the insufficiency of mutation and natural selection to explain the process of evolution; (3) the stability of existing species and the impossibility of one species evolving out of another; (4) separate ancestry for apes and humans; (5) catastrophism to explain certain geological formations, e.g., the flood explains why sea fossils appear on mountains; and (6) the relatively recent formation of the earth about six to ten thousand years ago.¹⁰

Establishment scientists typically try to gain quick victory over creationists by dismissing them. Stephen Jay Gould, the colourful Harvard paleontologist, says the very term ‘scientific creationism’ is meaningless and self-contradictory.¹¹ Although the battle between scientific creationists and established scientists appears to be all out war, this is not the case. The creationists, many of whom are themselves practising scientists, see themselves as soldiers within the science army.¹²

5. The Two-Language Theory

The Two-Language Theory might appear to be the way to establish a truce with an enduring peace. This is because it respects the sovereign territory of both science and theology and because it is advocated by highly respected persons in both fields. Albert Einstein—remembered for his remark that ‘science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind’—distinguished between the language of fact and the language of value. ‘Science can only ascertain what *is*, but not what *should be*’, he once told an audience at Princeton; ‘religion, on the other hand, deals only with evaluations of human thought and action.’ Note the use of ‘only’ here. Each language is *restricted* to its respective domain.

As of this writing, the current president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, anthropologist Stephen Jay Gould, advocates the two language view. Responding to Pope John Paul II’s elocution on evolution, Gould argues that science

¹⁰ 10. See: Duane T. Gish, *Evolution: The Fossils Say No!* (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1973) and Roger E. Timm, ‘Scientific Creationism and Biblical Theology’, in Peters, *Cosmos as Creation*, pp. 247–264.

¹¹ 11. Stephen Jay Gould, *Hen’s Teeth and Horse’s Toes: Reflections on Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1983), p. 254.

¹² 12. One could describe the war as a battle between atheistic science and theistic science. Langdon Gilkey suggests that scientism (what he calls scientific positivism) goes beyond the limits of science to propound an atheistic cosmology, and this initiates the reaction that results in scientific creationism. See: Gilkey, *Nature, Reality, and the Sacred*, p. 55.

and religion need not be in conflict because their teachings occupy different domains. Their respective *magisteria* (teaching authorities) are ‘nonoverlapping’.¹³

Neoorthodox theologian Langdon Gilkey has long argued for the two language approach. Science, he says, deals only with objective or public knowing of *proximate origins*, whereas religion and its theological articulation deals with existential or personal knowing of *ultimate* origins. Science asks ‘*how?*’, while religion asks ‘*why?*’.¹⁴ What Gilkey wants, of course, is for one person to be a citizen in two lands—that is, to be able to embrace both Christian faith and scientific method without conflict.¹⁵ To speak both languages is to be bilingual, and bilingual intellectuals can work with one another in peace.

The modern two-language theory of the relation between science and theology ought not to be confused with the premodern concept of the two books. In medieval times, revelation regarding God could be read from two books, the *book of nature* and the *book of scripture*. Both science and theology could speak of things divine. Both natural revelation and special revelation pointed us in one direction: toward God.¹⁶ The two-language theory, in contrast, points us in two different directions: either toward God or toward the world.

A problem I have with the two language theory is that it gains peace through separation, by establishing a demilitarized zone that prevents communication. In the event that a scientist might desire to speak about divine matters or that a theologian might desire to speak about the actual world created by God, the two would have to speak past one another on the assumption that shared understanding is impossible. Why begin with such an assumption? The method of hypothetical consonance makes just the opposite assumption, namely, there is but one reality and sooner or later scientists and theologians should be able to find some areas of shared understanding.

6. Hypothetical Consonance

Hypothetical Consonance is the name I give to the frontier that seems to be emerging beyond the two language policy. The term ‘consonance’, coming from the work of Ernan McMullin, indicates that we are looking for those areas where there is a correspondence between what can be said scientifically about the natural world and what the theologian understands to be God’s creation.¹⁷ ‘Consonance’ in the strong sense means accord, harmony. Accord or harmony might be a treasure we hope to find, but we have not found it yet. Where we find ourselves now is working with consonance in a weak sense—that is, by identifying common domains of question asking. The advances in physics, especially

¹³ 13. Stephen Jay Gould, ‘Nonoverlapping Magisteria’, *Natural History* 106 (March 1997), pp. 16–22.

¹⁴ 14. Langdon Gilkey, *Creationism on Trial* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985), pp. 49–52; 108–113.

¹⁵ 15. In his more recent works, Gilkey has pressed for a closer relationship—a mutual interdependence—between science and religion. Gilkey attacks scientism (what he calls naturalism or scientific positivism) when it depicts nature as valueless, determined, and void of the sacred, on the grounds that these are supra-scientific or philosophical judgments that go beyond science itself. Science, therefore, must be supplemented by philosophy and religion if we are to understand reality fully. *Nature, Reality, and the Sacred*, pp. 3, 11, 75, 111, 129.

¹⁶ 16. The ‘two books’ approach is embraced today by the organization, Reasons to Believe, a publishing house that ‘examines how the

¹⁷ 17. Ernan McMullin, ‘How Should Cosmology Relate to Theology’, in *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Arthur Peacocke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) p. 39. See: Peters, *Cosmos as Creation*, pp. 13–17.

thermodynamics and quantum theory in relation to Big Bang cosmology, have in their own way raised questions about transcendent reality. As Paul Davies has shown, the God question can be honestly asked from within scientific reasoning. Theologians and scientists may now be sharing a common subject matter, and the idea of hypothetical consonance encourages further cooperation.

Mark William Worthing at Luther Seminary in Adelaide challenges theologians to be theologically responsible by investigating what science is saying about the world, the world of which we believe God to be the creator and redeemer. 'Theology ... has the responsibility to demonstrate to what extent and in what ways Christian faith is compatible with cosmologies that may in fact prove to be an accurate description of the universe.'¹⁸ Princeton theologian Wentzel van Huyssteen puts it this way: 'As Christians we should therefore take very seriously the theories of physics and cosmology; not to exploit or to try to change them, but to try to find interpretations that would suggest some form of complementary consonance with the Christian viewpoint.'¹⁹

Hypothetical consonance asks theologians to view their discipline somewhat differently. Rather than beginning from a rigid position of inviolable truth, the term 'hypothetical' asks theologians to subject their own assertions to further investigation and possible confirmation or disconfirmation. An openness to learning something new on the part of theologians and scientists alike is essential for hypothetical consonance to move us forward. Canberra systematic theologian, Stephen Pickard, 'suggests a more modest and humble theological task, willing to admit uncertainty and an appropriate provisionality in the results of theological enquiry, perhaps more so than has occurred in the past'.²⁰

The new book by Flinders University/Adelaide School of Divinity theologian Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution*, presumes hypothetical consonance when putting together evolutionary biology with Christian theology. As the 'of' in the book's title indicates, *The God of Evolution* does not hold that science and faith speak separate and untranslatable languages. Quite the contrary. The scientific theory of evolution provides actual knowledge about the way in which God works in nature to achieve divine purposes. 'There is every reason for a Christian of today to embrace *both* the theological teachings of Genesis *and* the theory of evolution. But holding together the Christian view of God and the insights of evolutionary science does demand a rethinking of our theology of the trinitarian God at work in creation'.²¹

It is my judgment that, at least for the near future, the model of hypothetical consonance should lead the conversation between natural science and Christian theology. Scientists are already recognizing the limits to reductionist methods and peering into the deeper questions about the nature of nature and the significance of all that is real. Theologians are mandated to speak responsibly about the natural world we claim to be the creation of a divine creator; and natural science has demonstrated its ability to increase our knowledge and understanding of this wondrous world. If God is the creator,

¹⁸ 18. Mark William Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 193.

¹⁹ 19. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Duet or Duel? Theology and Science in a Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1998), p. 78.

²⁰ 20. Stephen Pickard, ' "Unable to See the Wood for the Trees": John Locke and the Fate of Systematic Theology', *The Task of Theology Today*, ed. by Victor Pfitzner and Hilary Regan (Adelaide: Open Book Publishers, 1998), p. 145.

²¹ 21. Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution* (New York: Paulist, 1999), p. 13.

then we should expect growth in our understanding of God as we grow in understanding of the creation. Conversely, we should expect that, if the world is a creation, then it cannot be fully understood without reference to its creator.

7. Ethical Overlap

Ethical Overlap refers to the recognized need on the part of theologians to speak to the questions of human meaning created by our industrial and technological society and, even more urgently, to the ethical challenges posed by the environmental crisis and the need to plan for the long range future of the planet. The ecological challenge arises from the crisis-crossing forces of population overgrowth, increased industrial and agricultural production that depletes nonrenewable natural resources while polluting air and soil and water, the widening split between the haves and the have-nots around the world, and the loss of a sense of responsibility for the welfare of future generations. Modern technology is largely responsible for this ecological crisis, and theologians along with secular moralists are struggling to gain ethical control over technological and economic forces that, if left to themselves, will drive us toward destruction.

An advocate of hypothetical consonance, I belong also to the ethical overlap camp and I believe that, at root, the ecological crisis poses a spiritual issue, namely, the crying need of world civilization for an ethical vision. An ethical vision—a vision of a just and sustainable society that lives in harmony with its environment and at peace with itself—is essential for future planning and motivating the peoples of the world to fruitful action. Ecological thinking is future thinking. Its logic takes the following form: *understanding-decision-control*. Prescinding from the scientific model, we implicitly assume that to solve the ecocrisis we need to understand the forces of destruction; then we need to make the decisions and take the actions that will put us in control of our future and establish a human economy that is in harmony with earth's natural ecology.

In order to bring theological resources to bear on the ecological challenge, most theologians have tried to mine the doctrine of creation for its wealth of ethical resources. It is my judgment that we need more than creation; we need also to appeal to eschatological redemption—that is, new creation. God's redeeming work is equally important when we begin with a creation that has somehow gone awry.

I believe the promise of eschatological renewal can provide a sense of direction, a vision of the coming just and sustainable society, and a motivating power that speaks relevantly to the understanding-decision-control formula. We need to combine creation with new creation. Theologians can make a genuine contribution to the public discussion if, on the basis of eschatological resources, we can project a vision of the coming new world order—that is, announce the promised kingdom of God and work from that vision backward to our present circumstance. This vision should picture our world in terms of (a) a single, worldwide planetary society; (b) united in devotion to the will of God; (c) sustainable within the biological carrying capacity of the planet and harmonized with the principles of the ecosphere; (d) organized politically so as to preserve the just rights and voluntary contributions of all individuals; (e) organized economically so as to guarantee the basic survival needs of each person; (f) organized socially so that dignity and freedom are respected and protected in every quarter; and (g) dedicated to advancing the quality of life on behalf of future generations.²²

8. New Age Spirituality

²² 22. See: Ted Peters, *GOD—the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), chapter 12, and *Futures—Human and Divine* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978).

New Age Spirituality is the next and final in our list of parties interested in the science-religion struggle. The key to New Age thinking is holism—that is, the attempt to overcome modern dualisms such as the split between science and spirit, ideas and feelings, male and female, rich and poor, humanity and nature. New Age artillery is loaded with three explosive sets of ideas: (1) discoveries in twentieth-century physics, especially quantum theory; (2) acknowledgement of the important role played by imagination in human knowing; and (3) a recognition of the ethical exigency of preserving our planet from ecological destruction.

Fritjof Capra and David Bohm, who combine Hindu mysticism with physical theory, are among the favourite New Age physicists. Bohm, for example, argues that the explicate order of things that we accept as the natural world and that is studied in laboratories is not the fundamental reality; there is under and behind it an implicate order, a realm of undivided wholeness. This wholeness, like a hologram, is fully present in each of the explicate parts. Reality, according to Bohm, is ultimately ‘undivided wholeness in flowing movement’.²³ When we focus on either objective knowing or subjective feeling we temporarily forget the unity that binds them. New Age spirituality seeks to cultivate awareness of this underlying and continually changing unity.

A recent *Christian Century* article on science and religion promulgates such holism with a pantheistic overtone. ‘When I am dreaming quantum dreams’, writes Barbara Brown Taylor, ‘the picture I see is more like a web of relationships—an infinite web, flung across the vastness of space like a luminous net. ... God is the web ... I want to proclaim that God is the unity—the very energy, the very intelligence, the very elegance and passion that make it all go.’²⁴

By adding evolutionary theory to physics and especially to Big Bang cosmology, New Age theorists find themselves constructing a grand story—a myth—regarding the history and future of the cosmos of which we human beings are an integral and conscious part. On the basis of this grand myth, New Age ethics tries to proffer a vision of the future that will guide and motivate action appropriate to solving the ecological problem. Science here provides the background not only for ethical overlap but also for a fundamental religious revelation. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry put it this way: ‘Our new sense of the universe is itself a type of revelatory experience. Presently we are moving beyond any religious expression so far known to the human into a meta-religious age, that seems to be a new comprehensive context for all religions. ... The natural world itself is the primary economic reality, the primary educator, the primary governance, the primary technologist, the primary healer, the primary presence of the sacred, the primary moral value.’²⁵

Now, I happen to find the ethical vision of the New Age inspiring. But I cannot in good conscience endorse its meta-religious naturalism. I find it contrived and unconvincing.

²³ 23. David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 11. See: Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (New York: Bantam, 1977). See: Ted Peters, *The Cosmic Self: A Penetrating Look at Today's New Age Movements* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), chapter four.

²⁴ 24. Barbara Brown Taylor, ‘Physics and Faith: The Luminous Web’, *Christian Century*, 116:17, pp. 612–619 (June 2–9, 1999), p. 619.

²⁵ 25. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), p. 255. A variant would be the team work of physicist Joel R. Primack and musician Nancy Ellen Abrams who are trying to construct a myth out of big bang inflationary cosmology and medieval Jewish Kabbalah, not because the myth would be true but because our culture needs a value orienting cosmology. ‘In the Beginning ... Quantum Cosmology and Kabbalah’, *Tikkun*, 10:1 (January–February 1995), pp. 66–73.

Nearly the same ecological ethic with an even stronger emphasis on social justice can be derived from Christian eschatology.

Returning to the more theoretical tie between science and theology, I earlier recommended hypothetical consonance as the most viable option for the near future. Hypothetical consonance takes us beyond the limits of the two-language theory without initially violating the integrity of either natural science or Christian theology. Where the leading scholars find themselves, to my interpretation, is with one foot in the two-language theory and the other stretched for a stride to go beyond. That stride means we need to step back into an age-old theological concern, namely, the relation of faith to reason.

FAITH AND REASON IN SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

The key development among those scholars who either strive for consonance or who are at least in partial sympathy with consonance is the attempt to demonstrate overlap between scientific and theological reasoning. Two insights guide the discussion. First, scientific reasoning depends in part on a faith component, on foundational yet unprovable assumptions. Second, theological reasoning should be recast so as to take on a hypothetical character that is subject to testing. What is a matter of some dispute, however, is whether or not theological assertions refer—that is, is theology a form of realism? Do theological statements merely give expression to the faith of a religious community or do they refer to a reality beyond themselves such as God? Theologians are asking to what extent *critical realism* in the philosophy of science should be incorporated into theological methodology.

Langdon Gilkey has long argued the point that science, every bit as much as theology, rests upon faith. Science must appeal to some foundational assumptions regarding the nature of reality and our apprehension of it, assumptions which themselves cannot be proved within the scope of scientific reasoning. In its own disguised fashion, science is religious, mythical. ‘The activity of knowing’, he writes, ‘points beyond itself to a ground of ultimacy which its own forms of discourse cannot usefully thematize, and for which religious symbolization is alone adequate.’²⁶ Scientific reasoning depends upon the deeply held conviction—the passion of the scientist—that the world is rational and knowable and that truth is worth pursuing. ‘This is not “faith” in the strictly religious and certainly not in the Christian sense’, he observes. ‘But it is a *commitment* in the sense that it is a personal act of acceptance and affirmation of an ultimate in one’s life.’²⁷

On the scientific side, Paul Davies acknowledges the faith dimension to science in terms of assumptions regarding rationality. Presumed here is a gnostic style connection between the rational structure of the universe and the corresponding spark of rationality in the human mind. That human reasoning is generally reliable constitutes his ‘optimistic view’.²⁸ Yet he acknowledges that the pursuit of scientific knowledge will not eliminate all mystery, because every chain of reasoning will eventually hit its limit and force on us the meta-scientific question of transcendence. ‘Sooner or later we all have to accept something as given’, he writes, ‘whether it is God, or logic, or a set of laws, or some other

²⁶ 26. Langdon Gilkey, *Religion and the Scientific Future* (San Francisco: Harper, 1970), p. 41.

²⁷ 27. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁸ 28. Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 24; see p. 232.

foundation of existence. Thus “ultimate” questions will always lie beyond the scope of empirical science.’²⁹

On the issue of faith at the level of assumption, theologians and scientists, at least philosophers of science, agree. This raises a second related issue: does theology, like science, seek to explain? If so, then theology cannot restrict itself to individual or even communal subjectivity or to authoritarian methods of justification that isolate it from common human reasoning. This is what Philip Clayton argues: ‘Theology cannot avoid an appeal to broader canons of rational argumentation and explanatory adequacy.’³⁰ Clayton proceeds to argue for inter subjective criticizability and to view theology as engaged in transcommunal explanation.

If theology seeks to explain, does it also refer? This is the question of critical realism to which we now turn.

CRITICAL REALISM AND THEOLOGICAL REFERENCE

Wentzel van Huysteen, professor in the first chair in the United States designated for Theology and Natural Science at Princeton, believes that theological statements about God refer to God. He advocates ‘critical-theological realism’ and a method for justifying theories in systematic theology that parallels what we find in natural science. Justification occurs through progressive illumination offered by a theological theory, not as traditionally done by appeal to ecclesiastical or some other undisputable authority. Van Huyssteen recognizes the relativistic and contextual and metaphorical dimensions of human speech that flood all discourse, theological and scientific alike. Progress toward truth requires constructive thought, the building up of metaphors and models so as to emit growing insight.³¹ And, most significantly, theological assertions refer. They refer to God. They are realistic. ‘Theology’, he writes, ‘given both the ultimate religious commitment of the theologian and the metaphoric nature of our religious language, is scientifically committed to a realist point of view. ... Our theological theories do indeed refer to a Reality beyond and greater than ours.’³²

On the one hand, critical realism should be contrasted with nonliteralist methods such as positivism and instrumentalism, because it recognizes that theories represent the real world. On the other hand, critical realism should be contrasted also with ‘naive realism’, which invokes the correspondence theory of truth to presume a literal correspondence between one’s mental picture and the object to which this picture refers. Critical realism, in contrast, is nonliteral while still referential. The indirectness comes from the conscious use of metaphors, models, and theories. Ian Barbour notes that ‘Models and theories are abstract symbol systems, which inadequately and selectively represent particular aspects

²⁹ 29. Ibid., 15. See Paul Davies, *Are We Alone?* (London and New York: Harper Collins, Basic Books, 1995).

³⁰ 30. Philip Clayton, *Explanation from Physics to Theology* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1989), p. 13; see Peters, *GOD—The World’s Future*, pp. 74–76.

³¹ 31. The criterion for evaluating the progressive strength of a theory is fertility, and this constitutes the chief argument on behalf of critical realism for Ernan McMullin, ‘A Case for Scientific Realism’, in Jarret Leplin, *Scientific Realism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), p. 26. See Arthur D. Peacocke, *Intimations of Reality: Critical Realism in Science and Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984).

³² 32. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Theology and the Justification of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 162–163. ‘I advocate a critical realism’, writes Ian Barbour, ‘holding that both communities [scientific and religious communities] make cognitive claims about realities beyond the human world.’ *Religion in an Age of Science*, p. 16.

of the world for specific purposes. This view preserves the scientist's realistic intent while recognizing that models and theories are imaginative human constructs. Models, on this reading, are to be taken seriously but not literally.³³ Urging the adoption of critical realism by theologians, Arthur Peacocke maintains that 'Critical realism in theology would maintain that theological concepts and models should be regarded as partial and inadequate, but necessary and, indeed, the only ways of referring to the reality that is named as "God" and to God's relation with humanity'.³⁴

Not all theological voices chime in with harmony here. Nancey C. Murphy recommends that theologians avoid critical realism on the grounds that it remains modern just when we need to move toward postmodern reasoning. Critical realism remains caught in three restrictive elements of the modern mind: (1) epistemological foundationalism which attempts to provide an indubitable ground for believing; (2) representational thinking with its correspondence theory of truth; and (3) excessive individualism and inadequate attention to the community. The postmodern elements she lifts up for the theological agenda are (1) a non-foundationalist epistemological holism and (2) meaning as use in language philosophy.³⁵ What counts for Murphy is the progressive nature of a research programme; and this is a sufficient criterion for evaluating theological research regardless of its referentiality.

CONCLUSION: SEEING COSMOS AS CREATION

We in the Christian tradition are used to speaking glibly of the natural world as God's creation. On what basis do we do this? It is not immediately obvious from observing the natural realm that it is the product of a divine hand or the object of divine care. Since the Enlightenment we in the modern scientific world have been assuming that no footprints of the divine can be discerned in the sands of the natural world. Western science assumes that if we study natural processes with the intention of learning the laws by which nature operates, what we will end up with is just a handful of natural laws. If we study natural processes with the intention of wondering about the magnificent mysteries that surround us, we will end up where we started, namely, with an imagination full of spectacular puzzles. If we study nature for her beauty, we will see beauty. If we study nature to see her violence, we will see her as did Tennyson, blood 'red in tooth and claw'. Nature, we have been assuming for a century or so now, does not seem to take the initiative to disclose her ultimate foundation or even her existential meaning. What natural revelation reveals is simply nature, not God. If we want to know more, we have to ask more questions. And we have to go beyond our natural relationship with nature to find the answers.

Christian theologians, seeing the limits to natural revelation in a modern world replete with naturalism, find they need to go to the historical events of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the events that stand at the heart and centre of God's special revelation. Good Friday and Easter do not provide the ritual revelation of God as the world's creator,

³³ 33. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, p. 43; see: Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms* (San Francisco: Harper, 1974), p. 38; and Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1982), pp. 133-134.

³⁴ 34. Arthur D. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, and Minneapolis: Fortress, enlarged ed., 1993), p. 14.

³⁵ 35. Nancey C. Murphy, 'Relating Theology and Science in a Postmodern Age', *CTNS Bulletin*, 7:4 (Autumn 1987), pp. 1-10; see her Templeton Book Prize winning work: *Theology in an Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1990).

of course. But these events do confirm what had already been suspected in ancient Israel, namely, that the creation of the world was the necessary first act in God's continuing drama of salvation. The world in which we live is not merely a conglomeration of natural laws or puzzles; it is not merely the realm of beauty or violence. The cosmos exists because it plays a part in the divine scenario of redemption. It is on the basis of what we know about the God who raised Jesus from the dead that St. Paul can perceive how creation has been 'subjected to futility', that it 'has been groaning in travail', and that God has furthermore 'subjected it in hope' because it 'will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' ([Rom. 8:18–25](#)).

Special experiences of God reveal special knowledge. We need to know—or at least need to hypothesize—that there is a God with divine intentions before we can see clearly that the world around and in us is in fact a creation. It is primarily on the strength of Israel's experience with the liberating God of the Exodus that the Old Testament writers could depict the world as God's creative handiwork. It is on the strength of our experience with the incarnate Lord that Christians in today's world can say that 'God so loved the world . . .' ([John 3:16](#)). The New Testament promise of an eschatological new creation tells us something essential about the present creation. Theologically, it is God's promised kingdom that determines creation, and creation is the promise of the kingdom. Whether we interpret nature through the symbol of the Exodus, the incarnation, the kingdom or some other similar religious symbol, we find that we are dependent upon some form of revelation of God's purposes if we are to put nature into proper theological perspective—that is, if we are to think of nature as a creation.

