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# Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews reflecting  
global evangelical theology for the purpose  
of discerning the obedience of faith*



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# Evangelical Review of Theology

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# Editorial: Spirit and Truth

We begin this final issue of the year with an article by Ben Pugh (UK) who is concerned about evangelical interpretations of the cross that are overly objective and technical. Using insights from some of the Neo-Orthodox classics, he shows the 'the Spirit is the facilitator of the Calvary event, he is given after completion of the work and he bears witness thereafter to that completed work'. Pugh is therefore hopeful that 'a cross-centred pneumatology' can bring a much needed 'balance to every aspect of church life'.

Moving to the level of theology proper, Robert Haskell (USA) challenges the claims of Process theology which has a view of God in which he is not all powerful and is dependent on the world for his own self-actualization. Haskell shows that this is in harmony neither with the Bible nor with the church's theological expositions throughout the centuries.

Moving on from these key doctrines, Christopher Fung (Hong Kong), with his own background in science, joins our pages again to propose a singular interpretation of the ministry and death of Jesus Christ in terms of the 'Sabbath' which has consequences for our responsibilities for the care of the created world. He concludes that when the Bible is read properly, 'a vivid earthly-yet-cosmic picture of [its] central character—Jesus Christ—naturally emerges with creation care at its core'.

These profound truths work themselves out in 'the obedience of faith' in many different ways, including the area of leadership and ministry, as

Leanne Dzubinski (USA) shows in her article on gender diversity in missions. She argues that without the full inclusion of women, the work of evangelism is hindered and the gospel message is limited in its transformational effects. This means that it is imperative for mission organisations to recognize women as full partners in the work, and in so doing to find that they can make significant contributions to organisational leadership.

Continuing on the missions theme, Jim Harries and Fred Lewis (Kenya and USA) raise for consideration how the financial input of western mission activities often brings negative effects including division, corruption, dependency and worse. They frankly urge that persuasion and the power of God should be the currency that is used.

We conclude with an important article by Wendy Helleman (Canada) reporting on a program of tertiary education in Nigeria where Christian and Muslim students together study Patristics. The course is compulsory for all students at the University which is situated in a bi-religious area, and covers key aspects of the development of early Christianity which took place before the emergence of Islam. This is a challenging course which is proving useful in revealing 'a new role for the study of early Christianity, one that seeks to foster constructive discussion with Muslim colleagues and neighbours'. As such, it is well worth considering in a world where reconciliation based on truth is urgently needed.

**Thomas Schirmacher, General Editor**  
**David Parker, Executive Editor**

# The Spirit and the Cross: Insights from Barth and Moltmann

Ben Pugh

**KEYWORDS:** *Spirit, Trinity, Jünger, Balthasar, monarchical, eucharist, procession, revelation, evangelism*

IN AN EARLIER ARTICLE for *ERT*, the Spirit's role in justification was ably presented.<sup>1</sup> This is a valuable contribution because one of the reasons why justification has been so ignored in popular spirituality is that it may be seen as something scholastic, theoretical, even 'difficult'. That this is far from Paul's understanding hardly needs stating. The atonement has suffered similarly in evangelical hands. There has been an excessive and reactionary tendency to stress the objective character of the atonement. Added to this is the fact that, for decades, almost all the published evangelical work on the subject has been academic and polemic in nature. One is left with a situation in which, in the life of our churches, the subject is avoided because it is too abstract, difficult, or even contentious.

My hope in writing this paper, is

to bring out the role of the Spirit in the Trinitarian accomplishment of the cross, and thus the Spirit's action also in the application of its benefits to faith. I hope that by thinking some of the thoughts of the giants of continental theology, influenced as they admittedly were and are by philosophical preoccupations very different from our own, fresh light may be shed on the situation of the present time.

## I Karl Barth: Revelation and Response

Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*<sup>2</sup> is founded entirely upon the doctrine of the Trinity. This, of course, is out of reaction to liberal scepticism about the Trinity that relegated the subject to a mere appendix.<sup>3</sup> Barth's main reason for placing the doctrine of the Trinity at the head of his work is to lay the foundations of his doctrine of revela-

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1 Jeffery Anderson, 'The Holy Spirit and Justification: A Pneumatological and Trinitarian Approach to Forensic Justification', *ERT* (2008) 32:4, 292-305.

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2 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I-IV, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1968), hereafter denoted by, CD.

3 See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 738-751.

tion. For Barth, God's threeness is his power to reveal himself. An aloof deistic god of monotheism is too remote. The near-to-hand god of mysticism is too nebulous. The God of Christian faith can be near and far at the same time. The gods of monotheism and mysticism are really nothing at all. The Triune God has shown himself in a way that is something in particular: Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The way that God reveals himself in creation and redemption, and supremely in the incarnation of Christ, is how he really is in himself, according to Barth. This assertion is an affirmation of the liberals' desire to avoid abstract metaphysical speculation about the being of God, but also, in opposition to liberalism, an assertion of the givenness of God's revelation. Because of the unity between what is revealed to us of God and what actually exists of God, all enthronement of the autonomous thinking self must be done away with. Rather than sinfully making our concepts and thoughts of God the starting point, all thinking about God must begin with the givenness of what God has revealed. God's revelation of himself in history, God's entering into the human story, is the man Jesus Christ. Our reckoning with this one great fact of revelation is the starting point of all truly Christian theology.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. The Role of the Spirit in Barth

All that Barth asserts concerning the being of the triune God and his works in salvation, centred as it is upon the revelation of Christ, prepares the way

for an exposition of the work of the Spirit. Because God reveals himself in a way that is hidden—veiled in human flesh, no one has the power to comprehend this revelation. In the tradition of Calvin and Luther, the impotence of man in the dialectic is thus maintained. It is precisely this impotence that the third member of the Trinity comes to rectify. The Holy Spirit is the 'subjective reality of revelation'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, for Barth, the Spirit may be defined as the 'revealedness'<sup>7</sup> of the revelation, the revelation itself being the 'being and work'<sup>8</sup> of the Son.

In this way the stage is set for accrediting the Holy Spirit with an indispensability rarely seen in western theology. In Barth's scheme, the Spirit truly is vital. It is not human presentations of the gospel that reach people. In their natural, sinful state, those who hear are incapable of comprehending the things of God and incapable of seeing the revelation of God that is Christ. It is the Spirit alone that enables people to respond to the Revelation with their own 'Yes' that rises from their hearts.<sup>9</sup> He it is who awakens men and women to faith in the revelation and enables them to live a life of obedience.

Noteworthy is Barth's continuing insistence upon thinking along christological lines. Where soteriology all too easily becomes focused on the subjective realm,<sup>10</sup> Barth insists, '...

4 CD 1:1, 349-83, 406.

5 CD 1:1, 378, 150-158.

6 CD 1:2, 203.

7 CD 1:1, 339.

8 CD IV:1, 147.

9 CD IV:1, 356, 646.

10 Ferguson sees this tendency as the main weakness of the traditional *ordo salutis*. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 99.

the being and work of Jesus Christ—for even here we cannot abandon the christological basis—must now be understood as the being and work of His Holy Spirit'.<sup>11</sup>

The position that Barth thus arrives at, that of the union of the work of the Spirit with the work of the Son, provides a very useful point of departure for thinking about the Spirit and the cross. Barth uses the language of synonym, not comparison. He says that the work of the one is the work of the other. This stands to reason, for if the aim of the Spirit is that the revelation should actually be revealed to people, (assuming that there is nothing else needful besides the apprehension of this revelation,)<sup>12</sup> then the work of the Spirit is indeed one with the work of the Son, the revelation itself.<sup>13</sup>

Barth has restored the christological centre of Christian theology. This means that his pneumatology, like every aspect of his *Dogmatics*, is christocentric. A weakness of Barth's scheme, however, is that the cross becomes a non-essential item. Salvation is complete in the pure fact that Christ has been revealed. This completed act now simply awaits application into human lives by the Spirit. There being no more

revealing to be done, the Holy Spirit, as the subjective realisation of that revelation, is thus solely responsible for actually bridging the gulf between God and man.<sup>14</sup>

A greater reciprocity between the two bridging acts, that of Christ in history and the Holy Spirit in human experience, is desirable. The cross is a phenomenon that intrudes itself into human experience, as we will later see in Moltmann. Likewise, the Spirit must be seen to be involved in the event of the cross itself if the work of Christ is to be seen as truly Trinitarian.

Barth is christocentric but not stau-rocentric.<sup>15</sup> The result of this is that the God of his earlier dialectic period actually remains in large measure the God who is 'Totally Other'. The dialectic between a holy God and sinful man is not sufficiently resolved even by making Christ central. The result of this is that many of Barth's best interpreters seem to find it impossible to resist the urge to place the cross itself at the heart of Trinitarian discussion. In this way, Barth's God can be seen more clearly to be a God of compassion, of suffering even, who involves himself with the lives of his creatures.

Barth has, after all, paved the way for this by obliterating the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. This makes it possible to read back into the life of God himself the event of Golgotha. The cross, rather than the incarnation, can then become a definition of God.

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11 CD IV:1, 147.

12 Barth's apparent neglect of regeneration is a flaw that Moltmann picks up on. See section 2.2 of this paper.

13 Behind this union of their works there is also, of course, a union of their Persons. Torrance rightly observes that Barth viewed the phrase in the Nicene Creed about Jesus being 'true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father' as a statement of momentous importance (see CD 1:1, 484-512).

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14 See especially, CD 1:2, 234.

15 Notwithstanding the remarkable phrase, 'The crucified Jesus is the image of the invisible God.' CD II:2, 132.

## 2. The Role of the Spirit in Barth's Interpreters

We can now turn to consider the role of the Spirit in Barth's interpreters. The man whom Barth considered to be one of the best<sup>16</sup> was Hans Urs von Balthasar,<sup>17</sup> who builds upon Barth's work by focussing on the reciprocity between Son and Spirit that exists within the immanent Trinity. He advocates an adaptation of the *filioque* insertion to reflect this. Instead of the double procession being viewed as a procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son into the world, the double procession for von Balthasar is firstly a procession from the Father to the Son, that is, his anointing at baptism.

The second procession is the outgoing of self-sacrificing love in the Spirit from the Son back to the Father.<sup>18</sup> This of course, builds on Augustine's model of the Spirit being the love exchanged between the Father and the Son,<sup>19</sup> and carries the same deficiency in the area of the Spirit's distinct personhood. Nevertheless, an understanding of the atonement as a response of love to the Father on the part of the Son facilitated

by the Spirit has great potential.