So, curiously enough, we might consider the possibility of a reversal in natural theology. Traditionally the aim of natural theology has been to ask what our study of nature can contribute to our knowledge of God. But might it work in reverse? Might we ask what our knowledge of God can contribute to our knowledge of nature? To know that God is the creator is to know that the world in which we live and move and have our being is *creation*.

We may not have to choose between the two methods, of course. We could begin with nature and then ask about God; or we could begin with what we think we know about God and then ask how this influences what we think about nature. Or, we could do both. Both should be on the agenda of those working in the field of Theology and Natural Science.

EXTENDED NOTE (SEE FOOTNOTE 2 ABOVE)

My position here is also a more nuanced lineup compared to the one offered by Ian Barbour in his Gifford Lectures, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), pp. 3–30, wherein he identifies four ways: conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration. My categories of scientism and church authoritarianism fit his conflict category; and the two-language theory is a model of independence in both schemes. Yet Barbour's notions of dialogue and integration lack the nuance that I believe is operative under the notion of consonance. Consonance involves dialogue, to be sure, but it acknowledges that integration may be only a hope and not an achievement. Also, Barbour thinks of scientific creationism in terms of 'biblical literalism' and thereby places it in the conflict category, overlooking the fact that the creationists think of themselves as sharing a common domain with science; they see themselves in conflict with scientism but not with science itself.

John Haught offers up an alliterative four unit typology: conflict, contrast, contact, and confirmation in his new book, *Science and Religion* (New York: Paulist, 1995). Mark

Richardson offers us a three part typology: (1) integration, typified by the work of Lionel Thornton, William Temple, Austin Farrar, Arthur Peacocke, and John Polkinghorne; (2) romantic, typified by poets Whitman or Wordsworth and by contemporary New Age figures such as Briane Swimme, Thomas Berry, and Matthew Fox; and (3) scientific constraint, wherein one speaks univocally about the natural and transcendent worlds, typified by Paul Davies, Freeman Dyson, Stephen Hawking, and Frank Tipler. See: Mark Richardson, 'Research Fellows Report', *CTNS Bulletin*, 14:3 (Summer 1994) pp. 24–25.

Philip Hefner cuts the pie six ways: (1) modern option of translating religious wisdom into scientific concepts; (2) post-modern/new age option of constructing new science based myths; (3) critical post-Enlightenment option of expressing truth at the obscure margin of science; (4) post-modern constructivist option of fashioning a new metaphysics for scientific knowledge; (5) constructivist traditional option of interpreting science in dynamic traditional concepts; and (6) Christian evangelical option of reaffirming the rationality of traditional belief. (Unpublished to date)

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From Modernity to Post-Modernity: Taking Stock at the Turn of the Century

Rolf Hille

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THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY AS PROPHETIC GIFT AND WORK

'The task of philosophy is to understand what exists, for that which exists is reason. Concerning the individual, just as each is, as it were, a child of his own times, so also philosophy grasps its time in thoughts.' This is how Hegel, in his *Philosophy of Law* defines the task of philosophy. Philosophy in the Hegelian sense thereby claims that through this analysis reality is taken into consciousness as comprehended reality. In this article, though, we would like to ask whether it is possible or desirable on the part of the theology of history, to carry out the kind of analysis which Hegel attempted in his entire philosophy, viz, to comprehend time in thought and thereby to define it philosophically. This is an incredibly audacious claim to make.

Jesus Christ calls his church to 'understand the signs of the times', and so to interpret time prophetically. But this competency has nothing to do with human ability because 'the discernment of spirits' is a charismatic gift given by God over which we have no control. The philosophical interpretation of the present is an intellectual act which we perceive by our own power. But seeing reality clearly in a prophetic way from the standpoint of the knowledge of faith is not only a gift of grace which God alone can grant, but it must also be used with reservation. Ultimately, Hegel presumes that complete knowledge of the absolute mind is present within him, and that he, therefore, can also speak a final word about reality.

However, as theologians gifted with prophetic understanding in the New Testament sense, we never speak from our own knowledge by reason, but, rather we stay bound to the word of revelation. In our interpretation of the theology of history, we will never be allowed to or will be able to go as far as Hegel claims for himself as a philosopher of history, simply because our judgment is done with an eschatological reservation. We are not able to take stock of the ultimate end result, but can at best make a provisional assessment.

The phrase 'from Modernity to Post-modernity' first of all signifies an historical-chronological change. First comes Modernism, and then Post-modernism follows. But when we speak of Modernism, it is thereby implied that there also must have been something which preceded it; with some caution, we would like to call this 'Pre-modernism', i.e., that development of the history of thought which was supplanted by Modernism. Therefore, I could structure this article to show the chronological succession presented as a historical whole. However, I do not wish to do this, but rather to attempt to show in a systematic and phenomenological way some of the main characteristics in the succession of Pre-modernism, Modernism, and Post-modernism. This article will briefly interpret each of them from a theological viewpoint in order to reach some conclusions for our situation today. Though there are many phenomena to evaluate, I would like in this article to sketch briefly and assess the anthropocentric change.

Of course, in keeping with our topic, I am placing the emphasis upon Modernism and Post-modernism. The so-called Pre-modernism will be referred to only briefly in order to demonstrate the transition which occurred with the arrival of Modernism. A discussion of Modernism within the context of Post-modernism is indispensable because the latter presents itself in part as the decisive contradiction of the former; nevertheless, it also in part accepts the former and continues it in a radical way.

THEOCENTRICITY, EGOISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

We now turn to an examination of the anthropocentric change from Pre-modern theocentricity through Modern egoism to Post-modern individualism.

A) The Theocentricity of the Early Church and of the Middle Ages

Pre-modernism here means, in short, the ages of the Early Church and the Medieval period. These epochs placed God in the centre of thought, culture, and society. This is quite evident architecturally in the rising Gothic cathedrals in the centres of cities. At the centre of all human areas of life and all artistic creativity was the encounter with God. Humanity is in this sense not autonomous, and constitutes no independent theme of philosophical or theological discussion. Closely interwoven with the question of God is certainly a view of human life in which earthly things are only a very temporal, provisional intermediary station on the way towards real human existence in God's eternity. And with this, there is also always the possibility of ultimate failure, that is, of eternal lostness.

B) Modern Egoism

Modernism began with the Renaissance and Humanism which introduced a radical change. From then on, no longer God but humanity, time and the material condition of each individual are the centre of interest. The Renaissance means the rebirth of the classical antiquity of Greece and Rome and the orientation to their pre-Christian ideals. The character of the Italian Renaissance can be shown in the basic anthropocentric attitude of Francesco Petrarca, who, while climbing a mountain, becomes aware of his own ego or identity, and experiences himself as an individual over against the world. Furthermore, he also understands himself as standing over against God. A kind of humanity develops which from now on finds its own vital best interest in itself.

In Germany this change is characterized especially by the movement of Humanism which takes *Humanum*, that is, humanity's possibilities, as its starting point. Humanistic anthropology essentially says that a person is capable of learning and can be educated. Education is, therefore, the essential task we are to undertake. Because a person can be developed into a better character, the worldview of Humanism is basically optimistic. The conflict during the Reformation with the anthropology of Humanism is very clearly documented in the dispute between Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam in, for example, Luther's writing, *De servo arbitrio*. Luther's awareness of humanity's lost condition and our exclusive dependence upon God's salvation stands in contrast to Erasmus' pride, who thinks that it is possible, in the end, to reform an individual into someone who is good.

Philosophically, the ego-centric philosophy of Modernism was decisively developed by Rene Descartes, who sought an ultimate certainty in a methodical process of doubt. Descartes was not a doubter out of principle, one who criticizes out of enjoyment of scepticism, or who was interested in the destruction of every bit of truth. Rather, he was a serious seeker of truth who, with his scientific method of doubt, wished first to do away with every kind of certainty which was based only on tradition or on empirical observation, or just on rational deduction. In contesting all knowledge which seemed questionable to him, he hoped to reach a clearer and more definite certainty. The certainty which Descartes then discovered in his critical process was that, for him, only the 'I' of the thinking person as *res cogitans* was the final, most basic, and indubitable truth: *Cogito, ergo sum*—I think, therefore, I am.

Even before Kant's discussions on the matter, this basic conviction describes a transcendental 'I' as a reality concentrated on the pure act of thought. The *res cogitans* in which the thinking individual exists for himself, is the Archimedean point from which Descartes can then come to a certainty about God through an ontological process. Finally, God's attributes of goodness and truthfulness guarantee not only the trustworthiness of divine thought, but also knowledge of the world in the sense of the *res extensa*, that is, the extended being. Because he is good, God does not deceive people, his intelligent creation, with unreal or misleading sensory reality.

Descartes' line of reasoning is quite characteristic of the way Modern thought becomes anthropocentric. On the one hand, medieval traditional science, which had until then been broadly accepted, was questioned critically. The simple proposition that facts had always been believed by everyone everywhere in the sense of the classical Catholic principle of tradition, was, for Descartes, not enough for clear and definite certainty. Yet, on the other hand, the apparent evidence of empirical perception also did not suffice as such because there is the phenomenon of dreams and sensory deception. Even the results of logical conclusions have proved themselves to be mistakes time and again. So at the end of the thinking process neither tradition, nor the objective world, nor the certainty of the contents of thought remain, but simply the fact of the thinking being himself, the *res*

cogitans. He is, as we have shown earlier, the Archimedean point from which God and the world are brought with great effort into thought and thereby, finally, also into reality. But, epistemologically speaking, the thinking 'I' remains the principle and centre of the universe.

In the wake of the Enlightenment and of German Idealism, the Modern approach with the autonomous 'I' of humanity was further developed. Immanuel Kant founded the Enlightenment essentially as a moral undertaking to 'depart from self-made mental immaturity'. His critical struggle is not simply or even primarily considered as the emancipation of thought from the bonds of traditional prejudices, but rather as the moral self-determination of the individual. In the name of freedom, all heteronomous influence upon moral decision is to be opposed. By virtue of his own practical reason, the 'I' determines himself in autonomously setting the norms of his actions. A person is obligated solely to command which appear reasonable, corresponding to Kant's categorical imperative. Descartes' epistemological anthropocentrism becomes moral anthropocentrism with Kant. In this context, divine commandments have, at best, only a propaedeutic and pedagogical function.

Kant's student, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, takes this a crucial step further in radicalizing the 'I' philosophy of Modernism to the extreme. Human existence establishes the 'I' over against the 'Non-I'. The 'I' has thereby become the absolute, the creator of all existent reality. God, nature, history, society—all reality is derived from the free productivity of the 'I'. With this universalization of the 'I', modern anthropocentrism reached an unsurpassable highpoint in a quasi-apotheosis. All further intellectual and cultural developments of modern anthropocentrism are only small distinctions and developments of this Modern-age claim for self. The ideal of the strong, self-confident individual turns out to be normative for all areas of life, whether in politics, business, art, or culture.

C) Post-Modern Individualism

The transition from the modern 'I' philosophy to the Post-modern 'I' culture is very characteristic of the present intellectual situation. Post-modernism radicalizes the Modernist subject to the atomized individual and dissolves it thus into oblivion. Humanity in its loneliness becomes overburdened by the task of self-establishment and self-design, and enters the crisis of meaning found in nihilism and existentialism.

The atomization of the individual in Post-modernism is an expression of ego-centrism in terms of the saying: 'every man for himself, against everybody else'. The dance around the golden calf of self causes the cohesion of especially large institutions to dissolve, affecting political parties as well as trade unions and churches. The central question with respect to social structures is: 'What does being a member of an institution, or cooperating in a certain organization do for me personally?' The willingness to be socially involved becomes dependent upon individual and temporary calculated usefulness. Communal experiences become fragmented; closely related to this is the unique explosion of the possibilities from which to choose. For the first time in history, these possibilities set the individual free to put the abstract concept of subjective self-realization into actual practice in society.

A person's destiny in life is determined neither by social status nor by an anonymous fate, but chosen by free-will. This lifting of barriers for the 'I', of course, leads also to an overabundance of possibilities which, for its part, makes the ambivalence of Post-modern existence conspicuously evident. Post-modern individuals not only can choose their own destiny, but they are obliged to do so. They are, as Jean Paul Sartre put it, condemned to freedom. Thus they bear the full risk of failure and carry the whole burden of responsibility themselves. And so the fear arises of missing life, which is understood as a

last opportunity in an almost secular-eschatological way. Because of this existential uncertainty, one tries to keep open as many options for as long as possible. In addition, the atomisation of the individual is closely connected to the dissolution of pre-existing norms, whose only criterion is: 'What is clear to me?'

Sociologically, the ethical disorientation of our Post-modern contemporaries is seen most clearly in the area of sexual ethics, especially in respect of individual relationships and the crises that occur in these relationships. This begins with the model of the so-called 'life-phase' partnerships, including the decision to be single, the deliberate choice to be single parents, and finally, 'patchwork families', in which children of different ex-partnerships live together.

In fact, the urbanization of the modern world has done much to promote such socio-cultural forms of behaviour in the Post-modern Age. For example, the anonymity of the big city provides a homosexual youth, who still perhaps feels like an outsider in his small hometown, all the freedoms to submerge into this kind of subculture.

D) A Theological Evaluation and Criticism of Post-Modern Individualism

How should one take theological responsibility in dealing with the phenomenon of individualism? First of all, we can realize that society has no problem with the fact that the subculture of the church still exists. Even church worship, with its relatively small attendance, is, in this context, just one of many subcultures in the whole society. This point was made quite clear to me in discussion with vicars of the Württemberg Lutheran Church. These young pastors argued, 'Why should we really invest so much time and energy in the worship service which perhaps only three to five percent of the membership attends? All the other church members have the same right to us as pastors. Why, then, should we place the special event of the worship service so strongly at the centre of our church work?' There is some truth in this assessment, sociologically speaking, as long as we are moving only within the small milieu of church attenders. Because we are reaching only a fraction of the population, mainline church services can be considered in this case as *de facto* free-church worship services.

As long as the churches move in this uncontested terrain which has been granted them, they present no problem for the pluralistic society. The challenge for Post-modernism arises at the moment when the church crosses the boundaries to penetrate into other subcultures with missionary intent. This is clear in the discussion about the American model of the Willow Creek Community Church. One may question the potential of this model of church growth which developed in an urban metropolitan situation in North America by asking whether it would also be applicable to a rural area. But for the missiological context being discussed here, it is important to note that Willow Creek is characterized by an attempt to leave the Christian ghetto and to speak to people in their own contemporary world. This is no short term impulse but, as their so-called 'seeker services' indicate, it is an on-going programme. Thus, secularized people in the greater Metropolitan Chicago area are being reached today. This clearly shows that the effort to reach people today through a worship service can lead to a breakthrough of the existing ecclesiological sound barriers.

Also, Willow Creek is trying very hard to make inroads into an unchurched environment in differing sociological subcultures through special contextualised programmes. In making such advances, one must, of course, always examine theologically whether or not different or altered contents are being conveyed by the new forms of preaching. As far as I can tell from available materials and sermons, this is not the case with Willow Creek. One positive fact is that Christians are advancing out beyond their own subculture into various areas of our diverse and multi-faceted society. In this way, people

are able to find a spiritual home in the Christian churches which is well suited to their present situation. At Willow Creek this occurs especially through intensive work in smaller target groups. This demonstrates how important it is to do proper missionary work among the diverse subcultures in a completely pluralistic and individualistic society by means of group-specific programmes.

Post-modern Individualism issues a double challenge at a fundamental level to the Christian church. Firstly, the church members themselves come from different social contexts which, in part, produce contrasting individual needs and interests. Enormous integration problems arise here. Secondly, mass evangelism is becoming more difficult and challenging. I would like to refer here back to the New Testament metaphor of 'fishers of men' and describe our situation at the end of the 20th century. It was still possible in earlier societies to evangelize on the basis of the common cultural characteristics moulded by Christian influence, which can be compared with the use of a large dragnet; today however, the comparison would be with the use of the fishing rod. This explains, I believe, the major difference between current evangelistic work and the great revival movements of the 19th century. In the 19th century, there was still a dominant Christian culture which, today, has been replaced by ideological and ethical pluralism.

On the whole, one should never forget that, in spite of all justifiable complaints about Post-modern ego-centric individualism, it is the gospel of the love of God and his free grace, combined with the call to personal discipleship to Christ which has been such a strong influence on the value placed upon individual personality in modern times. In addition to this, the demand for individual freedom to be able to live out one's faith according to the convictions of conscience shows an historical effect of the Reformation. The latter gave a strong impetus to the movement for political freedom, a topic which we can now examine.

E) Post-Modern Individualism and Political Freedom

It is commonly understood that no person is an island, but that everyone is tied to larger social structures and lives in certain political conditions. Therefore, the development of the history of thought sketched briefly in the preceding sections can also be illustrated and clarified in the history of political freedom.

In Pre-modern times, that is, up until the end of the Middle Ages, a kind of heavenly hierarchy corresponded to earthly society. God, with the powerful angels, stood at the top of the pyramid. People had their given social realm in which they could develop themselves individually only to a very limited extent. The question of individual self-actualisation was not even raised because, based on one's birth, everyone was already defined into a very special social role by God's predetermination. In the Modern Age, this was reversed. In the historical process, political freedom became increasingly relevant in the struggle for individual self-realization. Thus, in the wake of the French Revolution, the third class, the rising middle-class (bourgeois), prevailed against the two upper classes, namely, the nobility and the clergy. The bourgeois finally gained power and were able to realize freedoms for the citizenry.

It is noteworthy here that the revolutions of the Modern age each had their own specific range of hopes, to which they were linked by ideologically-developed promises. For the French Revolution this was articulated in the triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The freedom of the individual which, historically and ideologically speaking, had long since been prepared by the Enlightenment, was now brought about politically in a concrete way. Of course, later thinkers on the threshold of Post-modernism have understood the true character of the dialectic of the Enlightenment with its dangers and pitfalls. Theodor Adorno and Juergen Habermas make this fact clear in their assertion that

the claim of Modernism to emancipate people through a pursuit of the truth can also quite easily lead to a new absolutism. This becomes evident in the historical influence of Hegel's philosophy who, as we saw at the beginning, wanted to gain a complete picture of reality in its inner logic and lead the universe to freedom.

With Hegel, as in all of the German Idealist philosophy of consciousness, it was just abstract theory. But when Karl Marx's dialectic principle was accepted and transferred to concrete politics, the whole thing ended tragically. The real absolute universal claim accepted by Hegel within a closed logic of its own inevitably led to catastrophe in its practical outworking in Soviet style socialism; history does not conform to philosophical premises. The Marxist system could no longer be corrected because of the dialectical historical principles on which it was based. For if dialectics has to move history with scientific precision into a certain direction, then its teleological development can no longer be revised. In the Leninist system, only the elite of the Communist cadre understood the real meaning of the process of history, which they still claimed to direct with infallible certainty. Habermas' and Adorno's dialectic of the Enlightenment must be considered with this background in mind.

Meanwhile, what we are experiencing now at the turn of the century is the victory of the American model, that is to say, the bourgeois revolution. Viewed historically, the French Revolution and the intensive settlement of North America both took place at approximately the same time. The American Declaration of Independence together with the Bill of Rights made possible in the New World the first realized democracy. In Alexis Tocqueville's book *Democracy in America* (1835), we have a classic work, characteristic of the enthusiasm of this epoch. It depicts the early 19th century and describes the great possibilities for the free development of the individual. In a nation in which church and state are strictly separated, in contrast to Europe, and in which, therefore, everyone may live in the freedom of his faith, the most diverse forms of religious community can exist side by side. In spite of strong individualism a strong community of solidarity developed in the United States, at least at the local level. The optimism described by Tocqueville is even today still characteristic of how Americans feel about life. The inaugural speeches, for example, of US presidents John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton are quite typical of the new mood of progress. Both are distinguished by strong enthusiasm. They live in the awareness of having a mission in this world, namely, to ensure democracy, freedom, and human rights everywhere with the promising motto: 'Make this world a better place to live in!'

Europeans' feelings at the end of the millennium are different from those of Americans, which also has drastic effects on the respective expressions of Post-modernism. Europe has experienced the storm clouds of the apocalypse in the past century in varied forms. The historical TV documentaries televised on the occasion of the turn of the century show with frightening power how terrible the first half of this century especially turned out to be for Europe, with the huge massacres, wars, exterminations, and expulsions. If we include in this evaluation the catastrophic history of the Third World, then there is little remaining in European Post-modernism of glad hopeful feeling about life and of the promise that the world will only get better which is characteristic of Modernism.

Still, from a biblical-theological perspective, it would be rash simply to reject the history of political freedom in its very diverse expressions and courses. First of all, it must be realized that Post-modern Individualism has modern political emancipation as one of its essential presuppositions. While ego-centric individualism must be deplored theologically, Modernism's support for human rights and thereby also for religious freedom and freedom of conscience must be welcomed theologically as being

indispensable. This is the case because the essence of religious freedom is deeply anchored in New Testament thought.

The early church, as a small diaspora church in a world critical of Christianity and increasingly hostile to it, carried out evangelism and fought for its future. In this way, its message proved itself to be a dynamic power, even with respect to the social history of antiquity, as seen, for example, in the triumph over slavery. The motivation of many of our spiritual forefathers, who emigrated to the United States for reasons of conscience and certainly not just because of economic motives, was characterized by the desire for freedom. They simply wanted to be allowed to practise their faith freely in the New World. They thought about their courageous step of emigrating in the context of the New Testament ideal of freedom, which was not without political consequences.

Just how important the question of religious freedom becomes is obvious in Wolfhart Pannenberg's analysis of modern secularism. Pannenberg proves that secularism in Europe received its first major impetus as a result of the religious wars, that is, especially the Thirty-Years' War. Through the experience of political-military intolerance, the first great estrangement of broad segments of the European population from the Christian faith came about. Freedom of religion is a valuable possession that Evangelicals should defend, even politically. They should stand on the side of those who demand civil tolerance and in doing so, at the same time support the biblical message in carrying out its missionary proclamation. The Great Commission does not deny religious freedom but confirms it, for according to the New Testament, it is indispensable to the preaching of the gospel.

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General Revelation Makes Cross-Cultural Communication Possible

Gordon R. Lewis

Keywords: General revelation, natural theology, salvation, cross-cultural communication, language, relativism, justice, world view, truth, redemptive analogy;

Christian missions in the Orient had diminished effectiveness, observed Lit-sen Chang, when dependent upon either general or special revelation exclusively. On the one hand, liberals failed because they so identified with the natural theology of the people that they did not adequately present the distinctive gospel of Christ. On the other hand, pietistic fundamentalists failed because they so emphasized the gospel that they ignored the cross-

cultural points of contact provided by general revelation;¹ a more effective theology of missions than either encompasses both God's universal and particular revelations.

For present purposes, however, I emphasize general revelation and its relationship to cross-cultural communication whatever the culture or language in use. I seek also to integrate some contributions of philosophical, missiological, biblical, and theological materials.

Not all missiologists affirm a divine revelation to all everywhere. Hendrik Kraemer represents those who follow Christomonistic theologian Karl Barth in denying the contributions of general revelation and natural theology. Kraemer explained that Karl Barth admitted points of contact between God and man 'because the fact that faith in God's revelation occurs pre-supposes that it can be communicated to man and apprehended by him as revelation coming from God'. Nevertheless, with fierce emphasis Barth's assumption of an infinite qualitative distinction between God and man led him to assert that 'There is no point of contact'. Kramer explains,

... The sole *agent* of real faith in Christ is the Holy Spirit. ... Intent on maintaining integrally the unique character of the Christian revelation as God's sovereign condescending act, what it says is that there are no bridges from human religious consciousness to the reality in Christ, and that it is exclusively God's grace and no human contribution or disposition whatever that effects 'the falling of the scales from the eyes'.²

Kraemer's Barthian missiology validly underlines the uniqueness of salvation through Christ, but unjustifiably denies a general revelation and a natural theology by common grace. The Holy Spirit has chosen to work universally through means such as physical and moral laws. Although *salvation* is Christomonistic, *revelation* is given, not only in Christ, but also in nature ([Rom. 1:20](#)) and the human heart ([Rom. 2:14](#)). Barth does not succeed exegetically in overriding Romans chapters [1](#) and [2](#) on the consideration that they are not Paul's primary teaching on salvific experience. In his *Commentary on Romans* while trying to be free from philosophical presuppositions, Barth astonishingly interprets [Romans 1:20](#) in a self-contradictory manner. The passage says, 'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made'.³ Barth comments, 'And what does this mean but that we can know nothing of God ... ?'⁴

Although Cornelius Van Til also denies common ground 'in principle', he admits it in fact, but does not want missionary apologists to use it.⁵ However, his prohibitions upon the use of common ground in apologetics or missions conflict with Paul's use of the teaching in [Romans 1](#) and [2](#) and when ministering as the apostle to Gentiles (pagans) at

¹ 1. Lit-sen Chang, *Strategy of Missions in the Orient: Christian Impact on the Pagan World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), p. 105.

² 2. Henrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), pp. 131–132.

³ 3. Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

⁴ 4. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 47.

⁵ 5. G.R. Lewis, 'Van Til and Carnell', ed. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussion of the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), pp. 349–368.

Athens and elsewhere.⁶ After surveying numerous alternative theological perspectives, and exegeting relevant biblical evidence, Bruce Demarest and I developed a doctrine of general revelation in volume one of *Integrative Theology* with some of its missiological relevance.⁷ We conclude as did Robert Webber elsewhere that

God created the world with which He is in relationship. The world reflects the Creator (yet is not an extension of Him) and therefore communication is central. God's communication of Himself to the world is through nature as well as in time, space and history. This establishes the principle that creation is a worthy vehicle through which God can be communicated.⁸

What makes cross-cultural communication possible is the universal illumination of the human heart and mind to the truths of general revelation by the Logos ([John 1:1-3](#)). Regardless of the depth of the diversities of the languages in use and the cultural mores, the one Creator made us to know and love him and our neighbours, and to rule the world as accountable stewards. Our accountability for our stewardship of nature and our opportunities to serve others imply some conformity of the categories of our minds with those of the world and of our common Creator.

I respect the anthropological approaches of Mayers and Hiebert, the missiological emphases of Anderson and Lubzeta, the communicational emphases of Charles Kraft and David Hesselgrave, and the theological approach of Harvey Conn who seeks to moderate 'the angry dialogue between cultural anthropology and theology'.⁹ To these approaches I urge adding axiological and epistemological approaches in preparing for communication from one world-view (*weltanschauung*) to another. The epistemological-axiological hypothesis concerning a universal revelation and illumination is proposed in part I. How it conforms to experience morally and intellectually is presented in part II. The question of whether it involves redemptive analogies is considered in part III.

I. GLOBALLY NORMATIVE TRUTH

The culturally specific missiologists properly call attention to numerous differences among the languages and mores in the contexts of their experience and research. Writers in philosophy also magnify contrasts among historical systems and contemporary existentialist, analytic, process, and theistic ways of thinking and speaking. The upshot of much of the philosophical and missiological work focused on variables tends toward a conceptual relativism and could proliferate in countless ethnocentric theologies and local 'truths'. Both philosophers and missiologists need to emphasize also the similarities of all humans *qua* humans in the *imago Dei* with some common human frames of reference or categories and common human moral values.

However, some philosophers and missiologists appear to have given up hope of ever arriving at *the* truth about 'the facts'. They are like a medical specialist who told me, 'I

⁶ 6. G.R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), pp. 125-150, and 'Gospel on Campus: An Expository Study of [Acts 17](#)', Parts 1-4, *His*, (October-December, 1966, January 1977).

⁷ 7. G.R. Lewis and B.A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), I:61-91. See also Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

⁸ 8. Robert E. Webber, *God Still Speaks* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), p. 81.

⁹ 9. Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1984), p. 10.

used to think that there were three sides in counselling a married couple: her side, his side, and the truth. If I could only discover the truth and tell them, that would solve their problems. Now I do not think there is a third side, 'the truth'. Each has to forgive the other, and that's it. They wouldn't accept the truth if they heard it'.

From both philosophical and missiological fields it seems conclusive that we are indeed related primarily to the one specific culture in which we were raised. I say culture-related rather than culture-bound because some rebel against their parents' cultural influences. Admittedly, however, some of our knowledge is not only time-related, but time-bound and merely culture-specific. Some distinctive requirements for a specific cultural setting may not be normative for all times and all peoples. Some culturally specific knowledge, however, has significance for culture after culture. And some known ethical principles like justice are normative for all cultures and subcultures. Even the claims for an apparently total cultural or philosophical relativism are proposed as supportable with objective validity to all others for belief. If it is universally true that all human knowing is influenced by the standpoint of the knower, then we can attain at least one transcultural truth!¹⁰

The fact that all interpreters' perspectives of nature are culturally influenced by changing historical situations, nevertheless, does not mean that we know nothing but our changing perspectives. Because reporters put a slant on the news does not mean that nothing happened which is distinct from their slants or that we can reduce all knowing merely to slanted opinions. Some reporters are better informed than others about what happened in another part of our world. Humans as divine image-bearers have conceptual criteria for testing truth claims and critical methods of knowing that enable discerning people to sift more reliable from less adequate interpretations.

Historian H. Richard Niebuhr's works are properly concerned about the dangers of absolutizing the relative in history and in religion. But Niebuhr argues that his confessional faith makes 'reasonable sense of human life and thought' in terms of values, rather than a rational demonstration. That claim, however, appeals to some objective, non-confessional meaning of what is *reasonable* and of *value*. To the extent that Niebuhr manages to avoid subjectivism and religious scepticism he inconsistently appeals to universal principles of logic, evidence, and value. Holding that all human understanding is language-dependent and socially determinate, he fails to explain how relative viewpoints are confirmed or changed and how different speech communities with different confessional faiths can communicate with one another.¹¹

Unless Niebuhr can recognize basic common categories of thought and being in the world and in persons created to know and love God, to know and love each other and to rule the world, he lacks a basis for cross-cultural communication and progress in thought among different communities of people. *If God created the earth and image-bearers to know it, to rule it, and to relate to one another under God*, changeable and sinful though we are, we are not left to solipsistic relativisms or totally time-bound contextualizations.

When judgmentally scrambling human languages at Babel, God did not destroy the basic common categories of thought or values necessary to meaningful human existence on earth. Since Babel cross-cultural communication is more difficult, but not impossible.

¹⁰ 10. Gordon Lewis, 'Relativism', *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), pp. 926–930.

¹¹ 11. See my 'The Niebuhr's Relativism, Relationalism, Contextualization, and Revelation', *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response*, ed. Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pp. 155–156.

Even though fallen and judged, God's image-bearers from East and West discover similarities in human moral and intellectual capacities and categories.

Linguist Eugene Nida has explained that although absolute communication is not possible, effective communication is possible between persons of different cultures. He offers three reasons for this: '(1) the processes of human reasoning are essentially the same, irrespective of cultural diversity; (2) all people have a common range of experience, and (3) all peoples possess the capacity for at least some adjustment to the symbolic "grids" of others.'¹² Across whatever languages may be in use in any context, human reasoning from experience is essentially the same and our 'grids' are compatible because *of divinely revealed transcultural categories and standards of truth and morality*. These thought forms and norms make worthwhile the efforts at cross-cultural personal relationships and make meaningful cross-cultural communication and confirmation of truth claims.

If universally humans are accountable to the same Creator and Sustainer for ethical norms (like justice) in their relationships with each other, we must be able to know some 'oughts' in spite of our finiteness, fallenness, and our cultural and linguistic diversities. Inwardly known moral laws, like the outwardly written law of Moses, make human life and cross-cultural respect and communication possible. The requirements of God's moral demands are reflected in the behaviour of those who did not have Moses' formulation ([Rom. 2:14, 15](#)). All non-Jews of any and every culture (Gentiles) in concrete situations encounter the demands of the law within. As self-conscious persons, pagans were wise critically to evaluate their own conduct by standards (not essentially different from the commandments of Moses). Because of the internal analogue of moral laws making claims upon them, the biblically uninformed cannot escape divine judgment.¹³ If God universally and always reveals basic moral values as Scripture and experience indicate, then, contrary to Willard Van Orman Quine, all moral values do not differ with the language in use and cannot be reduced to discrete behavioural dispositions.¹⁴

If what Paul teaches is true, people everywhere independent of Moses' ten commandments know that they ought to value their Creator above all and worship the Logos as distinct from any creature. Furthermore they know they ought not to murder, steal, commit adultery, or bear false witness against one another, but to respect others' God-given inherent rights. Although this truth may be suppressed, it remains a basis of accountability for all persons in all cultures.

Before communicating claims concerning Christ as Saviour to people of other philosophies, religions, or cults, ordinarily we need to establish meaningful relationships and help people realize their moral need for the gospel of grace. The conditions necessary to meaningful experience within and across cultures do not compromise the distinctiveness of the gospel message. They reveal our sinfulness and demonstrate our need for mercy and grace provided by the Messiah's atonement.

But the question persists. How? How does general revelation make cross-cultural communication possible? Answers to 'how' questions are notoriously difficult, and mechanical, biological or physical explanations will not be forthcoming. Rather, I suggest a theological explanation. *The Logos who created everything illumines the darkness of our*

¹² 12. Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 90.

¹³ 13. See Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 63–65.

¹⁴ 14. See 'Quine, Willard Van Orman', *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion Eastern and Western Thought*, W.L. Reese (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities, 1980), pp. 474–75; C.F. Presley, 'Quine, Willard Van Orman', *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 53–55.

fallenness whenever humans learn truth about a matter of fact or a principle of morality (John 1:3-5). Having implanted in all humans capacities for knowing conditions that make any meaningful relationships possible, God also illumines all people to these standards, making understanding and communication possible within or across differences of age, race, sex, world-view, or cultural expression. In addition to a general revelation, depraved sinners need and receive a general illumination to attain any changeless truths about what happens once-for-all or uniformly under given conditions. Hence in Augustinian fashion, teachers in the final analysis are mere occasions for the teaching of the divine *Magistro*. And knowledge learned from the divine Teacher is God's truth wherever it may be found.¹⁵ So, if all humans are dependent on God and accountable to one God, some globally normative truth is possible

II. AN ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCE CONFIRMS UNIVERSAL NORMS

If our Creator has implanted some mental categories and moral standards in our natures, Edward John Carnell reasoned, we should be able to discover them in our experience and make use of them in our cross-philosophical communication. Carnell sought to discover divinely given principles by an analysis. *Analysis* is not inductive or deductive inference from experience to something outside it. Neither is analysis simply a phenomenological description of culturally influenced experiences. Analysis is a reflective discrimination of the various elements already present in our relationships with other people which make distinctively human life meaningful. It is our own unique experience that we analyse. And we simply ask, 'What, if anything, makes human experience meaningful?'¹⁶

Are moral values too emotively explosive for productive cognitive evaluation across radically different philosophical preunderstandings or long-standing cultural traditions? Is it possible to consider with a high degree of philosophical fairness and objectivity issues with such deep, polarizing loyalties? Can we find a basis for meaningful relationships, dialogue, and evaluation? Difficult as it may be, an analysis of meaningful relationships between persons of different religious cultures and world views disclose several non-negotiable values best accounted for as given by the Logos who illumines the darkness of all.

A. Universally people's *intrinsic human rights* ought to be respected. Whenever we walk in a park and meet other human beings, we find ourselves under obligations greater than those of either things or animals. In relationships with persons, however different from us, we are obligated to respect their rights to life and liberty. If injured we ought not to take advantage of them, but to help them. If starving we ought to feed them, if hurting we ought to assist them. If Jews and Arabs, for example, are to communicate with each other harmoniously, they must respect each other's rights to exist. Similarly, if Christians are to communicate with non-Christians effectively, Christians must respect their human rights.

The confirmation of this analysis of human relations can be observed in relationships between humans of radically different political loyalties at the United Nations. Participation in the United Nations requires assent to its International Bill of Human

¹⁵ 15. On general illumination see my 'Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine', (Syracuse University: Unpublished Dissertation, 1959) pp. 25-54.

¹⁶ 16. Edward John Carnell, *Christian Commitment* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 44-46. For a condensation and discussion see also G.R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), pp. 176-284.

Rights.¹⁷ An analysis of the basic recognition of the inherent value of human life regardless of political or religious differences is necessary for communication between people of the East and West, North and South. With tolerance for the inherent value and rights of those with whom we differ culturally and philosophically, meaningful communication becomes possible. Total relativism, relationalism, and contextualization cannot account for the universality and the necessity of the obligation under which all human beings find themselves to respect the rights of all other persons. And on the basis of that oughtness we do find cross-cultural communication taking place at the Olympics and, however painfully, at the United Nations.

As empirical evidence of the correctness of this analysis, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations adopted its Universal Bill of Human Rights. An analysis finds that a *sine qua non* of meaningful human experience and communication cross-culturally is respect for the inalienable rights of persons, however differently interpreted in Marxist lands. The impact of this universal truth was perhaps a key factor in Russian *glasnost* and *perestroika*. And Chinese young people gave their lives for it in Tiananmen Square. The most adequate explanation of the universal recognition that we *ought* to respect others is a universal divine revelation of moral law. God gave the negatives of the moral law to protect human rights. Because all humans of diverse cultures are my image-bearers you shall not murder, violate, or steal from them. All in God's likeness have a right to life, spouse, possessions, and religion. All also have a right to hear the way to eternal life and the gift of Christ's perfect righteousness.

How does general revelation make cross-cultural communication possible? It grounds the rights of the Christian and the pre-Christian, not in individual or collective achievements, but in the very constitution of our being as made in God's image and sustained by God. No earthly culture or authority can legitimately deny or suspend the intrinsic rights of a person to freedom in life, thought and religion. Universal and necessary moral principles come from above, they are not derived by inductive polls of human opinion. A moral law implanted in every human heart demands respect for the rights of all other human beings. That law may be violated, suppressed, and held down in unrighteousness, but those who disregard it remain inexcusable ([Rom. 1:20](#)).

B. Universally people can communicate because all appeal to *the demand for justice*. All know that they ought not treat others unjustly or unfairly. The universality and necessity of the obligation to just thought and conduct can best be explained as a product of universal revelation from above. Satanists and others may deliberately suppress this inner sense of obligation to the right versus the wrong and reverse it. But in doing so they disclose the depths of their sinful distortion. Nevertheless, *no one desires to be treated unjustly* whether by another person, a gang, a tribe, a government or a religion. The right of all men and women to equality of concern and respect, Dworkin argues, is not derived from social status, merit, or national citizenship. The right is intrinsic to humanness.¹⁸ All desire to be treated fairly even beyond the realm of their country and its social contract. Prophets speak up against the mores of their cultures. Comparative judgments about better or worse societies reflect universal norms. Social justice is judged ultimately, not by varying national cultural traditions, but by universal, normative criteria. These would include not only that we ought always to respect others' rights and dignity as persons, but also to say in word and deed what we intend in meaning.

¹⁷ 17. Reproduced by Allen O. Miller, *A Christian Declaration on Human Rights*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Appendix pp. 159–182.

¹⁸ 18. See Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 182.

When teaching and living in central India my wife and I and our tall fourteen-year-old son—all obviously from the USA—were distinct curiosities in a city not frequented by tourists. Although at the time the government of India was displeased with the U.S. government and suspicious of even American missionaries as ‘spies’, our freedom depended on a universal sense of justice from a population overwhelmingly Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist. When any country unjustly deprives foreigners or citizens of their inherent rights, they incur greater guilt before the divine Judge of all the earth who does right.

Contrary to Charles Manson’s reasoning, as influenced by monism, a vast difference remains between helping a person and murdering her (Sharon Tate). Violations of the rights to life and liberty ought never to take place. The outcries of the victims of mass murders in any culture assume a universal and necessary norm of justice. The former dominance of the Nazi power did not make discrimination against the Jewish people in the Holocaust excusable. In the name of ‘law and order’ it is always wrong everywhere for ‘the haves’ to oppress and exploit ‘the have-nots’. It is also unjust everywhere and always for the have-nots to become accuser, judge, jury, and executioner in personal vengeance against those who wrong them, even in the name of ‘liberation’. Violations of the norms of universal revelation resulted in guilt before their Source for the Canaanite nations whose land became that of the Jews and for the Jewish people when they committed the same types of offences and were taken captive.

Talk about justice is cheap if no universal Administrator of justice exists. Personally we cannot take vengeance and are not free to administer proper penalties. Societies and court systems do not always achieve a just resolution. And societies and courts themselves need at times to have justice administered to them. But in every culture, for meaningful human life and communication, justice is non-negotiable. The most adequate explanation of this remarkable agreement in the midst of a host of relative differences is that God has imprinted this sense of obligation on the hearts of all persons in high places and low. The human heart longs for the restoration of the just peace lost in the Fall.¹⁹

In any culture or *weltanschauung* parents are responsible to educate their children morally. Why can children eventually be asked to do right, not simply for rewards, pragmatic advantage, conventional approval, law and order considerations, or a social contract made for them by others? How can Kohlberg expect us to teach our children to act morally in terms of universal ethical principles? In an age of relativism we can teach children to make judgments on universal moral norms because God has implanted this capacity in their hearts. Beyond legalism, we can invite our children to obey these principles as motivated by love for their divine Source. However suppressed or rejected, universal principles distinguishing the just from the unjust can be discovered. God’s negative commandments in their affirmative import protect each human’s right to life, spouse and possessions in any contextual situation.

C. Universally, furthermore, all people fail to live up to the standards of justice and need *mercy*, the withholding of deserved penalties and *grace*, the loving bestowal of undeserved benefits. General revelation, like Moses’ law, is a school master to help fallen people realize their need for mercy and grace. It prepares fallen people to seek mercy and grace from their Creator. And when the missionaries arrive, sensitive persons have often been found, like Cornelius, prepared for the gospel of a merciful pardon from all guilt and the gracious imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness.

¹⁹ 19. For a development of the relationship of missions to justice see Waldron Scott, *Bring Forth Justice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

When visiting mission fields in ten different nations travelling to and from India, I found that people in cultures as different as those in Athens, Jerusalem, Calcutta, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Taipei, Manila, and Tokyo wanted love. Wherever love is wanting all else is inconsequential. It is no accident that love is the highest of human values. It makes all else worthwhile. Love is the fulfilling of the law, not only the law written on stone, but the law written on our hearts.

Again, it is difficult to explain the universality of the value humans put on faithful love apart from our Sustainer's universal communication that above all else God wants our love, and he wants his image-bearers to love one another. He made us also to need people, merciful people, loving people, faithful people. Believers in a Creator who has made known his existence, power and moral values universally have a basis for faith in meaningful relationships cross-culturally because of these universal values revealed in our hearts by common grace.

D. For meaningful human relationships and cross-cultural communication people from the varied cultures need *humility* before relevant givens in reality and the *integrity* to report the data with *intellectual honesty*. That is, if a missionary's or a pre-Christian's view of an event or matter of fact should be inadequate, we may need openness to assess new evidence and/or willingness to accept a more adequate interpretation. The value of intellectual openness and honesty is important in so simple a communication as seeking directions to a place in a strange land, reporting the causes of an airline disaster to the world press, or describing the situation in an area of the world involved in revolution. We know from the requirements of the law written on our hearts not only that we should not bear false witness, but that the theories we propose for acceptance should fit the relevant, given data.

Our knowledge is not limited to experiential reactions entirely divorced from the givens themselves (phenomenalism). Ben Kimpel argues, 'A distinction must be made between knowledge which consists of interpretations and knowledge which is exclusively of interpretations.'²⁰ Some interpretations, furthermore, are better informed than others. The determination of which are the more reliable interpretations can be decided only by referring again and again to the given data. As Kimpel reasoned, 'Neither Immanuel Kant, nor anyone else has made it fully clear that our knowledge is only of interpretations and not of reality itself.'²¹

Washington columnist James Reston reported that when Stalin's purges were in full swing a resident news correspondent in Moscow was asked by a wide-eyed visiting leftist how far the court proceedings could be believed: 'Everything was true', he replied, 'except the facts'.²²

In spite of all the subjective differences influenced by childhood experiences (Freud), economic status (Marx), educational communities (Dewey), historical standpoints (H.R. Niebuhr), non-rational impulses (Reinhold Niebuhr), and cultural contexts (Kraft), people do critically examine data and determine some truth about events, crimes and nature's laws. On this basis our diagnoses of actual problems in the *status quo* in societies, schools, and churches need not be imaginary predicaments. The *ought* of our social concern cannot be understood without a grasp of the *is* of actual human existence. Lasting justice will not be built on false witnesses or half-truths. Responsible policy for liberation of the poor does not grow out of irresponsible analysis. With the help of criteria of truth as checks

²⁰ 20. Ben F. Kimpel, *Language and Religion* (NY: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 39.

²¹ 21. Ibid.

²² 22. *New York Times* (January 30, 1980).

and balances, and a critical method for confirming or disconfirming hypotheses people can overcome sinful biases and achieve a high degree of probability for critically determined conclusions. The attainment of truth in matters of fact is not easy, but its value is worth the painstaking effort. Unless one's knowledge in some respect conforms to reality, it misleads in relationships to others and to God who knows what is the case.

How to choose among the changing paradigms in rapidly developing sciences? Kuhn wrote, 'As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice—there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community.'²³ Apparently Kuhn and his followers do not see the contradiction in speaking of the 'structure' of scientific revolutions since a structure transcends the events. As Stanley I. Jaki pointed out, Kuhn failed to ask, 'What must nature, including man, be like in order that science be possible at all?' or 'What must the world be like in order that man may know it?'²⁴

E. In meaningful human relationships persons from varied cultures must communicate in ways that others can follow. For meaningful communication to take place within or across cultures people need to express themselves *without self-contradiction*. If what is affirmed is also denied at the same time and in the same respect, nothing remains for the receptor to receive. For lasting meaningful relationships settlers of the Americas ought not to contradict their promises to the Indians already living in the land. Neither men nor women ought to contradict the spirit or the wording of their marriage or other vows.

The givenness of the law of non-contradiction in general revelation is indicated by the fact that one cannot argue against it without assuming its validity. The recognition of the error of self-contradiction by children at very young ages and people of differing cultures everywhere can most coherently be accounted for as a product of general revelation. *God is faithful; his judgments and words are faithful*. Similarly, we know that the judgments and words of God's image-bearers ought to be *without hypocrisy and without self-contradiction*. The Creator who cannot deny himself creates us to communicate with himself and with others created in his image.

Integrity in thought and communication is as important as integrity in action. Non-contradiction is the norm of integrity in thought and word. Although some Eastern writers advocate abandoning the law, what is communicable in their writings adheres to it. Hinduism may be presented as embracing all contradictory positions, but when one suggests the contradictory of the basic tenets of Hinduism, a Hindu monist suddenly uses the law of logic. Hindu monists do not admit the contradictory of 'all is Brahman' or of 'all that we observe is maya'. On the unquestioned authority of the guru's affirmation of monism we are expected to deny the contradictories: a dualism of Creator and creature and the reality of the observable world.

Intellectual truth and personal faithfulness, although often divorced in our experience, are closely related in Scripture. Intellectually, truth is a quality of propositions that conform to reality. Existentially, faithfulness is a quality of persons who conform to universally revealed norms of what is and what ought to be. The hypocrisy so castigated by the existentialists is inconsistency of life with what is professed. Jesus faithfully taught the truth conceptually; he authentically lived the truth existentially. Hence he is the way, both in thought and life.

If the central claims of Christianity are true, then it follows that the incompatible claims made by other religious and philosophical writers are false. Harold Netland, a

²³ 23. Thomas Samuel Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 93.