A further contribution to Barthian interpretation comes from Karl Rahner.<sup>20</sup> He sees the sending of the Spirit and the Son into the world as a single 'concept'.<sup>21</sup> As love, God is eternally moved towards self-communication. Revealing himself to the world by sending his Son would not be a complete act of communication unless the recipient were able to respond. The sending of the Spirit returns this communication. The Spirit causes the response of faith to rise from the addressees, the men and women that God has created to receive this communication.<sup>22</sup> The sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit are, therefore, two sides of one work of redemption and not to be separated.

Another brilliant interpreter of Barth is Eberhard Jüngel. He, like von Balthasar, develops Spirit-Son reciprocity specifically with reference to the cross.<sup>23</sup> For Jüngel, the cross is the defining moment of God's revelation in Christ, not the incarnation. The Spirit is essential to Jüngel's theology as the bond of love uniting Father and Son during the crisis of the cross. For him, the statement, 'God is love', is about the Father's identification in the Spirit

<sup>16</sup> G. Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 111.

<sup>17</sup> The most important primary source in English for von Balthasar's pneumatology is *Pneuma and Institution* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1974).

<sup>18</sup> Commenting on Balthasar's theology, O'Donnell states, '...the event of the cross is a conspiracy of the love of Father and Son'. J. J. O'Donnell, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in Recent German Theology', *The Heythrop Journal* 23 (1982), 156.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity* 17-18 (Website: [www.ccel.co.uk](http://www.ccel.co.uk)).

<sup>20</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1970).

<sup>21</sup> Rahner, *Trinity*, 85.

<sup>22</sup> McFarland is very similar, using the analogy of speech. The Father speaks the Word, the Son is the Word and the Spirit is the 'Amen' of response. I. McFarland, 'Christ, Spirit and Atonement', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3:1 (March 2001), 90.

<sup>23</sup> See Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), 368-396.



with the crucified Christ.<sup>24</sup> The Spirit, as the bond of that love, prevents there arising any fissure in the unity of Father and Son within the Trinity during that moment of agony.<sup>25</sup>

It is in Barth's interpreters, therefore, that the full implications of his pneumatology with reference to the work of Christ begin to be seen. But it is Jurgen Moltmann, himself highly influenced by Barth, who has carried these implications forward into what eventually became a fully developed Trinitarian theology of the cross. To him we now turn.

## II Jurgen Moltmann: No Pentecost Without Easter<sup>26</sup>

In Moltmann's early Trinitarian expositions of the cross, the Spirit tends to be marginalized.<sup>27</sup> In his *The Crucified God*<sup>28</sup> he gives a very disproportionate amount of space to Father and Son, yet claims to be fully Trinitarian. The Spirit is seen as the bond of love uniting Father and Son during the crisis of the cross who then, in a way that does not seem clear, releases life into the world

as a result of this event.<sup>29</sup> In his later works, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*,<sup>30</sup> and *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*,<sup>31</sup> his pneumatology is more developed.

For Jüngel, the cross is a dynamic yet fixed and final revelation of the Triune God as he is in himself. For Moltmann however, the cross is not only a definition of the inner life of God but the inaugural moment of God's eschatological future. The very fact that God has opened himself up to the world in this way in order to redemptively draw the world into himself means that he has also become involved in its progress through history.<sup>32</sup> God has freely chosen to be so involved with the world he came to save as to be caught up in its very destiny. The world's becoming is therefore God's becoming.

This, of course, serves Moltmann's liberationist agendas very well.<sup>33</sup> Concepts of immutability and impassibility leave God too remote from human suf-

24 Jüngel, *Mystery*, 326.

25 Jüngel, *Mystery*, 346.

26 'They [the disciples] only receive the divine Spirit after Easter, and because of Easter'. J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London, SCM, 1981), 122.

27 Carl Braaten was quick to notice this deficiency, contending that, for all Moltmann's insistence on a Trinitarian theology of the cross, 'Would not a binitarian concept of God work just as well?' C. Braaten, 'A Trinitarian Theology of the Cross', *Journal of Religion* 56 (1976), 118.

28 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM, 1974), 235-249.

29 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 244.

30 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1977), 54-59.

31 Moltmann, *Trinity*, 122-126.

32 This theme emerges prominently in *Trinity*. See esp. 94-96, also *Church*, 53-56.

33 That Moltmann's eschatology is focussed on this-worldly hopes of Utopia is seen as the main weakness of Moltmann's theology by S.N. Williams, 'The Problem with Moltmann', *Evangelical Journal of Theology* 5:2 (1996), 158-59. Badcock sees Moltmann's eschatology as simply not biblical, *Light*, 210. He also cites Hill who highlights the striking weakness that if God's very being is defined in terms of dying, suffering and progressing with man, then what happens to his being once the eschaton has arrived? *Light*, 210-11 citing William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 175.

fering for Moltmann, himself the victim of a wartime trauma.<sup>34</sup> This overall picture of God as defined by the cross yet open to ongoing development provides the two basic keys to understanding his thoughts on the relation of the Spirit to the cross:

### 1. The Spirit Facilitates the Mutual surrender of Father and Son at the cross

For Moltmann, the cry of dereliction, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34) represents a tremendous Trinitarian conundrum, and one that he is not afraid to confront. He sees in this cry enormous scope for discussions of theodicy—God identifying himself with the world's godforsaken—indeed, God justifying himself to a suffering world.<sup>35</sup> Yet he also, and quite rightly, refuses to gloss over this apparent division that opens up within the very life of God as the Father seemingly abandons his Son. The cry of dereliction surely shatters any watertight Trinitarian theories about God's three-in-oneness.