²⁴ 24. Stanley I. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1978), p. 239.

missionary to Japan, has effectively shown that the exclusivism of Christianity's claims is not different in kind from other logical claims to truth.²⁵ All of the teachings of other religions are not false, only those that contradict teachings validly derived from soundly interpreted Scripture. Humility and respect should characterize our interaction with those of other faiths. But it is a serious misunderstanding to presume that humility and respect demand glossing over the question of truth.

The universal presence of such personal, moral, relational, and intellectual standards enables people in a pluralistic world to overcome total relativism and have more than mere opinions, fleeting images, or passing models of thought. Granted that God has implanted within us moral, factual and logical values, people everywhere can live, learn, and relate with increasingly well-informed, correctable opinions for which they are accountable to one another and God. On the basis of such non-negotiable absolutes as these we can account for the success of communication, time-consuming and difficult though it may be, across different presuppositions of diverse cultures, philosophies, and religions.

The God-given inner demands for personal integrity and intellectual honesty provide the bases on which Marvin K. Mayers can expect cross-cultural communicators to begin by developing a trust bond in mutual respect. At the end of each of the fine chapters in *Christianity Confronts Culture*, Mayers provides helpful biblical illustrations of mutual respect and personal trust.²⁶ But the possibility of success is there for the missionaries in these biblical examples because of the moral and epistemological laws essential to meaningful human relationships with God and one another.

How is it that people from cultures all over the world at the United Nations have the potential to develop in respecting one another's rights? Demanding justice? Caring about others? Conforming to reality? Representing states of affairs faithfully (without self-contradiction)? Capacities for the eternal are in their hearts! God has created the inner person with these moral and noetic values in his image.

Summing up, general revelation provides the most adequate explanation of values essential to meaningful human relationships and communication. Like the source of this revelation to all, all effective communicators should be pro-life in the broadest sense. All need justice, mercy, grace and love, knowledge of given data, and logical consistency in reference to their lives.²⁷

General revelation explains the dependence, obligation, and guilt of all people and cultures. By making clear our sinful disrespect of others, injustices to others, lack of love for others, misrepresentation of our neighbours and inconsistencies, general revelation points up our need. Like Moses' outward expression of God's law, this inner expression prepares us for the missionary who comes with the salvation of Christ. The *telos* of the law in either case is Christ.

III. DOES GENERAL REVELATION SUPPLY 'REDEMPTIVE ANALOGIES?'

With all the values of general revelation for theism and moral norms, we have found no evidence in it of God's plan of redemption through the incarnate Logos or his sacrificial death and resurrection. General revelation prepares people for the good news of special

²⁵ 25. Harold Netland, 'Exclusivism, Tolerance and Truth', *Missiology* 15:2 (April 1987), pp. 77-95.

²⁶ 26. Marvin K. Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, Revised, 1987), pp. 5-73.

²⁷ 27. Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:82-90.

revelation. Can we find in nature and history analogies of the Messiah's redemption? Don Richardson has popularized the view that general revelation provides 'redemptive analogies'. As he says, instances from ordinary history may serve as 'eye-openers' for some aspects of redemptive revelation when people first hear the gospel of Christ illumined by the special calling of the Holy Spirit. Analogies from history do not communicate the gospel before it comes via special revelation. Neither biblical nor experiential evidence indicates that general revelation redeems, regenerates, or reconciles to God. The people missionaries have found already prepared to receive Christ, do in fact receive him and mark their salvation from the time of their commitment to Christ. Cornelius was redeemed when he received the gospel.

Paul's approach to the Athenians utilizes points of contact from Stoic thought for theism but not for the gospel of Christ. Paul quotes a Stoic poet when he affirms our common Creator of all humans, but not when he reports the resurrection of the crucified Christ. The Lord of all is, of course, the Lord of the plague and the unknown God the Athenians should have sought. An element of truth is found in the Stoic pantheistic writer, that God is immanent and actively sustaining life on earth. But the Stoic poet is not therefore a sinner who, as Don Richardson said, 'reached out and found' God redemptively.²⁸ Rather, Paul commanded all everywhere to repent for not worshipping and serving God more than the creation.

General revelation logically and *temporally precedes special* revelation, as Don Richardson agrees. But Richardson's designation of general revelation as 'the *Melchizedek* factor' prior to Abraham confuses general and special revelation. Melchizedek, Richardson says, stands as 'a figurehead or type of God's general revelation to mankind'.²⁹ To follow Richardson and most critics in taking Melchizedek as a Canaanite priest, Bruce Waltke argues, 'presupposes that Scripture is deceptive and that man's historical reconstructions are more trustworthy than the inspired Word of God'.³⁰

Melchizedek, 'like the Son of God', had no pedigree recorded in Scripture ([Heb. 7:3](#)). Most likely he is a human specially called prior to the Abrahamic covenant and so is a type of Jesus Christ. Since the Messiah is the supreme instance of special revelation, it seems out of character to take him as a type of general revelation. The author of Hebrews demonstrates that he is a type of Christ, for both are a king of righteousness, and of peace, and both are without descent and abide as priests continually ([Heb. 7:1-3](#)). The fact that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham as indicated by his receiving Abraham's tithes, also indicates that he had more than general revelation (vv. [4-10](#)). Apart from Melchizedek, Richardson could speak of the general revelation factor preceding special revelation.

Richardson has well pointed out that in any culture we need to distinguish the intermingled factors of good and evil. We need to respond to elements of revealed truth about God and about morality already there and reject the evil factors resulting from rebellion against it, such as Richardson's occult or Sodom factor.³¹

Also in agreement with Richardson against some of his critics, we need not jump to the conclusion that general revelation in any way threatens the uniqueness of the Bible as

²⁸ 28. Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981), pp. 22-23.

²⁹ 29. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁰ 30. Bruce Waltke, 'Melchizedek', *ZPEB* 4:177.

³¹ 31. Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, p. 33.

God's only inspired, written revelation.³² Beliefs in folk religions paralleling those in Scripture need not be discredited as distortions or Satanic counterfeits in so far as they portray the content of theism and morality. Any non-Christian parallels to the redemptive plans of God, however may be traced to some influence of the Bible or people who have accepted its special revelation.

In agreement with Richardson, furthermore, the misinterpretations of some missionaries (calling Jesus the tenth incarnation of Vishnu!) need not keep us from finding some similarities that help in communicating the message of Christ once-for-all.

Richardson says that his references to redemptive analogies do not mean redeeming, i.e., that people could find relationship with God through their own lore apart from the gospel. By 'redemptive' he means, 'contributing to the redemption of a people, but not culminating it'.³³ So there may be 'God-fearers' in the midst of otherwise pagan people.³⁴ But Richardson's use of 'the Melchizedek factor' goes further than this and tends to confuse general revelation and illumination with the specially revealed redemptive message.

CONCLUSIONS

In cross-cultural communication of the faith Christians can capitalize upon the points of contact provided by general revelation, but should not consider the gaining of agreements on theism and morality sufficient for salvation. Having attained some metaphysical, moral, and epistemological common ground, Christians ought by all means and analogies to communicate the good news of the Logos who came to save those who in fact do not live up to the truth they know.

Both transcultural absolutes and their culture-specific applications have crucial contributions to make in both the East and the West. Some philosophers emphasize the objective validity of Christianity's transcultural truth claims. And some missiologists seem to be more concerned with the culture-specific adaptations or applications of Christian truth. The objective validity of Christianity's truth-claims is neither Western nor Eastern, but human. General revelation utilizes the capacities that all humans as divine image-bearers have for recognizing objectively valid truths about God's existence, power, and moral values and supplies the criteria for testing claims to special revelation.

Culturally specific missiology may tend to focus on communicative functions more than communicated content. Philosophers and theologians are generally more concerned with issues of communicated content than the process. Both contributions are needed for the sake of cross-cultural communication. We need not limit ourselves to dynamic equivalents, but on the above analysis of general revelation our cross-cultural communication can also achieve conceptual equivalents. More cross-disciplinary communication would help to develop a more adequate view of the objective validity of truth and value claims and a more effective communication of them to specific peoples. Yet, if this article has some validity, then one cannot follow postmodernism's denial of epistemological '*foundationalism*' without explicitly contradicting the Creator's universally revealed basis for cross-cultural communication and moral accountability.

The issues of missiological contextualization are not radically different from those of philosophical relativism. Philosophers have been struggling for years with the issues of

³² 32. Ibid., p. 52.

³³ 33. Ibid., p. 59.

³⁴ 34. Ibid., p. 107.

persuading others with radically different presuppositions, categories, and methods of reasoning. The history of philosophy is the history of attempts at communication across radically different world views and radically different values. As philosophers attempt to communicate across different *weltanschauungs* they can learn something from the history of missions that exhibits the attempts to communicate with people of different contextualized interpretations of experience in different cultural expressions of these world views. Philosophers and theologians do well to listen to missiologists and missiologists may profit from listening afresh to philosophically perceptive theologians.

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The Church, Culture and Ethnicity: A Theological View

Eshetu Abate

Keywords: Church, marks of the church, culture, ethnicity, transformation, reconciliation, negotiation, contextualisation, transparency.

The church is the body of Christ. Like her Lord she has two natures, the supernatural and the natural. She shares in the supernatural (the spiritual) because of her unique access and relationship to her heavenly Lord and the natural because she exists and operates in the natural world.

It is not new for the church of Jesus Christ to operate within cultures and ethnic groups. It has done this from the very inception of the church. In fact the founder of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ, did his mission within a certain culture and ethnic group. His great commission was 'to disciple all nations (all ethnic groups), baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. . . .' The apostles obeying the Commission of our Lord went with the gospel to all parts of the known world of that time, thus reaching all ethnic and cultural groups.

This means that the church today is not starting from scratch. We, as the church, have models to follow, our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles, in our dealings with culture and ethnicity. Besides, his promise in the great commission to be with his church to 'the very end of the age' assures his continued guidance throughout her ministry on this earth. Thus the church, guided by his Word and Spirit, can get directions on how to deal with different cultures and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, in the history of missions it has not been as easy to put this into practice as it should be.

Before we look at some theological models for the church's interaction with culture and ethnicity, let us see briefly what characteristics the church, culture and an ethnic group have.

A. THE CHURCH

In his book *Know the Truth* Bruce Milne, lists four important characteristics of the true church. The first of these is *unity*. The true church is characterized by its unity. Unity however does not mean total uniformity. Though the basic theological conviction is one, it could be expressed in different ways. Worship is done in the one Spirit to the one God, though forms may vary from place to place. Where possible, Christians who confess the same apostolic gospel should demonstrate their oneness in faith in their visible relationships. Milne writes

The NT addressed its teaching on unity to specific Christian groups, with immediate implications for their visible relationships. ... In other words there is need to search for a fuller visible unity than is presently experienced among those who confess the apostolic gospel. ... The deepest challenge of this teaching, however, is at the level of relationships in a local church. In that setting the unity of life in Christ should express itself in genuine and tangible care for, and commitment to, one another. In default of this the claim to be an authentic Christian church is called in question.¹

The second mark of a true church is *holiness*. The character of holiness is the result of the union of the church and its members with Christ, so that it may be said, 'A church which is a stranger to holiness is a stranger to Christ.' Having said that, we have to admit that the New Testament presents a picture of churches marked with division, error, sin and other limitations. Nevertheless, some visible degree of holiness has to be seen in a true church of God.

The third mark of a true church is its *catholicity* or *universality*. One distinguishing characteristic of the early church was its openness to all. Judaism and other sectarian movements of the time were not. Milne writes:

The key aspect of the early church's catholicity was its openness to all. In distinction from Judaism with its racial exclusivism and Gnosticism with its intellectual and cultic exclusivism, the church opened its arms to all who would hear its message and embrace its saviour, irrespective of colour, race, social status, intellectual capacity or moral history. It broke upon the world as a faith for all. ... Churches which erect other 'tests' should be viewed with suspicion. There is no place in a true church for racial, colour, social, intellectual or moral discrimination, provided in the last-mentioned case there is evidence of true repentance.²

The fourth mark of a true church is its *apostolicity*. The church is built 'on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone' ([Eph. 2:20](#)). Apostolicity does not mean for us a historic continuity of bishops that goes back in succession to the first apostles and Christ but conformity to the apostolic faith.

B. CULTURE

In comparison with the other lower animals, only human beings have cultures. This separates human beings from the lower animals. As usual there is no single definition of culture which is accepted by all. One definition given to culture is 'the integrated system

¹ 1. Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 216.

² 2. Milne, *Know the Truth*, p. 218.

of learned patterns of behaviour, ideas and products characteristic of a society'.³ Sir Edward Tylor, the pioneer British anthropologist, gave the following classical definition of culture. According to him culture is 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'.⁴

C. ETHNICITY

People belonging to an ethnic group have certain factors by which they distinguish themselves from others. First of all one belongs to an ethnic group by birth. Because of this a feeling and consciousness of kinship is common among members of a particular ethnic group. Ethnic identity is not based as much on a common culture as on a common sense of identity which is expressed in certain cultural values and symbols such as language. To maintain these signs and symbols is essential to the survival of the group as a distinct body and to symbolize its identity to others.

THE INTERACTION OF THE CHURCH WITH CULTURES AND ETHNIC GROUPS

The Incarnational Model

The incarnational model is the one which was chosen by the creator himself. When he came to the world he took our flesh. To be specific he took not the flesh of any body but the flesh of Mary who lived in a certain geographical location (Palestine) and historical time (around 4 B.C). He had to grow as a Galilean Jew. He knew the Aramaic language, including the proverbs of his people. In a way the limitless Word limited or accommodated himself to the Jewish culture and people. In fact his was a complete immersion in and identification with the culture. This model points to the fact that no one is more suited to be a missionary or to lead a local church than the person from the local culture. One problem the church has faced throughout the ages is in her cross-cultural evangelization. This is partly due to lack of indigenous people who can do the job, and partly due to the belief that no one else can do better than the cross-cultural evangelist.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave the challenge of cross-cultural communication to his apostles when he gave the great commission. As we stated above, the apostles obeyed the commission. The apostle Paul understood very clearly the incarnational model the gospel of Jesus Christ takes as it moves from culture to culture and from an ethnic group to another. Two instances in his letters show this fact clearly. First when writing to the Corinthians, he explained,

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 ... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some ([1 Cor. 9:19-23](#)).

Then again, in the reference to the dispute over the place of the Jewish law, he said,

³ 3. Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1983), p. 25.

⁴ 4. Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 39.

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?' ([Gal. 2:14](#)).

The apostle Paul believed that one did not need to forsake or leave one's own culture or custom to be a Christian. One can come as one is.

The cultural barrier between the evangelist and the hearers which often exists is one of the reasons why people do not understand and therefore accept the Christian gospel. Sahdu Sundar Singh, an Indian evangelist who preached the gospel to his own people as a Hindu Sahdu (Holy Man), once said, 'When the water of life is given with an European cup, most of my people refused to drink, however now when it is given with the familiar Indian cup they run to drink and quench their thirst.' This is not to deny that conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. However, one needs to remove cultural barriers that stand in the way so that the Holy Spirit may give life to the listener.

The tremendous revival that took place in Southern Ethiopia in the 1940s and the recent revival during the Derg Regime all over the country are for the most part the result of an *incarnational model of evangelization*. The revival was accompanied mostly with songs that have taken into consideration the cultural melodies and tunes of the society.

THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION UPGRADES CULTURE AND ETHNICITY

1. Transforming Culture

The church does not embrace all elements of culture as they are. Cultural elements which contradict the spirit of the gospel have to be discarded, as the experiences of the early church at the Jerusalem Council indicate. ([Acts 15:19-20](#)). Elements which do not contradict but express the identity of the group have to be maintained. The distinction between the two can best be made by the local people or Christians. In a way the church 'baptizes' cultures. It consecrates the whole way of life in that culture to the Lord. The church and her evangelists most often made the mistake of dictating from the outside as to which element of the culture was biblical. Sometimes, without valuing the thought patterns of the other culture, they tried to judge on the basis of their own culture. This then becomes an ethnocentric approach.

2. Reconciling Cultures and Ethnic Group

The church's message of reconciliation is the result of the cross—the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church itself is the result of the cross, that is the reconciliation made available by our Lord. As people from a culture are incorporated into the church they become a reconciled people and a people of reconciliation. We can see this from two angles.

A) Reconciliation with God

There is no question about this. Christ has done it all. It is finished. One has simply to make oneself available and accept the finished work. The way to God has been opened. The sin which blocked our free access to God is taken away.

B) Reconciliation of Ethnic Groups

It was taboo for a Jew even to associate with a Samaritan or a Gentile, quite apart from eating together. It would have made sense for an ethnic group not to associate with the

other if it had a unique merit or a reason to boast. But now in the church of Jesus Christ, as we are all reconciled alike on a common basis, the death and resurrection of our Lord, we have a reason to be together as brothers and sisters. Our Lord has carried the sin of the world. That includes the sin and atrocities done by one ethnic group upon another and vice versa. If we see from the perspective of the cross and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have no reason to be guilt ridden, nor do we have to keep on counting the guilt of others. The cross has forgiven all and removed all sins. Therefore the former oppressor and the oppressed can come together as equals and with dignity in front of the cross. 'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ, have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' ([Gal. 3:26-28](#)). Paul G Hiebert rightly says ' ... The gospel breaks down the barriers of ethnocentrism that divide people in opposing camps of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and masters, and males and females. It seeks to restore fellowship between God and humans, and between humans.'⁵

This is what the church should exemplify by the brotherly love, respect and harmonious relationship that exists between its members from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

We are in Christ a new community. The church forms a new community, a community of the redeemed. The ethos of this community is not the same as that from which its members came. The apostle addresses the Christian community in his time saying, 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy' ([1 Pet. 2:9-10](#)). As people of God, the new community, we have to think about things above.

THE GLOBAL AND ETHIOPIAN CONTEXT

1. The Global Context

In the global scene the cold war ended after forty years of rivalry between the U.S.A and the former Soviet Union. The fall of communism with the Soviet Union, created a vacuum for different forces to replace it. Ninan Koshy writes:

An important feature of the emerging global situation is the contest between the forces of integration and those of fragmentation. On the one hand, barriers that have historically separated nations and peoples in politics, economics, technology and culture are breaking down. Technology and economics have become truly transnational. ... On the other hand, forces of disintegration within nations and states are gathering momentum. Large states whose continued existence has been taken for granted have broken into pieces. New demands for nationhood—and revival of old demands—threaten many more states.⁶

To a certain extent the disorder in the international scene is caused by ethnic conflicts. The ethnic group has probably become the predominant grassroots political unit in the world today. Analysts tell us that in the last two decades ethnic conflicts have become especially widespread and that ethnicity has been at the centre of politics in country after country. As such it has become a challenge to the unity of states and a cause of international tension. The September 1998 issue of a World Vision News Letter, MARC

⁵ 5. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. xx.

⁶ 6. Ninan Koshy, *Churches in the World Of Nations*, (Geneva: WCC, 1994), pp. 107-108.

reports that there are 8000 identifiable separate cultural groups on earth and potentially 5000 of them could demand the right of self-determination and creation of their own states.

One of the reasons for the explosion of ethnic conflicts on world scene is the fact that throughout the cold war ancient cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups remained trapped and largely separated within artificial frontiers that had been imposed upon them. In connection with this development religion is making a growing influence in the politics of ethnic and national identity. Sometimes situations have been created in which it has been difficult to separate a certain religion from an ethnic group and nation. For example, in the former Soviet Union, Armenians are 'Christians' while the Azerbaijanis are 'Muslims'.

2. The Ethiopian Context

The Ethiopian context is not very much different from the global context. There are over eighty ethnic groups in the Ethiopia. With the fall of Communism, the country has been divided administratively into fourteen regional states based primarily on ethnicity. These fourteen states are under the Federal Government, implying that each state has its own limited autonomy. In some circles also we hear and see ethnic revival and a desire for self determination. It is in this context that churches of Ethiopia exercise the biblically based transformation, reconciliation and mutual respect which we described above.

THE CHURCH AS A MODEL OF RECONCILIATION

The above conditions exert their influence on the churches and on the different ethnic groups who are members of the churches either directly or indirectly. In some cases they may even result in conflicts.

The solution in such cases is to truly come to the common faith and investigate the kind of relationship that should exist in its light. As Christians, with the apostle Paul, we should value the new community or 'the new ethnicity' in the Lord more than our natural descent or relation ([Philp. 3:4-11](#); [John 1:12-13](#)).

One of the factors that aggravates ethnic conflict within a local church is lack of transparency. According to the teaching of our Lord there is nothing hidden which will not come to the light. Non-transparency only broods distrust and division. Therefore the churches should create an open forum for their members to discuss issues of concern and find solutions. Ethnic conflicts are one of them. Nevertheless one has to admit that it is not easy to come to a consensus because there are many conflicting forces from inside and outside the church, from above and from below. The church is not made up of only the redeemed. Our Lord likened the kingdom of God to a net that has collected both good and bad fish. In the same way we have in the church people of different backgrounds and levels of understanding.

Another factor that can help solve conflicts is negotiation. A learned anthropologist once remarked that when conflicts arise, negotiations should continue until a consensus is reached. In such situations there is no use in stopping the negotiation before a consensus is reached.

If ethnic conflicts are solved in the church, this can be a model society at large. The churches should put forward their own well studied Manifesto of ethnic relationships that can be a model for society at large to follow. The whole Manifesto should centre around Christ's actions in reconciling the world with his Father and with one another. There is a limitless resource in the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ to straighten the relationships between ethnic groups and cultures. We, the Evangelical Churches of Ethiopia, together with others should very soon embark on doing that by carrying the

message of reconciliation and harmony wrought in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Mission, the Bible and Israel-Palestine

Andrew M. Lord

Key words: Israel, Palestine, hermeneutics, mission, holistic, Zionism, discrimination, justice, reconciliation, prophecy;

Israel-Palestine¹ is known for its political tensions and fighting. It is also a region with a deep biblical history focused on the Jewish nation. This biblical history has motivated Christians for mission amongst Jews, and yet has also led to the oppression of Palestinians living in the Israeli Occupied Territories. This article aims to listen to some of the voices of Christians living in Israel-Palestine, to reflect upon their concept of mission and use of the Bible. In particular I will be considering how divisions in the land are reflected in the mission hermeneutics of Christians there. For me these issues have been given life by visits to Israel-Palestine, feeling the contrast between spending time at the Palestinian led Bethlehem Bible College and the Church's Ministry amongst Jewish People (CMJ) Hostel at Christ Church, Jerusalem.²

Israel-Palestine is a land steeped in history and we need to begin by outlining very briefly the recent history in order to understand the context for mission. In 1918 Arabs formed over 90 per cent of the population, and yet within fifty years they have become a minority in the land, without political power or authority. Palestinians lived under Ottoman rule until 1917 when the land fell under British control during the First World War. Due to anti-Semitic pogroms in Europe, Jews began arriving in the land from the 1880s with a desire to regenerate their culture and thus Zionism was born. This was encouraged by the British Government, particularly as a result of the 'Balfour Declaration' which stated that 'His Majesty's Government view will favour the establishment in

¹ 1. With Naim Ateek I have chosen to call the land 'Israel-Palestine' rather than 'Israel' which does not acknowledge the Palestinian presence, or the 'Holy Land' which conjures up images of the past rather than the present. See Naim S. Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1989), pp. 4-5.

² 2. The Church's Ministry amongst Jewish People is an evangelical Anglican missionary agency founded in 1809.

Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object'.³

The importance of the Protestant Bible-reading ethic in reaching the Balfour Declaration is widely acknowledged. From different viewpoints this is argued by both McDowall and Pileggi.⁴ Crombie argues that the English supporters in the development of Zionism during the nineteenth century were mainly missionaries or people associated with CMJ⁵ CMJ emphasized the physical restoration of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, tracing this theme of restoration back to the Puritans and their interpretation of Romans chaps. 9–11.⁶

At the end of the Second World War the British asked the United Nations to resolve the question of Palestine.⁷ In 1947 the UN proposed a partition plan establishing both Jewish and Arab states, with 54% of the land being given for a Jewish state. This was unacceptable to the Arabs, although acceptable to the Jews if the vast majority of Arabs were removed from the Jewish state.⁸ Gradually the conflict of views turned into war which eventually the Jews won and declared a State in 1948. Fighting has continued in different forms ever since. Since 1948 an estimated 2,797,179 Arabs have become refugees,⁹ while at the same time any Jew has an automatic right to settle in Israel.¹⁰ The Arabs who were able to remain in Israel faced legal discrimination and military control. Most of the Arab land was transferred to Jewish ownership, with over 40% of the land lost because the owners were absent, being refugees refused permission to return.¹¹ Arabs faced exclusion from land, work, government aid, housing, health and education.¹²

This experience has gradually led to the growth of a nationalist movement and the definition of a Palestinian identity, rather than a simply Arab identity. After the defeat of the Arab states at Israeli hands in the 1967 war there was increased feeling that only Palestinians would recover Palestine, not Arab nations generally.¹³ Resistance to the Israeli government grew and in 1987 the *intifada* began with resistance through stone-throwing and socio-economic actions. During the 1990s, the Gulf war highlighted Arab disunity and weakened the PLO¹⁴ which identified with Iraq. This helped to encourage a

³ 3. David McDowall, *The Palestinians: The Road to Nationhood* (London: Minority Rights Groups, 1994), p. 13.

⁴ 4. *Ibid.*, 14; David Pileggi, 'The Best Kept Secret', *Shalom Magazine*, CMJ (1997).

⁵ 5. Kelvin Crombie is the historian and manager of the CMJ Guest House in Jerusalem. Kelvin Crombie, *For the Love of Zion: Christian Witness and the Restoration of Israel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), p. 141.

⁶ 6. Crombie, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁷ 7. McDowall, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁸ 8. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹ 9. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁰ 10. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹ 11. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–46.

¹² 12. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–56.

¹³ 13. McDowall, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–69.

¹⁴ 14. The Palestine Liberation Organisation under Yasir Arafat has grown to represent Palestinians in Israel-Palestine.

peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, but with the Palestinians in a weak negotiating position. Israel continues to build settlements on Palestinian land and those in Hebron have become a focus for continued conflict. It is not clear if the future holds peace or violence.

Christians form a minority of all Palestinians, about 6.7 per cent or 400,000. Of these only 50,000 live in the Occupied Territories and they represent only 2.9 per cent of the population there. Since 1967 about 40 per cent of the Christians have left the country and McDowall attributes this to the economic and political repression of Israeli rule and their better mastery of European languages.¹⁵ Unemployment of 50 per cent amongst Christian graduates forces this issue, but leaves an ever smaller Christian population in the Occupied Territories.

VOICES FROM THE LAND

Many voices speak from Israel-Palestine. Out of the many varied voices I've chosen to focus on three which offer different reflections on how the Bible speaks into the situation. Faced with oppression and struggle there are Palestinian voices speaking out for liberation, for an end to injustice and the creation of a Palestinian State. Reflecting on all the Bible has to say about Israel there are others who voice the need for evangelism amongst the Jewish people and the importance of the whole land belonging to Israel. Between these two views there are those who speak for reconciliation and peace-making.

Naim Ateek, an Anglican Palestinian priest, is the main spokesperson for a Palestinian theology of liberation. He suggests that the major problem in hermeneutics for Palestinians has been the creation of the State of Israel which has particularly affected the reading of the Old Testament. He comments, 'Since the creation of the State, some Jewish and Christian interpreters have read the Old Testament largely as a Zionist text to such an extent that it has become almost repugnant to Palestinian Christians.' This has led, in some quarters, to a lack of use of the Old Testament. The search for a hermeneutic is focused on how to interpret texts that Jewish Zionists and Christian fundamentalists cite to substantiate a Jewish claim to the land.¹⁶

The hermeneutic that Ateek suggests is Jesus Christ himself. When confronted with a difficult passage one needs to ask, 'Does this fit the picture of God that Jesus has revealed to me? ... If it does, then that passage is valid and authoritative. If not, then I cannot accept its validity or authority.'¹⁷ By itself this hermeneutic is not very new and it is only in its application to the situation of oppressed Palestinians and to the biblical passages referring to Israel and the land that it becomes a liberating hermeneutic. It becomes liberating in that it allows Old Testament stories to become sources of hope in the struggle for justice, and Ateek puts forward three Old Testament passages as being central for Palestinians, particularly the story of Naboth's vineyard.¹⁸ Here the king wanted to expand his land and offered money for Naboth's vineyard, which Naboth refused because it was his family's inheritance. The king arranged to have Naboth killed and the vineyard taken from the family. God spoke words of judgment on the king through the prophet Elijah and hence speaks judgment on Israel today.

¹⁵ 15. McDowall, op. cit., p. 127.

¹⁶ 16. Ateek, op. cit., pp. 77–79.

¹⁷ 17. Ibid., p 82.

¹⁸ 18. Ateek, op. cit., pp. 86–89, following [1 Kings 21](#).

Ateek's vision leads him to hope for a land shared by both Palestinians and Jews, in which there is a Palestinian state and where new attitudes of peacemaking would characterize both Jews and Palestinians.¹⁹ Any solution to the problems must pass the test of Jesus' commands: 'whatever you wish men would do to you, do so to them' ([Mt. 7:12](#)) and 'love your neighbour as yourself' ([Mk. 12:31](#)). To sustain action towards a solution Ateek draws on the Christ-story: 'The Church lives in the power of the cross. Its strength comes from its crucified and living Lord. It is enlivened by the Holy Spirit. This power enables the Church to overcome its physical and psychological weakness as a minority and transcend any bitterness or hostility resulting from the political conflict, in order to assume the role of servant and, for Christ's sake, to become the agent and instrument of both peace and reconciliation.'²⁰

For a contrasting view we turn to CMJ which has been involved in Israel-Palestine for nearly 200 years. They aim at evangelism amongst Jewish people, the encouragement of Jewish believers and teaching Christians about the Jewish roots of their faith. They 'see the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel as a sign of God's faithfulness as revealed in the Scriptures'.²¹ Further insight into their approach can be seen in their advice to people wanting to work as volunteers:²² 'Our aims as a society are based on what Scripture has to say on the place of the Jewish people in God's plan not only in the past but still today' and suggests reflection on [Jer. 31:1-33](#), [Ez. 36:22-37:14](#) and [Romans 9-11](#). Clearly an understanding of the Bible as it relates to present day Israel fires their missionary work.

In the 1997 issues of CMJ's magazine, *Shalom*, there were articles on the Jewish faith, testimonies of Jewish believers in Christ, reflections on Jesus' Jewish roots, stories of Jewish Christians (or 'Messianic Jews' as they prefer to be called) around the world, and details of CMJ's work and projects. The only article on the political situation came in Issue 3 where Pileggi reflects on how the Christian convictions of British leaders played an important role in the establishment of the State of Israel.²³ There is no mention of Palestinians or issues of justice, and only mention of Jewish politics when it reflects on evangelistic work, such as the recent bill against 'inducement for religious conversion'. The mission of CMJ appears limited to evangelism and nurture and it is an open question how much this is determined by its biblical hermeneutic. However, given the very definite hermeneutic regarding interpretation of biblical promises to Israel which is at the heart of CMJ, this must have strong links with the resulting expression of mission today.

One book recommended by CMJ gives an outlook and biblical interpretation which is still popular if somewhat dated. Lance Lambert, in *Battle for Israel*, presents Israel as a victim of Arab aggression and cannot understand why Arabs need Israeli land when they have so much of their own.²⁴ Thus the main question is 'Will Israel survive?' Lambert takes particular comfort in [Zechariah 12:2-9](#), 'I will bewilder the armies drawn up against [Jerusalem] and make fools of them, for I will watch over the people of Judah but blind all

¹⁹ 19. Ateek, op. cit., pp. 163-75.

²⁰ 20. Ibid., p. 161.

²¹ 21. CMJ, 'Aims of the Society', unpublished paper (1990).

²² 22. CMJ, 'Volunteer Work in Israel', unpublished paper (1990).

²³ 23. Pileggi, op. cit.

²⁴ 24. Lance Lambert, *Battle for Israel* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1976), p. 56.

her enemies.’ Lambert concludes that ‘Israel will not only survive but she will also triumph’ and eventually ‘all Israel will be saved’.²⁵

Not all texts recommended by CMJ rule out a Palestinian state. One of the key introductory texts to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, *Our Father Abraham* by Marvin Wilson, reviews in detail the biblical texts and concludes that ‘ “real-estate” theology is, at best, precarious theology’.²⁶ He proposes that issues of justice, morality and history demand the existence of the State of Israel and that Christian support for Israel ‘can only be interpreted as a giant step forward in seeking to right an ugly historical wrong’. Sadly, Wilson does not apply the same criteria to the existence of the Palestinian people, but he does conclude that Christian responsibility is ‘to pray, to encourage, and to work for a permanent and fair sharing of the land between two peoples, Arabs and Jews, with a maximum of justice and a minimum of injustice’.²⁷

The final voice from the land comes from Palestinians who, while still in favour of a Palestinian State, do not focus on that aim in their writing and biblical reflection. They tend to focus on reconciliation rather than liberation. Two such Palestinians, from different traditions, are Elias Chacour and Salim Munayer. Elias Chacour is an ordained priest in the Melkite Church and has worked for many years in the Galilee region struggling for peace and involved in developing community projects. Chacour’s ministry is fired by Jesus’ prophetic ministry expressed in the Beatitudes ([Mt. 5:3–10](#)). He hungers for justice and righteousness²⁸ and sees the first step in reconciling Jew and Palestinian as the restoration of human dignity. Hence the emphasis on work to unite communities and develop projects that restore human dignity. Chacour emphasizes the need to reunite Palestinians, divided through hatred fuelled by the Israeli oppression. From this came work to unite Palestinians with Jews in fighting for justice.²⁹ Being a peacemaker involves ‘deep forgiveness, risking the friendship of your enemies, begging for peace on your knees and in the streets’.³⁰

Salim Munayer is dean of the evangelical Bethlehem Bible College and runs the ‘Musalaha’ reconciliation ministry. Reconciliation starts between people and God and then is worked out in society with reconciliation between different people. Reconciliation has a salvational and a personal aspect.³¹ Inspiration for this is taken from [2 Corinthians 5:14–20](#) (we are ambassadors of reconciliation), [Ephesians 2:14–16](#) (the barriers between people have been broken down by Christ) and particularly the story of Jacob and Esau in [Genesis 32](#) and [33](#) (reconciliation of enemies). Munayer starts with justice but notes that ‘God alone is the judge and the sovereign Lord’ and so we should not take the role of judge into our hands. He then stresses prayer and non-retaliation as being vital. Munayer started with his and others feelings of injustice and his prior theological framework regarding prophecies of the Land. From this he moved to further Bible study

²⁵ 25. Lambert, op. cit., 54, 31, 69, 116, with the last reference quoting [Romans 11:26](#).

²⁶ 26. Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 268.

²⁷ 27. Ibid., pp. 269, 275.

²⁸ 28. Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers: A Palestinian’s Struggle for Reconciliation in the Middle East* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1985), p. 146, cf. [Mt. 5:6](#).

²⁹ 29. Chacour, op. cit., pp. 168, 188–192.

³⁰ 30. Ibid., p. 200.

³¹ 31. Salim J. Munayer, ed., *In the Footsteps of Our Father Abraham* (Jerusalem: Musalaha, 1993), p. 4.

to gain understanding of God's will.³² Munayer identifies the key issue as nationalism and sees the challenge to Christians as putting obedience to God above desires for our nation. He concludes that we need 'to speak about God's holiness, justice and righteousness, to be peacemakers to call for reconciliation between Arabs and Jews. It is our role to confront our people when they are in the wrong, and more than anything else, to intercede for our people that God will have mercy on us'.³³

Musalaha also includes Jewish Christian voices. They stress the Christian responsibility as peacemakers, based on Jesus' challenge in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God' ([Mt. 5:9](#)). They see the chief enemy as being hate, and the key need being to promote love, loving even our enemies.³⁴ In this they are like Chacour, but reflect on different biblical stories. Joseph Shulam reflects on how Esau, who had been robbed of his birthright by Jacob, rejects Jacob's offer of gifts in recompense as being no longer necessary ([Gen. 33:9](#)). He compares this with how Palestinians, robbed of the land, should refuse compensation (such as a Palestinian state) because the land is Israel's 'by decree of the Creator of the Universe'.³⁵ Shulam does not go on to reflect on the remainder of the story where Jacob insists on giving gifts and Esau gives in and accepts ([Gen. 33:10-11](#)), which suggests that a desire for recompense should be pursued by those who have inflicted harm. David Millar suggests that the oppressed Palestinians follow Jesus' command to those under Roman occupation, 'If any man requires you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two'. Millar stresses the 'freedom of [the] heart'³⁶ and contrasts the Christian obligation to preach the gospel with a nationalistic, political substitute.

MISSION, THE BIBLE AND ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Having heard some of the voices coming out of Israel-Palestine we now come to reflect on them in terms of mission and hermeneutics. The Israeli-Palestinian situation is one of division—division between Israel and the Occupied Territories, between Jew and Palestinian, between those in power and the powerless. In such a divided country there appears a tendency to have a divided mission. Different Christian groups focus on different aims in mission: evangelism to the Jews, unity amongst Palestinians, restoration of the human dignity of communities or liberation for the Palestinians. There tends to be a focus on mission within one particular community or addressing one particular issue. The overlap between groups involved in mission can seem slim, despite the physical overlap.

Many argue the need for mission to be holistic in terms of combining both evangelism and social action.³⁷ However, mission also needs to be holistic in terms of the people involved and the people worked amongst. In Israel-Palestine evangelism and social action

³² 32. Chacour, op. cit., p. 41.

³³ 33. Munayer, op. cit., p. 47.

³⁴ 34. Ibid., pp. 19–20.

³⁵ 35. Ibid., p. 32.

³⁶ 36. Ibid., pp. 22–23.

³⁷ 37. This argument is made by evangelicals such as John Stott *The Contemporary Christian* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), pp. 337ff and Ronald Sider *Evangelism and Social Action* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993), and can be seen in David Bosch's outline of an ecumenical missionary paradigm, David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1991), pp. 368–510.

take place amongst Jews and amongst Arabs and yet this is not enough because suffering and injustice still exist. The problem is that here different (if holistic) forms of mission operate independently, but there needs to be an overlap between the mission undertaken by different groups. The early church faced this problem with different people involved in mission amongst Jews and amongst Gentiles. These were brought together at the Jerusalem Council,³⁸ although some tensions continued. Mission in Israel-Palestine still reflects an Enlightenment focus on independence and needs to work towards interdependence.³⁹

Some overlaps do occur between the missions of different groups. The emphasis on reconciliation by Chacour and Munayer brings Jewish and Palestinian Christians together, providing opportunities for an exchange of mission understanding. And yet a mission focus on such overlaps can be dangerous. A focus on unity and reconciliation seems to favour the current political *status quo*. This comes across most forcibly from the people involved in Musalaha with Jewish Christians arguing for Palestinian submission to Israeli authorities. In our mission we cannot strive for unity for the sake of unity; instead we need to strive for unity for the sake of justice. Thus Chacour brings together Jews and Palestinians to march for justice before the Israeli Parliament. Mission must bring us together in order to further the just rule of God on earth.

Christian mission in Israel-Palestine arises out of the situations of different Christian groups living in the land. This mission draws much of its inspiration from the Bible. In fact the situation demands an examination of issues related to biblical exegesis. The early Zionists, though largely secular, were 'inspired by the Bible which gave historical and mystical authentication to their aims'.⁴⁰ For Palestinians the injustice they face is seen as being aided by such biblical exegesis, and hence Christians promoting justice must explain biblical passages which seem to support Israel's position.

In the same way as there is a divided mission in Israel-Palestine, there is also a divided use of the Bible—different groups select different passages to inspire and authenticate their mission. This raises questions about biblical authority. In the writings we have examined there has been a focus on Old Testament prophecy, the Beatitudes, the story of Jacob/Esau, some of Jesus' commands, and some Old Testament narratives. Even when there is an attempt to overcome such selectiveness, it still remains. Ateek, for example, is concerned to recover the use of the Old Testament amongst Palestinians, and suggests a hermeneutic which does allow some texts to speak into the mission situation. However, it also allows him to deselect other texts, particularly those which do not speak positively to Palestinians.

Two hermeneutical issues are of particular importance in the Israeli-Palestinian situation: the interpretation of prophecy, and the nature of peacemakers. Prophecy has been interpreted in a literal way to support the claims of Jews to the land, and yet this has led to the oppression of Palestinians. Some hermeneutical guidelines are needed to help Christians interpret prophecy. Kenneth Cragg suggests four such principles. Firstly, we must not interpret the prophets in a way that leads to injustice, exploitation, or insensitivity, when they were concerned to promote justice, fairness and sensitivity to others.⁴¹ Secondly, interpretation of prophecy requires careful consideration of frames of

³⁸ 38. [Acts 15](#).

³⁹ 39. Bosch, op. cit., p. 362.

⁴⁰ 40. McDowall, op. cit., p. 8.

⁴¹ 41. Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (London: Mowbray, 1992), p. 239.

reference and interpretation, with particular consideration of the present rather than future relevance of the prophecy. Thirdly, given that readers bring many intentions to their reading of Scripture, we need a compassionate honesty in relating to the people of the land. Finally, we are to subject any biblical readings to the ultimate themes of the Bible.⁴² These guidelines are useful because they promote a broader hermeneutic, one that is taken up in limited ways by Wilson⁴³ and Chacour⁴⁴ who bring the themes of justice, compassion and holiness to a consideration of prophecy.

All sides of the debate stress the text 'Blessed are the peacemakers' ([Mt. 5:9](#)) and yet interpret it in different ways. For some, peace is linked with reconciliation and this can favour a political *status quo*. A more healthy link is between peace and justice as seen in Chacour.⁴⁵ The link with justice takes into account more of the context of Jesus' saying, which also includes 'hungering and thirsting for righteousness' and the biblical understanding of peace.⁴⁶ For Jews peace can mean security, because that is the felt need, and yet this can lead to Palestinian oppression. For Palestinians peace can mean freedom from oppression through the establishment of a Palestinian state. Yet it must be questioned whether this is a peace which does not involve the breaking down of barriers such as we see in [Ephesians 2](#). A hermeneutic overly reliant on a particular social context and outlook can lead to mission that is limited. This is a problem of over-contextualisation⁴⁷; it is also a danger in the contemporary trend towards a wide plurality of equally valid socio-pragmatic readings of the biblical texts. Thiselton argues that there needs also to be a socio-critical reading in order to rank the different readings, otherwise one reading will just support a particular interest and not evaluate it.⁴⁸ He argues that any one socio-pragmatic model must not dominate the hermeneutical process.⁴⁹

We also need a hermeneutic that is fed by the views of many and not just the few. People outside the Israeli-Palestinian situation and yet working alongside it also have valuable insights not seen in voices coming from the land. Colin Chapman worked for many years in the Middle East before returning to England. He comments that there is a need to consider 'law' as well as 'prophecy' and that the themes of repentance, non-selective judgment and the suffering of injustice are important biblical themes.⁵⁰ Further consideration of these themes would enrich the missionary hermeneutics in Israel-Palestine. John Goldingay notes the tendency for us to develop an inner canon, a 'canon within the canon'.⁵¹ This positively identifies key texts and themes which enable the

⁴² 42. Ibid., p. 240.

⁴³ 43. Wilson, op. cit., pp. 269–70.

⁴⁴ 44. Chacour, op. cit., pp. 131–46.

⁴⁵ 45. The same may be said of the World Council of Churches conference on Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation.

⁴⁶ 46. Ateek, op. cit., pp. 144–50.

⁴⁷ 47. This is my term for the dangers pointed out by Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 427–28 regarding relativism and absolutism of contextualism.

⁴⁸ 48. Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 602.

⁴⁹ 49. Ibid., pp. 549.

⁵⁰ 50. Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* (Oxford: Lion, 1989), pp. 156–211.

⁵¹ 51. John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 105.

interpretation of the whole of Scripture, but which can over time blind us to the needs of others. He argues that we need a catholicity of interpretation within which we particularly welcome criticism from perspectives with which we sharply disagree.⁵²

This catholicity of interpretation forces judgment on western interpreters of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. As we have noted earlier, there is a link between the establishment of the Jewish State and western Protestant missionary movement, and thus a link between such movements and the Palestinian oppression that has come out of establishing Israel as a state. McDowall comments on how a Protestant focus on the 'Holy Land' gives a view of the country as one 'in which time stood still, the inhabitants a passive but colourful backdrop to those in search of biblical truth'.⁵³ In contrast the inhabitants have much to say about Protestant involvement in mission, their use of the Bible and their approach to politics. Inasmuch as we in the West begin to reflect on and judge the Palestinian situation, so we will find ourselves being judged.

CONCLUSION

The Israeli-Palestinian situation has been outlined historically and in regard to key Christian voices. Reflecting on these voices suggests that in a divided land, mission and hermeneutics also appear divided. There need to be overlaps between the mission activities of different groups in order to reduce the injustices encouraged by division. However, it is possible to focus on such overlaps to the exclusion of justice issues, and so unity and justice need to be kept together in mission. Divisions in hermeneutics appear to arise out of over-contextualisation by different groups. This needs to be overcome through a greater catholicity of biblical interpretation. There is much to learn from and be challenged by in the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

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Minority Christians in the Church History Curriculum

John Roxborough

⁵² 52. Ibid., pp. 243, 247.

⁵³ 53. McDowall, op. cit., p. 6.

Keywords: Theological education, church history, historiography, curriculum, minority groups, globalization, contextualisation, discrimination, evangelism, conversion, missiology;

As the theological curriculum gets squeezed by new concerns, it is sometimes difficult to ensure that important aspects are not neglected. In the church history area this applies especially to the study of minority groups of Christians. Although pressures of time may tempt teachers and students to concentrate on global issues, a proper understanding of Christianity requires a robust commitment to the stories of minority groups. If the distinction between mission and church history has all but collapsed, the history of conversion remains important in its diversity as well as its common themes. It is only in relation to the particularity of Christian experience that valid generalisations can be made. This article discusses some of the factors which are important in understanding minority groups, the temptations and benefits of ensuring minority history is studied and how minority Christian stories may be integrated into the curriculum.

HISTORIOGRAPHY, GEOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY

The role of church historian commonly arises out of a relationship with a particular church. The task of answering questions about the past relates to the identity of the group arising out of the conflicts, personalities, events, and issues which contributed to its character. Geography and wider social and economic factors also contribute to the cultural and theological identity of any group. Churches may see themselves as primarily defined by theological conflict (for instance churches arising out of the Reformation); they may also see themselves as more primarily defined by place (the Church of England, the Church of South India). Some may see themselves as defined by association with a particular person, not only Jesus himself, but a founder or saint. Often a particular figure has a defining role which helps identify the group even if it does not always facilitate ongoing change. Many orders, mission groups, and churches have the equivalent of 'What would Jesus do?' as part of their story.

These questions 'Who are we?', 'What is our story?', 'Where did we come from?', 'Why are we different?', are powerful instinctive human responses arising out of self-awareness and the desire to engage with one's community and identity. They also present a demand for the validation of conflict, the creation of heroes and martyrs, and by implication the discernment of threatening forces against which the faithful must remain vigilant. These issues exist for dominant 'mainstream' Christian groups as well as for minorities who lack power or who are otherwise insecure.