Moltmann does not offer any neat solution to this problem but posits

that the answers lie in the direction of pneumatology. We may define what, for Moltmann, the role that the Spirit has at the cross by the term, 'union'.<sup>36</sup> In Western Trinitarian theology, it is a well-rehearsed Augustinian maxim that the Spirit is the love that unites Father and Son. This could be what is involved in the Hebrews 9:14 passage. It may be the case that what enabled the Son to make a spotless sacrifice to God even though it would involve a critical moment of forsakenness at his hands was the presence of the Spirit.<sup>37</sup>

According to Moltmann's logic, the Spirit was also enabling the Father to hand over his Son. Both Father and Son were giving: the one his only Son, the other, his very life. At the very point where these two streams of self-giving converge, there is the Spirit. He is the presence of mutual love between Father and Son that prevents the cross from being an act of barbarism on the part of the Father or a pointless sacrifice on the part of the Son.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The story and that of his ensuing conversion is movingly told in G. Muller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 15-25. Tomlin notes, interestingly, how theologies of the cross are a significantly post-war phenomenon. In the case of Germany and Japan, the cross has been essential as a tool to reflect on loss and suffering. On the part of the victors the cross has served to correct heady optimism (G. Tomlins, G., *The Power of the Cross*, [Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999], 3-4).

<sup>35</sup> Moltmann finds the cross to be a rich seam of answers to protest atheism (*Crucified*, 219-227).

<sup>36</sup> '...the common sacrifice of the Father and the Son comes about through the Holy Spirit, who joins and unites the Son in his forsakenness with the Father'. (Moltmann, *Trinity*, 83. Cf. *Church*, 126).

<sup>37</sup> This 'presence' at the cross where otherwise there was 'absence' is, for Dabney, the very essence of a true *Pneumatologia Crucis*. D.L. Dabney, 'Pneumatologia Crucis: Reclaiming *Theologia Crucis* for a Theology of the Spirit Today', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53:4 (2000), 524.

<sup>38</sup> Broadly speaking, Moltmann's overall scheme seems to make sense in this regard, although some of his more shocking statements, such as those concerning the Father allegedly casting out and annihilating the Son at the cross (*Crucified*, 241), are admittedly impossible to defend. (See criticisms of Jowers, 'Theology', 246-51).

## 2 The Death of Christ Procures the Outpouring of the Spirit

If, under the previous heading, 'union' was the key concept for Moltmann, here, it is 'glorification'.<sup>39</sup> This 'glorification' will lead back to 'union', however, as the eschatological goal of the outpouring of the Spirit is the union of all things into the Trinity so that God will be 'all in all'. On the way to this goal, the Spirit brings glory to both the Father and the Son in doxology. In Moltmann's 'eucharistic'<sup>40</sup> model of the Trinity, the classic monarchical hierarchy within the Trinity in which the Father is first, then the Son, then the Spirit, is turned on its head.

In the eucharistic model, the Spirit produces thanksgiving and praise in people, which is offered to the Father through the Son. He criticises Barth for his limited understanding of the Spirit as merely bringing about in people the 'recognition' of what was achieved by Christ.<sup>41</sup> For Moltmann, the fact of regeneration points to something that actually takes place in the believer and not just on the believer's behalf at the cross that is then merely comprehended.<sup>42</sup> The Spirit actually involves the believer in the fellowship of the Trinity. The Trinity was opened up to the world

at the cross. The goal of the eucharistic procession of the Spirit is that, as a result of the cross, people are brought into the community of the Trinity and become part of God's future.

## III Barth and Moltmann: Some Preliminary Deductions

### 1. The Trinity, the Cross and the Spirit

According to Barth, the fact that God has been able to reveal himself shows that he is a Trinity. This revelation is focussed on the being and work of Christ. If, in accordance with Moltmann, it may be further said that the fact of the Trinity, that is, the idea that there is such a thing as the Trinity, is self-evident from the cross, then this must include the Spirit. We may accept that the cross is the high-water mark of God's revelation in history, his announcement to the world that he exists as a trinity of persons.

This announcement, however, must not be restricted to Father and Son but must make a third Person just as necessary and identifiable. It may then be argued that if the Spirit does have an essential role in the event of Golgotha, then it is quite likely that the subject of the cross is a central concern for the Spirit in his ministry today.

The Spirit may be seen as essential at Golgotha if we borrow the language and concepts of Moltmann's 'monarchical' and 'eucharistic' processions. At the cross we see, firstly, a type of 'eucharistic' procession in which it is by the Spirit that the Son offers himself to the Father. The Spirit is the anointing upon Christ that enabled him to com-

<sup>39</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation* (London: SCM, 1979), 88-92, and *Church*, 126.

<sup>40</sup> This is outlined in J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM, 1992), 298-301.

<sup>41</sup> Moltmann, *Spirit*, 150.

<sup>42</sup> This is a judgment of Barth that is not entirely fair, however, as Barth does speak freely of the Spirit 'awakening' and 'quickening' the hearts of believers as well as 'enlightening' them (*CD IV*:1, 153).

plete the work that he had taken human flesh to do. This work culminated with his offering himself on the cross through the Eternal Spirit. The goal here was to change the disposition of the Father towards the people on whose behalf the offering was made. As a response to this perfect self-offering, there is a monarchical procession of the Spirit from the Father which is intended to reach man with the benefits of Calvary. This sending of the Spirit into the world on completion of the work of the Son is the heavenly response to the Son's perfect offering.

There is then a third procession—people renewed by the Spirit initiate another eucharistic procession, a doxological self-offering. This happens as the Spirit bears witness to the completed work of Christ and arouses the desired response in people. In this way, God's 'self-communication' is completed by means of the answer that comes forth from the hearts of the men and women whose eyes have been opened. There is thus an offering up, then an outpouring, and then an offering up once more that characterises the whole plan of redemption and stamps it as Trinitarian.

These three processions reveal the Spirit to have a central place in facilitating and glorifying the Son's self-offering. Before, during and after the event, the Spirit centres himself around the cross. The cross is where the Spirit himself was significantly present and, together with Father and Son, brought about the redemption of mankind. However, he is also active before the cross, leading the Son towards it, and he is active after the event, leading the people of God towards it.

Of particular interest are the two

processions that I have described as 'eucharistic', first, the Son's self-offering and then that of his people. It could perhaps be said that the Spirit had the elect in mind when he facilitated the first self-offering, that of Christ to the Father. Now he has the cross in mind as he facilitates the second self-offering, that of the church to the Father. In a sense, the cross was not the focus of the first eucharistic procession of the Spirit, we were. We are not the focus of this second eucharistic procession of the Spirit, the cross is. The second eucharistic procession brings the cross into a central place in church life. The cross is on the Spirit's mind as he facilitates the worship and service of the church.

## 2. Implications for Evangelicalism

If the cross is kept at the centre of a church's devotional life, its members benefit firstly from the monarchical procession. The Spirit enables them to feel and enjoy the forgiveness procured at the cross and all that this new status makes possible, but they are also then able to go on to maturity as they find themselves caught up with the second eucharistic procession. The Spirit takes them out of themselves in order to mimic the self-offering of Jesus.<sup>43</sup> Christ's own brave and selfless

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Torrance, '...we are to think of the work of the Spirit not simply as the actualising within us of what God has already wrought for us in Jesus Christ once and for all, but as opening us up within our subjectivities for Christ in such a radical way that we find our life *not in ourselves but out of ourselves, objectively in him*' (italics original) (Torrance, *Theology*, 238).

deed in this way becomes reproduced in the lives of his people.

None of this will happen, however, if only the cross is emphasised without the Spirit. For in the first eucharistic procession, the essential role of the Spirit in the Christ-event and its culmination is clearly seen. That the Spirit was essential to Calvary is the foundation for insisting that Calvary is central to the Spirit. If this Spirit-Son reciprocity is taught accurately, then neither the cross nor the Spirit will be marginalized.

It is the focus of the second eucharistic procession of the Spirit that most needs to be understood today. Charismatic believers, in particular, need to be taught the centrality of the cross to the mind of the Spirit. It is too quickly assumed that 'we' are the centre and so the Holy Spirit in all his 'Godness' becomes confused with the impulses of the human spirit.<sup>44</sup> Understanding the true concerns of the Spirit will moderate the subjectivism of charismatic Christianity.

Not only so, but its notoriously divisive and sectarian tendencies<sup>45</sup> could also be dealt with as charismatics are encouraged to engage with the cen-

tral truths that concern all Christians. In this way a deeper unity with other streams and a greater credibility will be established.<sup>46</sup> Charismatics have also been accused of triumphalism, of proclaiming victory so much as to have no word of comfort for the defeated. Smail has wrestled at length with the possibilities of a theology of suffering springing from the cross and the Spirit.<sup>47</sup>

There are doubtless many more possibilities for Spirit-filled staurocentricism. I have scarcely even mentioned the possible impact upon evangelism, mission and worship. Suffice to say, that just as a crucifix has a balanced shape to it, its *patibulum* extending as far to the left as it does to the right of the centre pole, so a cross-centred pneumatology should bring balance to every aspect of church life. 'Balance' may be seen by the more progressive among us as acquiescence to a lifeless evangelical orthodoxy. Yet in an age of apostasy, balance will be an increasingly attractive source of strength and stability, and will be indispensable for the future of any church.

## IV Conclusion

The Spirit is the facilitator of the Cal-

<sup>44</sup> Torrance, pertinently asks the question, 'Does the Church possess the Spirit or is the Church possessed by the Spirit?' (T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 244)

<sup>45</sup> I speak here as a sympathetic insider. Taylor mentions, insightfully, that the tendency of some Pentecostalist groups to see themselves as the finders of a secret to which believers are blind is a factor that makes them vulnerable to sectarian behaviour. (John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, (London: SCM, 1972), 199)

<sup>46</sup> 'The more the renewal relates itself to the central things of the gospel, e.g. the person and work of Christ rather than just tongues or healing, the more its contribution becomes recognisable and receivable by the rest of the Church, and the more it is delivered from its own idiosyncrasies and eccentricities.' (Thomas Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1980), 18)

<sup>47</sup> Smail, 'The Cross', 64-70; see also Thomas Smail, *Windows on the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995), 65-77.

vary event, he is given after completion of the work and he bears witness thereafter to that completed work. Barth's and Moltmann's works have creatively affirmed and explored these three facets to the Spirit's work in relation to the cross. Barth originated a framework of theological thought that contemplated God as revealing himself through Christ. Others have then taken this framework and thought along new lines about the work of redemption.