History writing driven by these needs touches a deep emotional chord, but these needs do not represent the whole story. The development of history as a discipline has promoted awareness of social and geographical dimensions, and an appreciation of factual more than emotional accounts, as well as the value of allowing the human and the fallible their due weight. It is realized that whatever purposes hagiography may serve, it is self-limiting and makes it difficult for new questions to be asked.¹ The history academy also presents questions which Christians may feel less comfortable about. Replacing a providential and heroic view of the past with a secular and mundane one leaves something lacking. The desire for grand theories, often reductionist in their interpretation of religious experience, takes church history into the realms of debates about the

¹ 1. Alan Neely, 'Saints Who Sometimes Were; Utilizing Missionary Hagiography', *Missiology* 27.4 (October 1999), pp. 441-457.

significance or insignificance of religion in culture, and whether its influence is hostile, benign, or constructive. The church history of the academy may be legitimately concerned with the identity question of a secular society, but it is not concerned with the 'Who am I?' or 'What is the truth about Jesus?' questions of the Christian.

The missionary and ecumenical movements have contributed important dimensions. The assumption that active engagement in mission was a mark of a true church was something which the Reformers supported, despite the rather different agenda they faced in their time. History tended to be rewritten as the story of evangelistic mission and the spread of Christianity, not simply as the story of conflicts between theological traditions. In an age of ecumenism² however, the felt need was to seek understanding of the historical and social basis of conflict and to help provide a basis for working at resolving differences rather than perpetuating them. There has been a growing desire to seek to be fair to other parties and to take greater notice of figures who tried to prevent conflict. Ecumenism has usefully encouraged a quest for common interests across the divisions of the Christian church.

The early historians of the Protestant missionary movement were the administrators, editors and missionaries who documented what they found, wrote up what they thought their supporters needed to hear, and sought to justify their calling against the indifferent at home; at the same time they were learning the apologetics needed to engage with the faiths they discovered overseas. The needs of the emerging churches were long subsumed under the needs of the mission, but it was eventually appreciated that the identity of new churches should not be constructed out of the story of the mission and the missionaries. Instead they had to take account of their own leaders, cultures and world views.

In recent decades mission historiography has drawn attention to the processes of contextualisation (without which contextual theology has an uncertain grip on reality). An awareness of the multicultural diversity of Christianity has provided material for a deeper understanding of the processes of conversion, and given to church historians models of how to move beyond the mind-set which handles reports of spiritual phenomena by dismissing them.³ Missionary historiography has also needed to engage with colonial history and interpretations given by it to Christianity as a European phenomenon; it now faces the challenge of post-colonialism. In places at least it is mature enough to learn from both. It has not been alone in being willing to recognize that both the missionary and the convert remain strong players in the story of religious and cultural interaction, and that the missionary and his or her culture are also changed by the experience.

A significant contribution of missiological historiography has been its awareness of the dramatic changes in the geography of world Christianity. Simply on the basis of numbers, Christians today are more likely to be African, Asian, and Latin American than they are to be North American or European. At the same time, missiology has been interested in the particular experiences of cultures as they have encountered the gospel, by whatever vehicle it has reached them.

In this situation the church in any particular area or culture needs an understanding of its local and regional history as well as the global and universal dimensions of the Christian story. There are also important connections between these dimensions. For instance, Lutherans in India need an understanding of Luther and of the Lutheranism that

² 2. Timothy J. Wengert and Charles W. Brockwell, Jr. eds., *Telling the Churches' stories: Ecumenical perspectives on writing Christian history* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

³ 3. Mark A. Noll, 'The challenges of contemporary church history, the dilemmas of modern history, and missiology to the rescue', *Missiology* 24.1 (January 1996), pp. 47-64.

came to India, as well as an understanding of Christianity in India in all its traditions, and of the particular history of Christianity in their locality.

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF MINORITY HISTORIOGRAPHY

Whether the geographic focus is local, regional or global, the fact of being in a minority is a common Christian experience. Although Christians generally need to be concerned for the global and universal elements in the Christian story as well as the particular and regional, the danger of allowing a dominant particular experience to be taken as being global and universal, and therefore normative, is to be avoided. Recognition of the validity of local Christian history is important not only for people's ownership of their own history but also for the interpretive frameworks of the wider church.

The writing and teaching of church history needs to go beyond the emphasis on commonality, developed in situations of dialogue and ecumenism, to an awareness of difference. The localisation and globalization of history, like that of theology, needs discussion of its quality as an instrument for establishing Christian identity. The minority historian must understand a particular tradition in depth and relate it to wider pictures, also written by and out of the collective labours of minority historians.

Minority Christians have been the subject of historical treatment in relation to persecution, but interest has increased also with greater political awareness of indigenous peoples, the concern of Bible translators to reach every known language, the vision of mission strategists to plant churches in every people group and the growth of post-modernism and multicultural awareness. If the evangelistic strategies among these factors bear fruit, we can expect an increase in the Christian groups which are cultural and religious minorities.

Interest in minorities also needs to be driven not only by concerns about persecution, or about fears of western cultural dominance, but by a theology which takes cultural diversity seriously. Minority historiography is of at least equal significance to contextual theology. A commitment to understanding God's word out of 'theology from below' also requires a commitment to historical reflection on the 'below' out of which contextual theology is formulated.

The motif of being a minority may carry the danger of seeing persecution as the key to the Christian experience, and with it the temptation to sensationalist if not apocalyptic analysis of very ordinary Christian stories. Either way there are risks. Failure to take minority experience seriously may convey the impression that comfortable relations with political power should be considered normal. If political freedom and social persecution are both valid Christian experiences, it is the minority dimension which has further to go to be treated with adequate seriousness.

A victim mentality among the minority can be as distorting as the ignorance and prejudice of the majority. The power of politicians and media makes minorities vulnerable to fashions of idolisation or criticism for ends which have little to do with their right to exist or their contribution to society. What may be courted for votes one day may be condemned as dangerous another. If the scope for redress from unfair reporting is limited, and efforts to correct distortions sometimes counterproductive, a groundwork of quality scholarship is needed before there is a crisis. A scholarly exchange of opinion, and a culture of openness, may be a good investment in building trust as well as understanding.

WHO SHOULD WRITE MINORITY HISTORY?

Minorities often wish to reserve to themselves the writing of their own story, yet they need to be proactive in ensuring that their stories are represented in the history of a nation as fairly as possible. This requires that others as well as themselves be involved, even if some of those others may not be fully sympathetic. Christian historians who are not in minority groups have an obligation to include minorities in the larger story, even if they see some of these groups as rivals or even heretics. The experiences of minority groups in general are often indicators of dangers other Christians may also have to face.

For historians inside and outside minority there is a responsibility for fairness which is not diminished by the fact that they are not always heeded. Popular myth, and a feeling for how things ought to have been are powerful forces for both minority and dominant groups. Not everybody wants to know that heroes are not all saints and that saints are not necessarily easy to live with.⁴ Not all can cope with complexities and ambiguities, or the fact that golden ages on examination are not all that they were said to be. At the same time the selective writing up of negative experiences distorts reality. It is not always easy to assess whether minorities are dangerous, difficult or just different.

Any historian is subject to pressures and temptations; the minority historian faces these from within—not just from outside his or her own community. There are always misunderstandings, errors and people whose interests are better served by the maintenance of stories than by their correction. There are temptations to arrogance, exaggeration and defensiveness, quite apart from failures at the level of training, competence, industry and the determination of an appropriate critical framework. In the interests of objectivity or the desire to relate to majority concerns, some may magnify the failings of their community. Some may be inclined, sometimes for the same reasons, to gloss over mistakes, personalities, and embarrassing evidence.

A wide range of people may study minority Christianity. A particular person, group or institution may be more or less sympathetic to the subject, more or less competent within their own terms, or very far from engaging in the sort of critical reflection one might like to see. Nonetheless they are part of the overall enterprise. This also applies to different levels of expertise. The 'professional' historian depends on the work of the amateur, not just that of colleagues or the sources provided by institutions. This is especially true for minority groups. Without those who informally record the experiences of family members, religious and social history are alike impoverished.

This diversity of involvement also applies between different parts of the minority group—which is seldom as unified as those without or within are apt to think. It applies between different churches, and also between different religions. Those within a particular group have questions which are different from those outside. It also applies on an international scale.

Those who research and write about minority groups, whether expatriates or members of other or majority communities, need to see themselves in positions of trust. That does not necessarily mean the suppression of the uncomfortable, but it does mean that outside researchers must be willing for others to question their ideas, query their facts, revise their conclusions and formulate alternative theses. All historians approach their task from a certain time, place and culture and there is something provisional about whatever we do. We write to say this is how, from these assumptions, things seem to be. Responsibility for a particular piece of historical writing is not ownership of the truth. Whatever the quality of our scholarship, our version of history will be handed on to others to draw their own conclusions and write their own version. No perspective is above critical comment or investigation.

⁴ 4. Alan Neely, *ibid.*

The historian of the minority also has the task of sharing lessons from the experiences of others and of reminding their own community that they may be wrong as well as wronged. The historian should aspire to a concern for human rights which extends beyond his or her own community. People need to be mindful of the freedoms of others as well as the freedoms they seek for themselves. This may include the not always welcome information that the persecuted can themselves become persecutors. Lessons from the experience of persecution elsewhere may equally be a warning about the proper treatment of other minorities, even in eras marked by good will and good intentions.

DOCUMENTING MINORITY EXPERIENCE

Minority Christians themselves have a responsibility to help ensure their story is told in ways which do justice to their concerns and perspectives. The documentation of events, preservation of archives, and provision of adequate interpretive frameworks cannot be left to accident, or be abandoned to the mercy of majority cultures. Surprisingly, it is possible for minorities to be complacent about the preservation of what is valuable to them, including their faith, language, culture and history. Yet the aim of totalitarian groups is frequently to obliterate the memory of those they persecute and to rewrite history accordingly.

Minority historians need to study the scenarios faced by other minority groups, how they recognized the forces which lead to oppression as they arose, how they responded in crisis, and how those who survived worked to rebuild their communities when it was over. People are likely to be damaged emotionally and spiritually. Not all are strengthened by the experience of being oppressed. Judgment may be distorted even if faith has grown. Getting stories down and distributing them at the time is as important as reflecting on events afterwards. It is wise to take advantage of internet transmission and electronic storage outside of the local situation itself. We need to encourage the electronic documentation of church life through the archives of discussion and newsgroups as well as the work of those concerned for freedom of religion and human rights. Attention should be paid to what is said in public media, as well as the preservation of personal letters, papers, analysis and reflection.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Often the main questions which are assumed to be relevant for the minority Christian experience are those concerning personal courage and faith, but the community itself and the wider church also benefit from evidence of wisdom and discernment under pressure. While we may not be able to anticipate all that a later generation may wish to know, there are some basic things which will help make it possible for them to address their own questions in their time.

A chronology of events and a clear sense of place provides an important framework for interpretation of trends, issues and debates. Not every parish needs to write up every dimension of every issue, but records of the options and perceived consequences of different decisions helps provide depth. Leaders and hero figures need to be understood with sympathy if not always with agreement. It is important to uncover stories of laypeople, not just of leaders and of institutions. We need to see truth testified in failure as well as success, and to engage with ambiguity and uncertainty as well as faith and conviction.

The heat of conflict may not be an easy time for writing memoirs, but some of the participants at least need to be asked to record what was going on and what people learnt

of themselves and of God; they need to identify provisionally strategic decisions and their effect on the well-being, security and unity of the church. What were the arguments behind the decisions? What were the fears and assumptions? It may be possible to recall the folk sayings and prayers and Bible passages which guided people. Stories of survival, challenge, and courage are always important as are evidence of links across boundaries of faith, race, and class. Documentation of the ownership of institutions and property can be important. Preserving reliable evidence of bad treatment is not just a matter of refusing to let old issues die (though it may be that); it can be an essential foundation for justice and political credibility.

THE FUTURE

Where does this leave minority Christianity in the Church History curriculum? Any curriculum item can be incorporated as a topic in its own right and / or as a dimension of other topics. Minority Christianity has some claim to be included in the theology syllabus in both these ways, but it is of prime importance as part of the slice of the theological education cake that is called Church History. Church History itself may gain some space by leaving it to others to give the historical dimension to issues of theology which have often been assumed to be responsibilities for history more than theology. Theology is now a more diffuse subject than it used to, and the assumption that sorting out theology was the most important outcome of history has long gone.

The regional and the global dimensions of church history depend on the accumulative work of those concerned with minority history, whatever wider trends and patterns historians concerned for the larger pictures will wish to look for. The quality of all our theological and historical reflection, and potentially also of our discipleship, requires that due weight be given to the experiences of minority Christians.

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Ephesians 4:12 Once More: 'Equipping the Saints for the Work of Ministry?'

John Jefferson Davis

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'Now it is most apparent from [Ephesians 4](#) that all Christians are "in the ministry", wrote Ray Stedman in his widely read book of 1972, *Body Life: The Church Comes Alive*. 'The proper task of the ... support ministries ... is to train, motivate, and undergird the people to do the work of the ministry.'¹

This understanding of the task of pastors and teachers based on a particular translation of [Ephesians 4:12](#) ['to equip the saints for the work of ministry'] has become the dominant understanding of the text in evangelical and mainline churches today. In recent years, however, this popular interpretation has been challenged by a number of scholars.² It is the purpose of this study to examine the history of interpretation of [Ephesians 4:12](#), to propose a new translation of the Greek text, and to relate this discussion to the growing interest in today's churches in 'marketplace ministries' and 'ministry in everyday life'.³

¹ 1. Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life: The Church Comes Alive* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972), p. 78.

² 2. See, for example, Henry P. Hamann, 'The Translation of [Ephesians 4:12](#)—A Necessary Revision', *Concordia Journal* 41 (1988), pp. 42–48; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), pp. 252–256; T. David Gordon, "'Equipping" Ministry in [Ephesians 4](#)?' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (1994), pp. 69–78.

³ 3. The term 'ministry of the *laity*' is here intentionally avoided, in order not to perpetuate the unfortunate appearance of a dichotomy between the 'clergy' and the 'laity' which has plagued the church since the third century. For background on the historical development of this problematic distinction, see A. Faivre, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990).

Since the end of the Second World War there has been a substantial growth of scholarly interest in the role of the 'laity' in both the church and society. A significant role in this development was played by scholars associated with projects sponsored by the Department of the Laity of the World Council of Churches. The volume edited by Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber, *The Layman in Christian History* (1963) was a seminal contribution in this area.⁴ The 1958 book by Hendrik Kraemer, *The Theology of the Laity*, was also a landmark contribution.⁵ Postwar scholarship on the theology of the church which has highlighted such themes as the *body of Christ* and *the people of God* has also helped to recover the concept of 'every-member ministry' found in the New Testament.⁶ The recent work by Robert Banks, William Diehl, and others has heralded a real renaissance of interest in 'marketplace ministry' and 'ministry in everyday life.'⁷

EPHESIANS 4:12 AND THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION: THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

It is of interest to note the variety of ways that the Greek text [πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ] has been rendered in the history of English translations. The 1534 translation of William Tyndale reads that Christ (v. 11) 'made some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some shepherds, some teachers: (v. 12), that the saints might have all things necessary to work and minister withal, to the edifying of the body of Christ'. The Geneva Bible of 1560, translated by William Whittingham and Anthony Gilbey when Knox and Calvin were in Geneva, reads 'For the gathering together of the Saintes, for the worke of the ministerie, for the edification of the bodie of Christ'.

The Douay-Rheims Bible of 1582, a Roman Catholic version based on the Latin Vulgate, reads 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'. Already in the sixteenth century a question of translation is apparent: should the three clauses in 4:12 be understood as coordinate [as in the Geneva Bible and Douay-Rheims], or should the second clause ['for the work of ministry'] be understood as dependent on the first ['for perfecting/equipping the saints'], as in the Tyndale rendering? Taking the second clause as dependent on the first implies an 'egalitarian' or 'every-member ministry' understanding in which all the people of God do

⁴ 4. Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber, eds., *The Layman in Christian History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

⁵ 5. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Theology of the Laity* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958).

⁶ 6. See, for example, Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, tr. Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), esp. pp. 282ff., 'The Body of Christ and the People of God'; Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), esp. chapter 3, 'The People of God', and chapter 6, 'The Body of Christ'; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965); Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: a Study for a Theology of the Laity*, 2nd. ed. (London: Chapman, 1964).

⁷ 7. See, for example, Robert Banks, *Redeeming the Routines: Bringing Theology to Life* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), and *God the Worker* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1992); Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens, eds., *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1987); John A. Bernbaum and Simon M. Steer, *Why Work: Careers and Employment in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986); William E. Diehl, *The Monday Connection* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). For a very extensive annotated bibliography in the area, see Pete Hammond, ed. *Marketplace Bibliography*, available from Marketplace InterVarsity, P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707.

the ‘work of ministry’, while taking the clauses as coordinate implies a more ‘hierarchical’ view of the church in which the emphasis is on the teaching ministries of the apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers, who ‘equip’ or ‘perfect’ the saints.

The King James translation of 1611 reads ‘For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ’, reflecting the so-called ‘hierarchical’ view of the church’s ministry. The American Standard Version of 1901, continuing in this tradition, reads ‘For the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ’.

The Moffatt translation of 1935 reflects the ‘traditional’ view of the text established by the King James: ‘for the equipment of the saints, for the business of the ministry, for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ’.⁸ The ‘traditional’ view is likewise reflected in the 1944 Knox version, a Roman Catholic translation from the Vulgate, Greek, and Hebrew texts: ‘They [the teaching ministers of v. 11] are to order the lives of the faithful, minister to their needs, build up the frame of Christ’s body’.

A distinct break in the translation tradition can be seen in the Revised Standard Version of 1946, which reflected a newer ‘egalitarian’ [or ‘revisionist’] understanding of the text.⁹ According to the RSV, Christ gave apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers to the church in order ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ’. The ‘clergy’, according to this understanding, do not do all the work of the ministry, but are to equip and train all the people of God to perform the work of ministry.

This ‘revisionist’ translation of the text appears to be followed without dissent in English translations since 1946: the New American Standard Version of 1960 [‘for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ’]; the New English Bible of 1961 [‘to equip God’s people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ’]; the New Catholic Edition of 1962 [‘in order to perfect the saints for a work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ’]; the Jerusalem Bible of 1966 (Roman Catholic) [‘so that the saints together make a unity in the work of service, building up the body of Christ’]; the Today’s English Version of 1967 [‘He did this to prepare all God’s people for the work of Christian service, to build up the body of Christ’]; the New International Version (NIV) of 1978 [‘to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up’]; the New King James Version of 1982 [‘for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry’]; the New Revised Standard Version of 1989 [‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ’].

It is of interest to ask whether the new ‘revisionist’ understanding of the text that has become dominant since 1946 reflects new textual discoveries or exegetical insights, or whether perhaps the change is more reflective of a more egalitarian, democratic postwar *Zeitgeist* that has influenced both churches and Bible translators.¹⁰ Any answer to such a

⁸ 8. In what is here termed the ‘traditional’ view established by the influential King James translation, a comma is placed between the first clause [‘for the perfecting of the saints’] and the second [‘for the work of the ministry’], implying that the teaching ministers mentioned in v. 11 are doing the ‘work of the ministry’, rather than ‘equipping the saints *for the work of ministry*’, as in the dominant modern [‘revisionist’] translation tradition.

⁹ 9. Though not unprecedented, for the Tyndale version of 1534 seems to have anticipated this view.

¹⁰ 10. In a provocative 1977 article Stanley Gundry raised a similar question in relation to changing preferences in eschatologies during church history. ‘Time and again there seems to be a connection between eschatology and the Church’s perception of itself in its historical situation ... in many cases eschatologies [premillennial, postmillennial, amillennial] appear to have been sociologically conditioned. This suggests that factors other than purely exegetical and theological considerations have been more influential in the

question would, of course, require a more detailed examination of the linguistic and syntactical issues raised by the Greek text, and of the various arguments presented by the commentators.

EPH.4:12: THE COMMENTARY TRADITION

Over a century ago, in his 1857 commentary on the Greek text of Ephesians, Charles Hodge noted in relation to v. [4:12](#), 'Both the meaning of the words and the relation of the several clauses in this verse, are doubtful.'¹¹ These difficulties of translation have been reflected in the variety of renderings chosen by commentators since Hodge's time. After considering five different possibilities for understanding the syntactical relationship of the clauses [προς τον καταρτισμον ... εις εργον διακονιας ... εις οικοδομην ...], he chooses as 'perhaps the best' the rendering 'for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'.¹² In relation to this 'traditional' rendering, Hodge quotes with approval Calvin's comment that the apostle '... could not exalt more highly the ministry of the Word ... what higher work can there be than to build up the church that it may reach its perfection?'¹³ Both Calvin and Hodge, in their 'traditional' view, see the text as emphasizing the ministry of the *teachers* of the church, rather than the 'equipping' of the saints for 'every-member' ministry as in the 'revisionist' view.

The purpose of the following review of the commentary tradition is not to consider all the exegetical issues involved, but to focus on two of the critical issues: 1) the syntactical relationship of the three prepositional clauses, and 2) the translation of the term καταρτισμος, which appears only here in the New Testament.

In his 1897 commentary in the *International Critical Commentary* series, T.K. Abbot gives the sense of the text as 'With a view to the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ'.¹⁴ He notes that Chrysostom and the Authorized (King James) version take the three clauses as coordinate, and that the change in prepositions [προς ... εις ... εις] is not decisive against this, since such stylistic variety is characteristic of St. Paul. Nevertheless, he opts for a 'revisionist' rendering which subordinates the second clause to the first ['perfecting the saints *unto* the work of ministering'], since, in his view, if the three clauses were parallel, 'εργον διακονιας should certainly come first as the more indefinite and the mediate object'.¹⁵

J. Armitage Robinson, writing in 1904, also argued that the second clause should be taken as dependent on the first. He thinks that the absence of the definite articles, '... with the consequent compactness of the phrase, is strongly confirmatory of this view'. The

history of eschatology than we would care to admit.' Stanley N. Gundry, 'Hermeneutics or Zeitgeist as the Determining Factor in the History of Eschatologies?' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20:1 (1977), pp. 45-55 at p. 50.

¹¹ 11. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1994; 1857), p. 227.

¹² 12. *Ibid.*

¹³ 13. *Ibid.*, p. 230. For the citation from Calvin, see John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, tr. T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 181.

¹⁴ 14. T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), p. 119.

¹⁵ 15. *Ibid.*

meaning of the text is, accordingly, 'for the complete equipment of the saints for the work of service'.¹⁶

In his 1906 commentary B.F. Westcott also anticipated the 'revisionist' view that was to become the dominant view after the Second World War. The gifted individuals of [4:11](#) were given to the church '... with a view to the perfecting of the saints for a work ...' of ministry. Westcott appealed to the context of the passage in support of this view, 'in which special stress is laid upon the ministry of every part to the welfare of the whole'.¹⁷ He thinks that the change of prepositions [$\pi\rho\omicron\varsigma$... $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$... $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$] shows that the three clauses are not to be taken as coordinate. 'The responsible officers of the congregation work through the others, and find no rest till everyone fulfills his function'.¹⁸

William Hendrickson is one of many commentators who since the 1960s has adopted the 'revisionist' view. The apostles and prophets have been given for the purpose of perfecting or '*providing the necessary equipment* for all the saints for the work of ministering to each other'. During the week every member should be equipped to engage in a definite ministry, 'whether that be imparting comfort to the sick, teaching, neighbourhood evangelisation, tract distribution, or whatever the task for which one is especially equipped'.¹⁹

In recent years the most influential scholarly advocate of the 'revisionist' interpretation has been Markus Barth, author of the 1974 two-volume commentary on Ephesians in the Anchor Bible series. In a footnote Barth notes that the revisionist view has been promoted since about 1940 by the work of D.T. Niles and the World Council of Churches' Departments of the Laity and of Evangelism.²⁰ Barth engages in a vigorous polemic against the traditional view, which he designates as 'aristocratic-clerical', since he thinks that in this understanding laymen are '... ultimately only beneficiaries [of ministry], and ... the benefits of the clergy's work remain inside the church—though people and power outside the church may witness the clergy's successes and failures'.²¹ Barth thinks that the context and parallels of [4:12](#) support the revisionist interpretation: 1) the grace given to the saints in [4:7](#) is the same ministerial grace given to the apostle Paul; 2) in [4:7](#) all the saints are recipients of grace from on high; 3) in [1 Cor. 12:7, 18](#) the Spirit is given to every believer for the common good; and 4), there is but one calling or vocation in the church, the call of God into his kingdom.²² In summary, 'the task of the special ministers mentioned in [Eph. 4:11](#) is to be servants in that ministry which is entrusted to the whole church'.²³

To round out this survey of the revisionist interpretation, the comments of Leslie Mitton (1976) and Ronald Fung (1982) will be briefly noted. Adopting the now common

¹⁶ 16. J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: James Clarke, 1904), p. 182.