These new lines of thought, in their many forms, are one in their insistence that all truly Christian theology, if it is to be worthy of the name, must take the fact of the Trinity as its starting point. In Moltmann, this Trinitarianism takes on a fully cruciform shape. Further to this, Moltmann's increasingly strong emphasis on the Spirit has opened up the possibility of rethinking pneumatology itself in a cross-centred way. Not only may the cross and the doctrine of the Trinity be brought together, therefore, but also the cross

and the doctrine of the Spirit can now be seen as belonging together.

A useful way of thinking through this interaction between cross and Spirit is to borrow Moltmann's terminology of the 'monarchical' and 'eucharistic' processions. Monarchical processions begin with the Father, 'eucharistic' processions begin with the Spirit. Both Christ's self-offering in the Spirit and that of the church subsequent to Calvary may be seen as a eucharistic procession from the Spirit. It is by exploring this second eucharistic procession that some of the problems characteristic of the charismatic movement can be addressed.

There is much work to be done in drawing out the implications of Barth and Moltmann for evangelicalism. The possibilities of a staurocetric pneumatology remain to be fully explored. I hope in this paper to have made a start at thinking through what the theology behind such endeavours ought to look like.

## Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology

Edited by Neil B. MacDonald and Carl R. Trueman

Karl Barth and John Calvin belong to the first rank of great theologians of the Church. Both, of course, were also Reformed theologians. Historically, Calvin's influence on Reformed doctrine has been much greater than that of Barth's, and continues to be so in the present day. In contrast, Barth's Reformed credentials have been questioned – not least in his understanding of election and atonement. The question is: who should be of greater importance for the Reformed church in the twenty-first century? Who has the better arguments on the Bible? Barth or Calvin? Doctrinal areas of focus are the nature of the atonement, Scripture, and the sacraments.

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# Process Theology: A Christian Option or a New Religion?

Rob Haskell

**KEY WORDS:** *Omnipotence, Alfred North Whitehead, freedom, passibility, time, miracles, theism, evil, divine perfection*

## I Introduction

Process theology is a growing theological movement in which all of reality, including God himself, is seen as evolving. This system of thinking is an interpretation of Christian doctrines in the light of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, or 'organic philosophy' as he called it.

Some process theology ideas resonate with Christians, and perhaps rightly so. For example, that God is related to the world; that he experiences human suffering; that he is responsive to prayer; that God is not just 'out there' in the sky, but is intimately connected with us. However, the system as whole negates many of the basic doctrines of historic Christianity. For example, process theology denies creation 'out of nothing' (*ex nihilo*), God's omnipotence and his independence

from the world, as we will see below. In this paper I will attempt to show that process theology is essentially a new religion, well-crafted for the needs of both modern and postmodern people.

The process worldview addresses two crucial (post)modern concerns.<sup>1</sup> The first is freedom. Even at the most basic level and even in inanimate matter, it claims, freedom and self-actualization are at work. This process view of freedom addresses an important problem in the materialist scientific worldview. According to modern science everything occurs for material, physical reasons. Every event, choice or decision is the result of previous material causes. If this is true there is no such thing as free will, for all human decisions are simply the result of prior physical causes. But by re-imagining the meaning of cause and effect, as seen below, process theology has made

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<sup>1</sup> I am using '(post)modern' to signify that a theme is applicable both to modernity and postmodernity.

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room for materialist freedom.

A second key (post)modern concern which process theology addresses is evolution, which is seen as an overarching metaphysical principle (not just a biological theory). All of reality, including God, is on a path of development. This second big idea of process theology is an adjustment of the notion of God to modern expectations. An absolute God is arguably less credible to contemporary post-Christian individuals than one who is 'one of us' as the Joan Osborne song goes.<sup>2</sup> According to process theology, God is growing with us and learning from us just as we are also learning from him.

The idea of a 'lesser god' is a corollary to freedom: having vanquished the tyranny of cause and effect, it will hardly do to fall into the tyranny of an absolutely powerful God. The 'process god' also goes a long way towards solving one of the greatest philosophical problems of our time (at least in religion): the problem of evil. If God is all powerful and all loving, why is there evil in his creation? In process *theology* the existence of evil is explained by the fact that God is not all powerful or even necessarily all wise. However, this is seen as an inadequacy which he is working to overcome.

My remarks in the rest of the paper will be divided into three sections. In the first section I lay out the rationale

of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. Here all of reality, including God himself, is conceived of as being in process. The second section is dedicated to the idea of God and religion in process theology which is informed by this philosophical system. Essentially process theology conceives of God as a finite being existing in permanent reciprocal relationship to the world. The third section is dedicated to a biblical and theological assessment of the key claims of process theology. Here I try to show why I don't think process theology is compatible with historical and biblical Christian theology.

I respect process theologians for their efforts and I find process thought fascinating in its own right. However, given its growing popularity among many Christians, it seems timely to clarify process beliefs and particularly to contrast them with biblical teaching.

## II Process Philosophy Explained

Since process theology is an interpretation of Christianity in the light of Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, it will be important to first understand Whitehead's 'organic philosophy' (as he labelled it).

### 1. Time and actual occasions

The foundation of Whitehead's thinking is his concept of time. In contrast to our perception of time as an unbroken flow, Whitehead thought of time as a transition from one 'actual occasion' to another. The best metaphor I've see for this is a filmstrip, where there is a progression of still images with space

<sup>2</sup> This song was written by Eric Bazilian and performed by Joan Osborne on her 1995 album *Relish*. See <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One\\_of\\_Us\\_\(Joan\\_Osborne\\_song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_of_Us_(Joan_Osborne_song))> accessed 16 Feb 2012. The chorus goes as follows: 'What if God was one of us / Just slob like one of us / Just a stranger on the bus / Trying to make his way home.'



in between.<sup>3</sup> Whitehead argued that reality is similarly made up of distinct 'images' which appear, persist and finally disappear, leaving room for the next 'frame' to take its place.

But we have to add some extra processes to the filmstrip in order to understand Whitehead's theory. In a filmstrip there is no interaction between each image. They just follow each other in predetermined order. But a process view of time thinks of each occasion as being in dynamic relationship to the occasions that come before and after. This dynamism occurs on two levels. First, there is process or development within each 'actual occasion'. Each 'moment' of time comes into being, or is actualized. It does not just appear fully formed as is the case of the image in the filmstrip. Whitehead called this process 'concrecence'. Then each occasion also ceases to exist. Thus, what we experience as an unbroken stream of consciousness is actually an ongoing series of comings into being and 'ceasings'.

In process philosophy, then, the basic unit of reality is the 'actualized occasion'. But just as in a filmstrip, the series of distinct still images are perceived as an unbroken process. Since all of reality is made up of these occasions of becoming, all the things that we normally consider distinct entities (for example, a ball or a person), are really series of 'moments' which share a common theme. As Lewis Ford puts it,

In this view we may conceive of anything material as a series of events having persistent characteristics that are constantly exemplified over a period of time.<sup>4</sup>

Whitehead's next step is to connect these actualized occasions. Clearly, each occasion does not rise randomly out of nothing—if this were the case there would be no continuity in our experience of reality. As in the filmstrip, there is a rational order to the events. According to Whitehead each occasion is influenced by the previous one, or each occasion 'prehends' the one before it.

Prehending is a concept that is unique to process thinking and it is intended to replace the scientific notion of cause and effect. We are not to think, says Whitehead, of causation as a clash of distinct forces such as, for example, the case of billiard balls bouncing off each other. Rather, any given occasion opens itself to the influence of a previous occasion and integrates those given tendencies into its own process. Each occasion does not respond slavishly to the previous moment. It receives what has been passed on and then shapes that heritage uniquely in its own process of actualization (thus Whitehead's term, 'actual occasions'). Then, when the current occasion has ceased, its self-actualization is passed on to the following occasion.

Another way of saying it is that 'Events produce themselves out of their causes rather than causes produce events as passive effects'.<sup>5</sup> Thus

3 The image comes from John Cobb and David Ray Griffin in *Process Theology: an Introductory Exposition* (Louisville, TN: Westminster: John Knox Press, 1976), 14.

4 Lewis Ford, *The Lure of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 3.

5 Ford, *The Lure of God*, 7.

process philosophy replaces mechanistic cause and effect with organic prehension.

This is an extremely important distinction because with it Whitehead is able to defend free will, something that scientific materialism has not been able to do. Previous occasions have influence on the current occasion, but their influence is not decisive. Each occasion undergoes its own self-actualization.

Another crucial implication of prehension is that causes are internalized by their effect. So, unlike the modern scientific notion of cause and effect as the external interaction of objects (think again of billiard balls), the cause and the effect in process philosophy are integrally connected and affect each other internally. From this follows process notion of interdependence. Causes are taken into their effects; they literally become a part of that which they are influencing. This means that all things are organically connected.

## 2. Enter God

However Whitehead felt that this account of the interaction between actual occasions was not in itself satisfactory, for what is to keep the series of actualizations from incoherency, or endless repetition? Further, reality does seem to be a rational unfolding of events. There is an ongoing consistency in the flow of moments, such that we can recognize reality as an ongoing process. What, then, gives process philosophy its *process*? The crucial answer is that God is the one who leads the series of actualizations in a particular direction: '[God] is the principle of concretion—the principle whereby there is initiated a definite outcome from a situation oth-

erwise riddled with ambiguity.'<sup>6</sup>

However, God does not determine the outcome of the moment; he merely 'lures' its self actualization toward a particular goal. God is the director of the play, but he cannot issue orders—only suggestions. Or, in Whitehead's terminology, 'he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness'.<sup>7</sup> Reality remains free to actualize itself along the lines of its own potential.

In process philosophy, then, God is the source of the potentialities that are available in each occasion's coming into being. It is only because of God's direction that reality makes as much sense as it does. However, God is not to be seen as separate from the universal process.<sup>8</sup> He himself also prehends previous occasions and undergoes his own process—his own series of actualizations. Because of this, he not only exerts his influence on the world in each moment, but he is also influenced by the self-actualization of each previous occasion. God himself is not an exception to the rules of prehension and actualization.