¹⁷ 17. Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 62.

¹⁸ 18. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁹ 19. William Hendriksen, *Ephesians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), p. 198. It might be noted that Hendriksen, while supporting the 'every-member' concept of ministry, still seems to understand this in terms of 'religious' activities, rather than 'marketplace' ministry or 'ministry in the workplace' as well.

²⁰ 20. Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), p. 479, n. 265.

²¹ 21. *Ibid.*, p. 479.

²² 22. *Ibid.*, p. 480.

²³ 23. *Ibid.*, p. 481.

reading ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry’, Mitton goes on to add that ‘*the work of ministry* is not something done by a special person in the Church so much as that for which all church members ... are being prepared’.²⁴ Taking a functional view of the text, he believes that ‘... the whole membership of the Church is to be prepared for service ... The emphasis is on what the members should be *doing*’ [emphasis in the original].²⁵

Ronald Fung takes the first εἰς as subordinate to πρὸς, and the second εἰς as dependent on the previous phrase together, so that the sense is ‘to equip God’s people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ’.²⁶ This rendering, he believes, does justice to the different prepositions in the Greek, to the emphasis in v. [11](#) on the ministers appointed by Christ, and to the corresponding emphasis on the part played by each believer (v. [16](#)) in the growth of the body of Christ.²⁷

This exegetical consensus in favour of the ‘revisionist’ interpretation has been challenged in recent years, however. In his 1988 article Henry Hamann argued that the popular translations that linked the first and second clauses, ‘equipping the saints *for* the work of ministry’, were not supported by careful lexical studies of the words καταρτιζω and καταρτισμος. According to Hamann, the lexicons show that the verbal force of these terms, with the exception of only a few instances, comes to an end in the direct accusative noun.²⁸ That is to say, ‘equipping of the saints’ would represent one complete thought, and ‘for the work of ministry’ would constitute a second complete thought not immediately dependent on the first—as understood by the King James translators.²⁹ Hamann went so far as to say that the popular translation was motivated by a ‘dogmatic position’ on the part of those ‘... who for one reason or another are anti-clerical [and] see here a convenient text to support their point of view’.³⁰

Perhaps the most forceful criticism of the revisionist interpretation is found in the 1990 commentary of Andrew Lincoln. He argues that the now popular view, often appealing to the change of prepositions from πρὸς to εἰς, cannot bear the weight of such an argument. No grammatical or linguistic grounds exist for making a specific link between the first and second clauses; the primary context here in v. [12](#) is the role and specific function of the ministers enumerated in v. [11](#), not ‘all the saints’. The change in prepositions is more likely to be simply a stylistic variation, for the stringing together of prepositional phrases, all dependent on the main verb and coordinated with one another

²⁴ 24. C. Leslie Mitton, *New Century Bible: Ephesians* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1976), p. 151.

²⁵ 25. *Ibid.*, p. 152. While it is true that every member should be prepared for the work of ministry, it will be argued later in this paper that the primary focus of the text is not so much functional as ‘doctrinal-ethical’, that is to say, that the apostle’s primary concern is not so much on what the believer is doing in ministry as on Christian faith and character—on what the believer is more so that what the believer does—though both of course are important.

²⁶ 26. Ronald Y.K. Fung, ‘The Nature of Ministry according to Paul’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982), pp. 129–146 at p. 141.

²⁷ 27. *Ibid.*

²⁸ 28. Hamann, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

²⁹ 29. The force of this argument seems to be weakened somewhat by the fact that in [2 Tim. 3:17](#) a related word, ἐξαρτιζω, is used with a prepositional phrase which is clearly dependent upon it: ‘that the man of God may be equipped for every good work’ (πρὸς παν εργον αγαθον εξηρτισμενος).

³⁰ 30. *Ibid.* It does not seem very plausible, however, to suppose that commentators such as Robinson, Westcott, and Hendrickson, who support the revisionist view, are ‘anti-clerical’ in their sentiments.

is characteristic of the writer's style (cf. [4:13](#), [4:14](#), [6:12](#), and [1:5, 6](#)).³¹ Although the building up of the body of the Christ involves all the members (v. [16](#)), in this context the ministers have a particularly significant role to play in it, inasmuch as the transmission and interpretation of the apostolic gospel is foundational for the growth and health of the church.³² Lincoln suspects that '... opting for the other [revisionist] view is too often motivated by a zeal to avoid clericalism and to support a "democratic" model of the church'.³³

This challenge to the revisionist interpretation has also been supported by T. David Gordon in his 1994 journal article on [Ephesians 4:12](#). Gordon argues that apart from clear indications to the contrary, it is most natural to assume that the three prepositional clauses all have the same subjects, namely the gifted ministers enumerated in [4:11](#). If in fact the apostle had intended to subordinate the thought of the second clause to the first, the most natural way to have done this would have been to omit the second and third prepositions and have two complementary infinitives joined by the copula, such that the text would have read *προς τον καταρτισμον τον αγιον εργειν τεν διακονιαν και οικοδομειν τεν σοματα του χριστου*.³⁴ But this is not in fact how the text actually reads, and this seems to be a strong argument against the revisionist reading. In *this context* the emphasis is not on the work of ministry carried out by the saints, but on that carried out by the gifted ones of v. [11](#): the ministry and service of the Word.³⁵

A SUGGESTED TRANSLATION AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In light of the foregoing discussion, the following is proposed as a translation of [4:11, 12](#):

¹¹And he gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets,
some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers,
¹²for bringing the saints to maturity, for the work of
ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

The rendering 'for bringing the saints to maturity' is chosen from the variety of possible lexical meanings of *καταρτισμος*³⁶ as the meaning that best fits the immediate context: 'building up the body of Christ' (v. [12](#)); 'to mature manhood' (v. [13](#)); 'the stature of the fullness of Christ' (v. [13](#)); 'that we may no longer be children' (v. [14](#)); 'we are to grow up in every way' (v. [15](#)); 'bodily growth' (v. [16](#)). The immediate context is filled with images of a body growing toward adult maturity—physical growth being a metaphor for the doctrinal and ethical maturation which is the apostle's chief concern.

The now dominant revisionist translation of '*equipping* the saints for the work of ministry' gives what could be called a 'functional-pragmatic' emphasis to what, in the judgment of this writer, should be recognized as the 'doctrinal-ethical' or

³¹ 31. Lincoln, op. cit., p. 253.

³² 32. Ibid., p. 255.

³³ 33. Ibid., p. 253.

³⁴ 34. Gordon, op. cit., p. 71.

³⁵ 35. In agreement with Lincoln; cf. notes 31–33 above.

³⁶ 36. In addition to the commentaries cited above, see the standard lexica such as Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 418; Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 910; Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 717.

characterological emphasis of the immediate text and the entire epistle.³⁷ The apostle's chief concern is not so much what the saints are *doing* as acts of ministry, though this is important, but rather what they *are* and are *becoming*, as those whose Christian faith and character reflect the character of Jesus Christ.

This emphasis on doctrinal-ethical formation or characterological concerns is evident not only in the immediate context of [4:13–16](#) as noted above, but also in the more remote context of the epistle as well. Believers were chosen before the foundation of the universe to be *holy and blameless* before God ([1:4](#)). In his prayers for the new believers, the emphasis of the apostle is on growth in wisdom and insight ([1:17](#)); the dwelling of Christ in the heart of the believer and the believer's deeper experience of the love of Christ ([3:17–19](#)); leading a life worthy of their calling ([4:1](#)); being imitators of God ([5:1](#)).

This is not to say that the revisionist 'equipping', 'every-member' ministry concept is without justification in the text, for the writer indeed states that grace for ministry is given to each one ([4:7](#)) and the body grows when *each part* is working properly ([4:16](#)). The concerns of 'marketplace ministries' are consistent with the eternal plan of God to finally bring all things in heaven and *on earth* into right relationship under the headship of Christ ([1:10](#)). The church as the body of Christ is the fullness of him who is to fill all things with his presence, power, and authority (cf. [1:23](#)). Believers are God's workmanship, created anew in Christ to do good works in church and society (cf. [2:10](#)).

Nevertheless, the point to made here is that the revisionist interpretation of [Ephesians 4:12](#) seems to make *primary* what is in fact a *secondary* emphasis in the text. While the concept of 'body life' or 'every-member' ministry is theologically true in the light of Pauline and New Testament teachings, in this text the focus is on the special teaching ministries of the ministers enumerated in [4:11](#) rather than the various ministries of all the saints. Hence the 'traditional' choice of punctuation of the three coordinate clauses was chosen in the translation above, reflecting the force of the grammatical and syntactical arguments presented by Lincoln and Gordon.

This article, then, attempts to suggest a synthesis of the scholarly concerns reflected in the history of the interpretation of this crucial Pauline ecclesiological text. It recognizes the modern movement to acknowledge the validity of a concept of ministry which calls every member of the body of Christ to ministry in the service of Christ—not only in the church, but in the marketplace and the world as well. There is, however, a danger of 'proving the right doctrines from the wrong texts', and obscuring the main point of the text, which is, in this case, held to be *characterological* and doctrinal-ethical in the first instance, rather than functional or pragmatic.

The primary calling of the Christian is to reflect the holy and blameless character of Jesus Christ—in the family, in the church, and in the workplace. In bringing the people of God to moral and spiritual maturity, the teaching ministries of the gifted ministers of the Word have a central and strategic significance. In our modern and postmodern social worlds, every-member ministry is vitally important, but the *formation of Christian character* is, as the text of [Ephesians 4:11, 12](#) reminds us, if anything more vital yet.

³⁷ 37. In a most interesting historical and sociological observation, David Wells has noted that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, most obituaries published in American newspapers mentioned the character of the deceased, while at the end of the century the emphasis was on the occupation of the person. He believes that this substitution of function for character in the understanding of the person is one of the characteristics of modernity: David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 11. Wells addresses the issues of the loss of character and virtue in the modern church in *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

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Collection in the Early Church

James Chacko

Keywords: Stewardship, worship, fellowship, unity, grace, temple tax, poor, almsgiving, Messiah, apostolic community;

INTRODUCTION

The Old and New Testaments place a great deal of emphasis on giving. In fact, there are more verses related to giving than any other subject on money. There are commands, practical suggestions, examples and exhortations concerning this facet of stewardship. Everywhere in the Bible covetousness and greed are condemned, and generosity and charity are encouraged. The saying of Jesus Christ is quoted in [Acts 20:35](#), 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

The specific campaign that Paul led to collect funds to relieve the poverty of the Jerusalem church is commonly called 'collection for the saints'. On the surface the general notion of the collection is quite simple, but the question of Paul's purpose raises some complex issues.

In today's church hardly any worship service take place without a collection of money. This seems to have been implicit even in the early church. Justin Martyr from the middle of the second century remarks that 'each member who is well-to-do and willing gives as he pleases, and the amount is deposited with the presiding minister'.¹ Later John Wesley said: 'Earn all you can; save all you can; give all you can.'²; each of these reflects the attitude towards stewardship of finance within the church at the time. Similarly based on the biblical teaching, churches today place emphasis on teaching their members to give for the work of God. But it cannot be regarded as an essential ingredient of Christian worship.

In this paper I do not intend to deal with the Old Testament data which relate to 'tithes and offerings' in the Levitical, monarchial and post-exilic periods of the nation's history,

¹ 1. Quoted by Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 80.

² 2. Quoted by Boyd M. McKeown, *Stewardship in Methodism* (New York: The Methodist Publishing House, n.d.), p. 26.

or the cultural and historical background of the New Testament allusions to money.³ However, we will briefly study the collection from a Pauline perspective. A study of the Pauline collection involves not only portions of all four of Paul's major epistles, but also considerable segments of Acts and its background. Then, we need to study the places and people involved in the project. Finally, an attempt will be made to assess the theological significance and the impact which collection had on the later life of the church.

TERMINOLOGY OF 'COLLECTION'

Paul calls the collection a 'fellowship' (κοινωνια, [Rom. 15:26](#)), 'service' (διακονια, [Rom. 15:25, 31](#); [2 Cor. 8:20](#); [9:1, 12, 13](#)), 'gift' (χαρις, [1 Cor. 16:3](#); [2 Cor. 8:6, 7, 19](#)), 'generous gift' (ευλογια, [2 Cor. 9:5](#)), 'collection' (λογεια, [1 Cor. 6:1](#)), 'liberal gift' (αδροπες, [2 Cor. 8:20](#)) 'grace' (χαρις, [2 Cor. 8:9](#)) and 'service that you perform' (η διακονια της [2 Cor. 9:12](#)). [2 Cor. 8:4](#) uses three terms at once: 'they urgently pleaded with us for the *privilege* (χαρις) of *sharing* in this *service* to the saints'.⁴

THE BACKGROUND OF COLLECTION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Within the sphere of Judaism contemporary with the early church, several contributory practices were prevalent which were directly in the background of Paul's collection. Paul appropriated certain aspects from these practices that are discernible in the external elements of the collection. There is also revealed a striking correlation in the underlying symbolic significance. However, Paul borrowed most heavily for the organization of his collection from the Jewish Temple tax. This is evident both in the external elements and in the symbolic significance which that tax bore for dispersed Judaism. It was because the symbolism of the Temple tax corresponded so precisely with the hopes for the unity of the church with which Paul had invested his project that he was led to borrow and use so many other aspects of that tax.⁵

Acts chapter [21](#) tells of Paul's last journey to Jerusalem and his reception there. Most strikingly, Luke says nothing of the *collection* which Paul had been making for the church in Jerusalem. Even in [Acts 24:17](#) the word 'collection' is avoided, and without Paul's letters we would hardly recognize the allusion here—indeed the allusion in [Acts 21:26](#) may be only to his act of piety. Yet Paul was most anxious that the churches of his Gentile converts should send contributions to the mother church in Jerusalem ([Rom. 15:25-32](#); [1 Cor. 16:1-4](#); [2 Cor. 8-9](#)). Luke does mention seven delegates from the churches ([Acts 20:4f.](#)), but he fails to mention why they travelled with Paul—namely, to deliver the collection. This was obviously Paul's chief concern in going to Jerusalem, but Luke fails to mention

³ 3. For this study, see 'Money' in J.D. Douglas (ed.), [NBD](#) (London, 1962) and F.W. Madden, *Coins of the Jews* (London, 1881). For a detailed study of the New Testament teaching concerning money, see Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, pp. 80-86.

⁴ 4. S. McKnight, 'Collection for the Saints', in Hawthorne, G.F., Martin, P.R., & Reid, D.G. (eds.), [Dictionary of Paul and His Letters](#), (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993), p. 143.

⁵ 5. For a detailed study of the analogies to Paul's collection in contemporary Judaism including the Qumran community see Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul's Strategy* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 74 & 99.

that too. Paul apparently feared that the Jerusalem church might refuse to accept the collection ([Rom. 15:30f.](#)).⁶

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul he gives directions on how the money is to be collected ([16:1-4](#)); in his second epistle two chapters are devoted to exhorting them to liberality (chaps. [8](#) and [9](#)). Writing to the Philippians he compliments them on their financial aid ([4:15f](#)). Finally, in Acts, at his trial before Felix, Paul is represented as saying that the purpose of his visit to Jerusalem, during which he was arrested, was to bring alms and offerings ([24:17](#); cf. [11:29](#)).

PLACES AND PEOPLE INVOLVED IN PAUL'S COLLECTION

From both the book of Acts and Paul's letters we can discern the magnitude of Paul's campaign. It seems that Paul was able to derive both funds and sponsors from all his churches. Thus he had the following funds or people representing his missionary efforts:

From the Galatian region ([1 Cor. 16:1](#)) we hear of Derbe ([Acts 20:4](#)) and Lystra ([Acts 20:4](#)); from Macedonia ([2 Cor. 8:1-5](#); [9:2, 4](#)) we hear of Berea ([Acts 20:4](#)), Thessalonica ([Acts 20:4](#)) and Philippi (cf. [Acts 16:16](#); [20:6](#)); from Achaia we hear of Corinth ([Rom. 15:26](#); [1 Cor. 16:1-4](#)); from Mysia and Lydia we hear of Ephesus ([Acts 20:4](#)) and perhaps Troas ([Acts 20:5-6](#)); it is possible that funds came from Tyre ([Acts 21:3-4](#)), Ptolemais ([Acts 21:7](#)), and from both Cyprus and Caesarea ([Acts 21:16](#)). It is even possible that funds were collected from Rome (cf. [Rom. 12:13](#); [15:26](#) with [2 Cor. 8:4](#); [9:13](#); and [Rom. 1:13](#) with [2 Cor. 9:6-10](#)). It is very difficult to believe that there was any similar project at that time in the northern Mediterranean to Paul's collection for the saints.⁷ Hurtado detects an allusion to the collection in [Gal. 6:6-10](#).⁸

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COLLECTION

Scholars have debated vigorously the precise purpose of Paul's campaign to collect funds for the saints in Jerusalem. The traditional viewpoint, for example, has been that Paul wanted to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem (cf. [Gal. 6:10](#)) as a demonstration of the love of God that the Gentiles had found in Christ ([2 Cor. 8:8-9, 19](#); [9:12-15](#)).⁹ Paul believed that concern for the poor was a direct and necessary expression of the Christian faith.

There are a few that contend that the collection itself was seen as almsgiving on the part of the Diaspora Gentile church and, as such, was seen as a substitute action for their sacrifices and circumcision ([Sir. 29:12](#); [40:24](#); [Tob. 4:10-11](#); [12:9](#); [14:11](#); [Acts 10:2, 35](#)).¹⁰

Another purpose observed is the concern of Paul for Israel's unbelief in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Paul believed that the salvation of the Gentiles would result in the conversion of Israel ([Rom. 11:11-24](#); cf. [11:9-11](#)). Some scholars assert that the collection fits into this scheme: the presentation by Paul and his retinue of Gentile sponsors of the funds to the Jerusalem churches would provoke the nation of Israel to believe in the Messiah, for they would see in that act the fulfilment of the promise that the Gentiles would bring gifts

⁶ 6. James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 2nd edn. (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 256-257.

⁷ 7. Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection*, p. 68,69.

⁸ 8. L.W. Hurtado, 'The Jerusalem Collection and the Book of Galatians', *JSNT* Vol.5 (1979), pp. 46-62.

⁹ 9. S. McKnight, *Dictionary of Paul*, p. 145.

¹⁰ 10. *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 146.

to Zion ([Is. 2:2-4](#); [60:6-7](#), [11](#); [Mic. 4:13](#)) and the eschatological pilgrimage of the Gentile Christians to Jerusalem. Thus the collection was for Paul an eschatological provocation of Israel; by it he hoped to convert Israel to faith in the Messiah.¹¹

The most remarkable feature of these accounts is that Paul twice refers to the collection as the *κοινωνία*, which is usually to be translated as *fellowship*. In [2 Cor. 9:13](#) he speaks of *the liberality of your κοινωνία* which the Revised Version (RV) renders *contribution*, and in [Rom. 15:26](#) he states that the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia have been good enough *to make a certain κοινωνία*, (RV—contribution) *for the poor*.¹²

Convinced that the gospel was for all mankind and that the Good News involved the message of the new creation whereby the disharmony and disunity of the old was gathered up into a new unity in Christ, Paul fought a good fight for the inclusion of the Gentiles within the scope of the gospel. The collection was a visible demonstration of the truth for which he was struggling. That the Gentile churches should contribute for the poor at Jerusalem was proof positive of the actuality of the *κοινωνία*, that Jew and Gentile were one in Christ. Paul was motivated to demonstrate to Jerusalem that, just as there was one Lord and one gospel, so there was one church.¹³ So writing to the Romans, he can say that the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia have made *a certain κοινωνία* for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem ([15:26](#)).

In Philippians he returns to the subject again. They have had fellowship with him in his afflictions; they have also had fellowship with him *in the matter of giving and receiving*. But these gifts redound to their benefit for they are the expression of the sacrificial life which they share with Christ, and so they will be replenished from the divine riches which are in Christ ([4:14-19](#)). Therefore, generous giving enriches the giver. So the collection is to be understood as an aspect of the self-giving which was revealed by Christ in the pattern of his life and which is to be embodied by the church in mission. Here we touch the Christological level, which is made patent in 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians chapters [8](#) and [9](#), Paul not only calls the contribution *κοινωνία* but also *χαρις* (grace). Since Christ himself was the supreme actualization of grace, to give the same title to the collection is to intimate that it is all-of-a-piece with Christ's saving act. The identity of life between Christ and his members, which characterizes the *κοινωνία*, means that the giving of money is an expression of his own self-giving ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)). This is not just an illustration of the need for charity but the very foundation of the *κοινωνία* of giving. Our response in gratitude to his self-impoverishment must be self-giving, for giving to others is giving to Christ who gave himself for us. Thus reciprocity between God and his people issues in reciprocity between people themselves—vertical and horizontal are bound together. Christians must therefore give with liberality, with simplicity, without ulterior motive, without thought of self ([2 Cor. 8:2](#)), having first given themselves to God in complete surrender to his will ([2 Cor. 8:5](#)). This ministry (*διακονία*) is an essential element of *κοινωνία*.

But the *κοινωνία* is an apostolic community, charged to participate in mission through Christ and the Holy Spirit. This mission involves not only the preaching of the Word, but also the witness of the life of the *κοινωνία*, which is or should be an embodiment of the

¹¹ 11. Ibid., p. 146.

¹² 12. Paul speaks of money from the Greek point of view. Logically money is money, but to a Hebrew of the Hebrews like Paul it is associated with an end that transcends it. It is not a question of what the money is as such but what it becomes in relation to its final reference, and that reference is to the building up of ἐπιβουλῆ.

¹³ 13. S. McKnight, *Dictionary of Paul*, p. 145.

gospel it is called to proclaim. *κοινωνία* is therefore essentially related to mission and mission to *κοινωνία*—but so also is *διακονία*.

We understand this relatedness from the study of Jesus' own ministry. Modern New Testament scholarship refuses to draw a sharp dividing line between Jesus the healer and Jesus the teacher; his healing miracles were as much a proclamation of the gospel as the words that he uttered. But his miracles were directed towards people in their totality, in their actual situations. *διακονία* has precisely this aim, and is equally a preaching of the gospel. Hence *κοινωνία*, *διακονία* and mission are but different aspects of the same reality, and the collection of money, at a service, acts as a focal point for the understanding of this unity. The understanding of the collection in terms of mission is therefore basic to its meaning as expounded by Paul.¹⁴

Therefore, scholars have recognized that Paul's collection was motivated by more than providing aid for the poor, though that would have been motivation enough. McKnight affirms that we will be 'probably on the firmest ground if we recognize that Paul might have had more than one purpose in conducting the collection for the saints'.¹⁵

THE IMPACT OF THE COLLECTION

Neither Luke nor Paul tells of the results of the offering of the collection. However, Luke records the trip and the period during which the collection was handed over to the leaders. It seems that the collection was received with profound gratitude. [Acts 21:17–26](#) speaks of the church receiving them 'warmly'.

The combination of the quotations in [2 Cor. 9:10a](#) (cf. [Isa. 55:10](#)) and [2 Cor. 9:10b](#) (cf. [Hos. 10:12](#)) exactly corresponds to Paul's conviction that the effectiveness of the Word of God among the Gentiles was of instrumental significance for the conversion of Israel. However, some scholars argue that the collection did not accomplish its purposes. The saints remained poor, the act of charity notwithstanding; the tension between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians continued; and the conversion of Israel never took place.¹⁶

Nickle, however, suggests that 'it had the desired effect of promoting a reconciliation which resulted in the formulation of the "Apostolic Decrees"¹⁷ as a guide for the maintenance of mixed fellowship at the liturgical meals of the community'.¹⁸ He further suggests that the impact of the collection on the later life of the church was immensely fruitful. Over the years Christians have turned to Paul again and again in guilt because of their disunity. They have found great hope in Pauline principles that once again the true nature of the one body of Christ may be manifested in the visible church. Thus, Paul's teachings are essential for the unity of the Body of Christ.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

¹⁴ 14. J.G. Davis, *Worship and Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 135–139.

¹⁵ 15. S. McKnight, *Dictionary of Paul*, p.146.

¹⁶ 16. *Ibid.*

¹⁷ 17. Nickle maintains that the 'Decrees' listed in [Acts 15](#) were first decided upon by Paul and the Jerusalem church only at the later meeting in [Acts 21](#) when Paul delivered his collection.

¹⁸ 18. Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection*, p. 73.

¹⁹ 19. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

It is evident that Paul devoted a considerable amount of thought, time, and energy to fund raising. If the events which resulted in the launching of this project are taken into account, the time involved spanned the entire period of his known public ministry from Antioch to Rome. In fact, several have observed that the collection was the culminating act of Paul's apostolic ministry. Paul describes the collection as the 'fruit' and 'seal' of his ministry as he now prepares for a wider ministry to Spain ([Rom. 15:23-24, 28](#)). We may assume from this that the collection and its successful presentation in Jerusalem were together to be the crowning jewel of the first phase of his apostolic ministry (in fact, the only phase he actually completed!).

It is also evident from this paper that Paul's collection was not directly related to the worship of the early church. It was instigated to help provide the funds necessary to care for the poor ([Gal. 2:10](#)). In so far as the Jerusalem community continued to distribute succour at the time of the common meals ([Acts 2:44ff.; 6:1ff.](#)) which was accompanied by liturgical elements, his collection could be regarded as correlation to formal Christian worship. In his organization of the collection Paul recommended that money be set aside on the 'first day of the week' ([1 Cor. 16:2](#)), certainly a liturgical reference; but it was to be done at home and not during worship.

Our response to collection for the poor must be the direct and necessary expression of the Christian faith. For Paul, concern for the poor was one of the expressions of fellowship in Christ. If giving is merely to a church, a ministry or to a needy person, it is only charity. But if it is to the Lord, it becomes an expression of our faith. Christian charity today must be motivated not by sympathy or self-righteousness but by the love and concern for the poor portrayed in the ministry of Jesus. Giving with a proper attitude is very crucial ([1 Cor. 13:3](#)). The Lord has set the example of giving motivated by love ([Jn. 3:16](#)). According to Paul, giving is incumbent on each person. 'Let each one of you ...' ([1 Cor. 16:2](#)). It is the privilege and responsibility of every Christian, young and old, rich and poor. It is a personal matter in which every believer sustains a direct and individual responsibility to the Lord. Giving should be a deliberate, premeditated act. The supreme example of premeditated giving was set by our Saviour, 'who for the joy set before him endured the cross' ([Heb. 12:2](#)). Indeed, his sacrifice is a reminder that giving is at the very heart of the Christian faith. I believe it is time for us to recapture a Pauline theology of collection as a significant factor for the restoration of the unity of the church.

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and

Baptism and the Unity of the Church

edited by Michael Root and Risto Saarinen

Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans,

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no index

Reviewed by David Parker

Kevin Roy addresses the problem created by differing views of baptism within the church by presenting a practical model for achieving unity which involves freedom of conscience, 'mutual respect for different convictions' and diversity of practice within a united fellowship. Although he does not claim any originality for this proposal, he believes he has made progress by providing 'a reasoned theological basis for its acceptance and implementation'.

After a brief summary of the historical development of baptism, he analyses the three main options (Catholic, Reformed and Baptist) with a helpful emphasis on their common elements, biblical and historical strengths and positive contributions, rather than their differences and defensive positions. He also reviews the classic discussions of Jeremias and Aland regarding the history of infant baptism in the early church, concluding that the

indecisive nature of these discussions points to the need for an alternate theory. He offers such a theory, drawing attention to such factors as reasons for the delay of baptism, the effect of the elaboration of the rite, the development of ritual efficacy and the complex cultural factors involved in the adoption of baptismal practices.

More importantly, however, he argues that the diversity of early church practice means that it is true that '*all* contemporary forms of baptismal practices are a development of the apostolic baptism of the New Testament, and that no church today can claim to be administering baptism "as the apostles did in the New Testament". ' By the same line of argument, it is also true that 'we are all right, or partially right at least, insofar as every contemporary baptismal practice preserves some vital aspect of New Testament baptism'. This provides Roy with a theoretical basis for an 'authentic dialogue toward reconciliation and unity'.

On a practical level, therefore, Roy proposes that instead of an adversarial or trench warfare approach to church relations, it is better to adopt a convergence model which makes room for 'other truth convictions' and results in churches 'growing together' rather than defensively reinforcing their own positions. Such a procedure, he suggests, could be followed in Baptist churches if the common practice of open communion were expanded to open membership, in which infant baptism would be accepted as a legitimate form of baptism even if it was thought defective in some respects. He has similar concrete suggestions for other traditions. Roy also appeals to several reports advocating a consensus model, and presents extensive case studies of church situations in his own area where practices of this kind can be found as further evidence of the viability of his 'practical, necessary and dynamic' model. This kind of approach is undergirded by appealing to the concept of a 'hierarchy of Truths', where there is unity on primary matters, but diversity and freedom of conscience permitted for those on secondary and lower levels.

Roy, a Baptist from South Africa with a mixed denominational background, argues passionately for his case, which involves both theoretical and practical considerations. In the process he draws attention to some important and often neglected matters and offers valuable insights and interpretations. However, while he is conscious of the danger that his approach may be seen as a liberal compromise leading to a 'spineless Christianity' or that baptism may be trivialized, it may be questioned whether he has avoided the problems or substantiated his proposals sufficiently.

For example, not every one would agree that baptism can be relegated to a second level on a 'hierarchy of Truths' because for both sacramental and gathered church believers, baptism is so closely related to what it means to be a Christian and their understanding of the nature of church and of 'sacraments'—issues which are not considered fully enough in this book.

From the historical angle, the value of Roy's appeal to the early church may be questioned because he provides no theological reconciliation for the diversity that existed; in fact, he refers to a 'theological stalemate' and in consequence calls for a 'theological truce' on the issue today. This he hopes would allow for acceptance of different practices within the church, with baptism (whatever its form) being regarded simply as the normal means of entry into the Christian life. But this is possible only if the significance of baptism is simplified to minimal levels.

Perhaps Roy's deepest convictions about baptism, the divisions it causes and its 'non-necessity' (recognized in the extreme by all parties), could be best explored by a theme he mentions only briefly—its 'diaconal nature'. By referring to baptism as being given by God as 'a servant to the church, to promote the salvation, well-being and unity of God's people, and to be used as such with freedom of conscience' he is putting forward an idea

that holds promise of appealing to both Baptists and Paedobaptists which would involve interpreting baptism as a sacrament or symbol of faith.

Some of the important and complex aspects of baptism in an ecumenical context overlooked by Roy are given full coverage in *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*—a series of papers associated with a consultation held in Hvittorp, Finland, in October 1996. It consists of an initial study paper on the topic, followed by responses from various denominations discussing the foundations of communion, the New Testament data, the content of ecumenical dialogues, rites of initiation, problems of mutual acceptance and the complexities of church life. Much of the material presents detailed surveys of relevant discussions and is aimed to air questions and issues rather than promote definitive solutions. But two of the papers in particular relate more directly to Roy's proposals.

The first of them is James D.G. Dunn's 'Baptism and the Unity of the Church in the New Testament', which builds on his earlier work, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (SCM, 1970). While he agrees that the 'exegetical basis for a "high" view of baptism is quite strong', he also warns against the 'danger of too narrow a focus on baptism'. He questions whether we are 'too quickly imposing rich sacramental theology upon texts which speak only of the water rite' and points out that a 'theology of baptism which hopes to function as a unifying factor among churches which honor the biblical canon as a norm also needs to observe the relative weight and emphasis which the NT writers placed on the different elements in conversion-initiation'. In particular, he shows that the NT typically places emphasis on 'the centrality and sovereignty of the Spirit' and 'its correlative of faith', and therefore argues with Peter in [Acts 10:47](#), 'not *from* baptism, but from the evident work of the Spirit *to* baptism'. This observation has the merit of placing primary emphasis on the fact that 'the Spirit is to be seen as the defining mark of the Christian' ([Rom. 8:29](#)) and that the external rite of baptism plays a secondary role.

S. Mark Heim's presentation of 'Baptismal Recognition and the Baptist Churches' takes up analogous points, which are under-emphasized by Roy—the relation of baptism to the nature of the church and the importance of seeing baptism (and unity) as part of a larger complex of events. He points out that for Baptists the theology of conversion and the church are more fundamental than baptism: 'Baptists object more strongly to an ecclesiology based on infant baptism than they do to infant baptism.' Thus the key question in any scheme for mutual recognition of baptism is 'what are the implications of such recognition for the nature of the church?'

Furthermore the gathered church theology of Baptists means that they cannot agree that baptism by itself is a complete, valid and sufficient condition of entry into the church, thus making recognition of baptism *per se* without an accompanying confession of faith an achievement of limited value or significance. Thus he entertains the possibility that infant baptism followed by a profession of personal faith and commitment might be acceptable to Baptists as valid baptism in an ecumenical setting, even if it were not the norm for Baptist churches themselves.

Baptism and the Unity of Church is more comprehensive and ecumenically aware than Roy's *Baptism, Reconciliation and Unity*, although for this reason, it is also less conclusive. Yet Dunn's emphasis on the work of the Spirit as the referent of baptism would provide a positive element Roy could use to de-mystify the practice of baptism and effect the 'theological truce' he advocates. Heim offers the same kind of support when he places baptism in the larger context of 'full Christian initiation', a procedure which enables him to find a bridge between the two positions by pointing to the role of personal faith in each tradition.

As they stand, Roy's proposals may not be fully satisfactory, but the contributions of Dunn and Heim can both be seen as potentially useful examples of his plea for emphasis

on common strengths as a way of overcoming the disunity over baptism.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF THE LORD: AN OLD TESTAMENT SPIRITUALITY

by Deryck Sheriffs

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996 xiv + 363 pp. Paper

ISBN 0-85364-646-5

Reviewed by Henry Rowold

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Distinct from a theology, a religion, or an ethics of the Old Testament, yet related to and overlapping with them all, is a spirituality of the Old Testament, a study of the walk of faith as expressed in and commended by the Old Testament.

The title of the book, drawn from [Psalm 25:14](#), is Sheriffs' point of entry. After an opening chapter which develops both this theme and his topical and methodological parameters, Sheriffs moves at a measured pace through major traditions of the Old Testament: three Genesis prototypes of walking with God (Enoch, Noah, Abraham), life journey (Exodus), integrated faith (Deuteronomy), reflection and meditation (selected psalms), wisdom for life (Proverbs), facing mundane reality (Qoheleth), confronting God (Job and Jeremiah), guilt and restoration ([Psalms 32](#), [38](#), [51](#)), the daily rhythm of life (wisdom and psalms), times and seasons (festivals and sabbath).

In each of these sections, Sheriffs, a South African, teaching at London Bible College, introduces material from the Ancient Near East to give conceptual context and to highlight distinctive emphases of the faith of the Old Testament. He also selects representative pericopes, and provides very insightful commentary, characterized by exegetical integrity, theological probity, ethical application, and meditative musing. He is very concerned, for instance, to give voice to a holistic, positive, evangelical, even if sometimes inconspicuous spirituality, as opposed to 'spurious Christian spiritualities' which appear in various forms: truncated or legalistic pieties built often on overzealous guilt, western fixations on private, if sometimes ostentatious spirituality. As Sheriffs moves reflectively through the wide expanse of the Old Testament, he addresses a host of contemporary issues and concerns. Particularly appreciated is his pastoral reminder about the reality of a 'spirituality of the gap', i.e., the need to live between the assurance of the 'already' of redemption and the uncertainty of the 'not yet' in which we do not have full answers.

Another bonus of the book is the array of footnotes, often as rewarding as the text itself, as well as the bibliography appended to each section, both of which point the reader to a rich fare of supplementary resources, both theological and non-theological. One wishes, especially in this age of computerized printing, that an index of both topics and Scripture passages had been made available.

Sheriff does not pretend to be exhaustive. A glance above at the contents shows that some portions of Scripture are simply not referred to. In some cases, this is easily understandable, e.g. the historical writings or the prophets. One wonders if there isn't more to the legal traditions that could be incorporated, however, or whether the marginal pieces of Ruth, Esther, or Song of Songs don't have unique perspectives as well.

To ask for more is not meant as a criticism, but as a way of underscoring how rewarding this book is, and how many thoughts and avenues for further study it triggered in this reader's mind. What a rich resource this book could be for a study group, whether pursuing spirituality or the Old Testament. It assumes a biblically literate reader, though it does relegate technical matters to the footnotes. Sheriffs has contributed greatly to the theology, ministry, and spirituality of the church.

ONE BIBLE, MANY VOICES: DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO BIBLICAL STUDIES

by Susan E. Gillingham

London: SPCK, 1998 280 pp.,

pb bibliog., indices, illus

ISBN 0-281-04886-X

Reviewed by Stephen Raison

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Gillingham has written this book as an introduction to the study of the Bible as an academic discipline. Thus, it is designed for 'upper-sixth formers, first- and second-year undergraduates, and adult students coming later in life to read theology' (p. xv). Furthermore, the book is written for those to whom study of the Bible is a new discipline and it is said to be written without confessional bias. A high priority of the author is to demonstrate the desirability of adopting a pluralistic approach to biblical studies. By 'pluralistic,' Gillingham means a 'more integrative and interdependent [approach], so that the deficiencies of one approach could be complemented by the strengths of another' (p. 4).

In the first section, 'Plurality in the Making of the Bible', Gillingham describes the development of the Bible as text, Scripture and canon. An overriding theme of these chapters is 'diversity': in the authorship and theology of the biblical books, in the theologies of the biblical authors, in the definitions of the canon and in the actual text of the Bible in use over the centuries.

The second section of the book, 'Plurality in the Reading of the Bible', describes and then illustrates the diversity of approaches to the interpretation of the Bible.

Three approaches to biblical studies are identified: theological, historical and literary. In 'Theological approaches to the Bible', Gillingham surveys various approaches to understanding the Bible in both Jewish and Christian traditions. Under 'Jewish Tradition', we find an overview which includes the various ancient versions of the OT and its interpretation into the medieval period. The survey of the 'Christian Tradition' extends from the NT to contemporary Liberation and Feminist Theologies. In 'Historical Approaches to the Bible', Gillingham discusses the issues raised by historical criticism and describes the various diachronic methods with an emphasis on their limitations and goals. In 'Literary Approaches to the Bible,' the synchronic approaches are reviewed including 'Narrative and Poetic', 'Structuralist', 'Rhetorical' and 'Reader-Response' criticisms. Gillingham then demonstrates how these methods treat the Psalter and [Psalm 8](#).

The conclusion cautions the reader against adopting one approach to the Bible's interpretation to the exclusion of other approaches.

There are many praiseworthy features of this work. Gillingham expresses herself clearly and effectively utilizes tables and illustrations. Complex material is masterfully simplified and an enormous range of topics is treated succinctly. The use of the Psalter to illustrate the various approaches is effective and well set out. One final plus is that Gillingham situates her book within contemporary scholarly discussion by reference to practitioners of the different methods. I do not doubt that a thoughtful use of this book in the classroom would lead students to gain an excellent overall grasp of the various approaches to biblical studies without being overloaded with detail.

Some concerns, however, should be registered. Firstly, on occasion Gillingham seems to confound philosophical pluralism with methodological eclecticism. Though compatible they represent quite different stances. The former can embrace logically incompatible approaches whereas the latter can restrict itself to a group of approaches which have in

common convictions valued by the interpreter. For instance, Gillingham presents the variety of historical approaches as though such variety pushes the interpreter to philosophical pluralism—an unnecessary conclusion.

Secondly, the descriptions of the various approaches seem designed to serve the thesis. For instance, at one point, historical and literary approaches are contrasted thus: 'In historical criticism, the dialogue is within the text throughout its past history. In literary criticism, the dialogue is with the text with the present concerns of the reader foremost in mind' (p. 173). The last clause does not do justice to those literary approaches which are not governed by reader-response concerns.

Thirdly, the concluding chapter is disappointing. The wording leaves the reader somewhat uncertain as to what response to the book's material is appropriate: 'But it also leaves us with a sense that we should be as critical of pluralism *per se* as we should be critical of any exclusivist approach which assumes that it alone has the key control' (p. 247). Perhaps I hoped for too much in the final chapter of an introductory text, but it appears to undermine the attempt at integration of the approaches in the discussion of [Psalm 8](#).

This book should prove useful as a resource for introducing students to biblical studies within non-confessional contexts. However, lecturers who work within institutions with confessional commitments may find its pluralist stance too distracting.

THE ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS IN AFRICA: ITS HISTORY, ORGANIZATION, MEMBERS, PROJECTS, EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND MESSAGE

by Christina Maria

Breman. Boekencentrum, Box 29, 2700 AA, Zoetermeer, Netherlands, 1996. 602 pp.

Reviewed by W. Harold Fuller

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Any evangelical association would be blessed to have a researcher like Christina Maria Breman write its history. Dr. Breman applies Dutch thoroughness, theological insight, and personal missiological experience to this definitive treatment of one of the world's most dynamic evangelical alliances: the Association of Evangelicals in Africa.

Originally the author's doctoral dissertation, this volume records the growth of the association from an *ad hoc* conference held in Kenya in 1966, sponsored by the Africa Evangelical Office, a joint project of EFMA and IFMA. A Swazi participant moved for the formation of a continentwide association, and AEA was born.

Breman traces the development of AEA, which now embraces 34 national fellowships representing some 50 million evangelicals. She highlights the foci of six general assemblies, the development of departments and commissions, and relationships with other bodies. Extensive appendices list bibliographies and other data.

This meticulous work does not pretend to explain the whole context. Whereas quoted ecumenical sources could give the impression that AEA was a new intruder, Africa's evangelicals were actually seeking to preserve their longstanding biblical expression of Christianity. In the first half of this century, most Protestant Africans tended to be evangelical, even if their founding denominations in Europe and North America were becoming liberal. As African theologians were trained in liberal seminaries overseas, imported liberal theology became the intruder, increasingly affecting the churches.

The reader could also gain the impression that AEA was an imposed American idea. However, many groups affiliated with AEA were founded by Europeans. After World War II, North American missionaries became far more numerous (p.15). Their umbrella

agencies, EFMA and IFMA, took the initiative in sponsoring the Africa Evangelical Office. One vocal British evangelical (not typical of British missionaries) reacted to what he saw as ‘American’ intrusion. Breman records how AEA’s president answered this charge and how AEA developed strong African ‘ownership’.

In the foreword, Dr. Tokunbo congratulates Dr. Breman ‘on a work well done’. He adds that a book capturing ‘the dynamic aspect of AEA’s story’ still needs to be written. Whoever does that will find Breman’s scholarly research foundational.

JOHN STOTT: THE MAKING OF A LEADER

by Timothy Dudley-Smith

Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999

ISBN 0-85111-757-0 Hb 513pp index illus

Reviewed by David Parker

John Stott’s friend and colleague, Timothy Dudley-Smith, a retired bishop of the Church of England, perhaps best known for his hymn-writing, has given us over 500 pages on the life and times of this foremost evangelical leader. However, it covers only the first forty years of his subject’s life—up to the end of the 1950s—with occasional forward flashes! Admittedly, the author does explain in his lengthy introduction that he wants to supply detailed information about his subject and let his readers come to their own judgment about the events and people described. While some of this material could well have been trimmed without loss (e.g., the last chapter about the use of his retreat home in Wales), yet often the background it provides does enrich the texture of the book and creates interest for those who are familiar with the context (and those who would like to be).

The story is told in appreciative terms from John Stott’s early childhood in the home of his medical father in Harley Street through to the end of the first decade of his ministry as rector of All Souls, Langham Place, London where he had already served as curate for five years. In the process it covers his education at a prep school in Gloucestershire and then at the elite Rugby School; it continues as he read Modern Languages at Trinity College, Cambridge, and finally undertook theological training in preparation for ordination at Ridley Hall.

Even from his school days his outstanding intellectual and leadership capabilities were apparent, as was his famous hobby of bird watching. The importance of his relationship with Scripture Union worker and former school chaplain, Rev. Eric ‘Bash’ Nash, and his involvement in a house-party ministry amongst public schoolboys for the development of his Christian life and ministry gifts is made obvious.

Although as a boy Stott lived very close to the church he would later serve for all of his ministerial life, and had several godly influences on his young life, his conversion was by no means a foregone conclusion. His call to the ministry was even more problematic, coming as it did during the Second World War when it was in danger of being confused with his growing commitment to ‘instinctive pacifism’. These two developments not only created complications for him as he sought direction for his life, but they also caused a long lasting rift with his father who served as a medical officer in both Wars and had no commitment to an evangelical faith.

Besides depicting these highly significant personal and family issues, this well illustrated and fully indexed biography gives a clear and forceful portrayal of Stott’s rapid growth as a leader (and shaper) of evangelicalism in the Church of England, and his outstanding work with students. Readers are taken from his first fledgling steps as a speaker at school Christian fellowships through his earliest university missions at Cambridge, London, Oxford and Durham to his involvement with Billy Graham in his

crusades. They can then follow his own highly successful extended tours of North America, Australia and South Africa where the beginnings of his vast international ministry were becoming apparent. Stott's early contacts with the World Evangelical Fellowship are also described, especially his role in coining the statement of goals, based on Philippians chapter 1: the furtherance of the gospel, the defence and confirmation of the gospel, and fellowship in the gospel.

On the way there are detailed treatments of the Fundamentalist controversy in the UK in the mid 1950s, his outstanding abilities as an expository preacher and the development of an imaginative scheme of parish evangelism (based on guest services with extensive lay involvement, systematic follow-up and discipleship and worker training) which was followed in many other places. It vividly portrays his initial five year curacy at All Souls and the extension of his responsibilities in post-war London as he became rector in 1950 of this busy parish which encompassed a surprisingly wide range of ministries—to the medical world of Harley Street, students, tourists, a chaplaincy to the large Oxford Street department stores, and to those at the lower end of the social scale. The vast influence of the church in supporting missionary work in many parts of the world is also a notable feature. Of particular importance also was the genesis of his work as a writer, especially the wide influence of his best known book *Basic Christianity*. There is also a discussion of Stott the bachelor!

Fittingly sub-titled, 'The making of a leader', this biography is vital reading for those interested in a detailed documentation of how Stott became 'the most respected evangelical clergyman in the world today' (to use the words of Billy Graham). While the author avoids making his own opinions explicit, it is obvious he places great emphasis on the background context, formative influences and significant experiences of his subject's life. He shows how they have impacted on Stott's personal and ministerial growth and how the strategic ministries that he has developed have borne his personal mark and multiplied his contributions to Kingdom of God.

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