God provides each event with the aim or lure toward which it moves. The event actualizes itself, influenced by the possibilities that God has provided, but also becoming something unique in its self-production by appropriating elements out of its past. This result is then experienced by God. In this way, the world enriches God.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, 'God and the World', in *Process Theology*, ed. Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 89.

<sup>7</sup> Whitehead, 'God and the World', 91.

<sup>8</sup> Ford, *The Lure of God*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ford, *The Lure of God*, 11.

In Whitehead's words, 'the dipolarity of God is analogous to all actual entities'.<sup>10</sup> God, like all other actualities, proceeds from prehension to self-actualization and God is therefore described, like all of reality, as 'dipolar'. The difference between God and other actualities is that God's 'primordial pole' has infinite potentialities which are actualized in his consequent nature or 'actual pole'. God is related to the world in the same way that one moment is related to another—there is an ongoing exchange of influence and actualization between the two.

It should be emphasized that Whitehead's description of God is not 'as clear as one might like',<sup>11</sup> and because of this there is still debate and discussion on the topic. Among the important issues is whether God is to be considered a 'personally ordered series of entities' (like all other persons in the world), or whether he is to be seen as a single actual entity.<sup>12</sup> Since the latter view makes it difficult for the world to influence God (it is not clear how a single, ongoing actuality would interact with a series of actualities), the former view is preferred by John Cobb and others who are more interested in process

philosophy for its theological implications.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Evaluation of process philosophy

Process philosophy is a metaphysical system. This means that it attempts to provide a rational explanation for the nature of reality. It is interesting that Whitehead developed his ideas at a time when philosophers were becoming decidedly anti-metaphysical (*Process and Reality* was published in 1929). Overall, this is still the case today in philosophy. The problem with metaphysical systems is that they can be internally consistent without necessarily providing compelling external reasons for their veracity. In other words, metaphysical systems can do little more than suggest a possible explanation.

Hans Kung, therefore, asks whether both process philosophy and theology 'are not in fact mere assertions'.<sup>14</sup> Karl Popper similarly suggested that 'like all Neo-Hegelians, [Whitehead] adopts the dogmatic method of laying down his philosophy without argument. We can take it or leave it. But we cannot discuss it.'<sup>15</sup> It does seem that Whitehead's philosophy is driven more by his concern with freedom, cause and effect and evolution than by any compelling logical proofs external to the system. Also I wonder if interest in his philoso-

10 Whitehead, 'God and the World', 89.

11 Gene Reeves and Delwin Brown, 'The Development of Process Theology', in *Process Theology and Christian Thought*, eds. Delwin Brown, Ralph E. James, Jr. and Gene Reeves (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1971), 26. 'Whitehead... characterized his own ideas of God as "very vague"'. David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 157.

12 Reeves and Delwin, 'The Development of Process Theology', 39.

13 Reeves and Delwin, 'The Development of Process Theology', 39.

14 Hans Kung, *Does God Exist?* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 180.

15 K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1966), II:247. Cited in Kung, *Does God Exist?*, 181.

phy is based more on the timely conclusions it bolsters than by any logical necessity it presents. Ultimately the claims of process philosophy might be justified, but they also might not be justified. It seems difficult to say anything more conclusive than that.

Still, a few critical questions may even lead to a negation of Whitehead's philosophy. First, we may wonder why, if prehension is real, we have neither intuitions about it nor any scientific evidence that points to it. This final point is particularly important because Whitehead is positing an alternative to the scientific notion of cause and effect, but the reasons for this reassessment are not scientific; they are philosophical. Also, what sort of corroboration can be provided for the idea that all of reality experiences self-awareness? This seems like a good example of a 'mere assertion' and one that is very non-intuitive at that.

### III Seven Core Doctrines of Process Theology

Process theology retains all of Whitehead's main ideas and it therefore affirms freedom, evolution and self-actualization in the process sense. In terms of God's nature, process theology affirms that he is dependent on the world for his own self-actualization and the world likewise depends on him. God does not have control over the world and he cannot make any unilateral decisions about it. He can only woo or lure the world into following his will. Process theologians affirm that God is leading the world in a wise direction, but there is no guarantee that the world will cooperate with him. There are other implications that flow from

these ideas, and I will discuss those in the biblical evaluation section. For now we turn to some of the core ideas of process theology as expressed in its own categories.

David Ray Griffin lays out seven core doctrines of process theism. He admits that 'process theologians themselves have usually not clearly indicated which of their various views belong to the core doctrines of process theology and which ones are merely allowed by, without being entailed by, these doctrines'.<sup>16</sup> Griffin's list of doctrines is not exhaustive, but he does think that that while one might add to them, none of them can be removed.<sup>17</sup>

- **The acceptance of 'hard-core commonsense notions' or 'the inevitable presuppositions of practice'.** This means that concepts basic to our self-understanding, such as free will, should be treated as true. They are not conclusions but building blocks or presuppositions.
- **Panexperientialism.** According to process theology all of reality has a measure of self-awareness. This applies first to each actualized occasion as understood by in Whitehead's process philosophy. Each unit of existence participates in its own self-actualization. But second,

<sup>16</sup> David Ray Griffin, 'Process Theology and the Christian Good News: A Response to Classical Free Will Theism', in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*, eds. John B. Cobb and Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 3.

<sup>17</sup> The doctrines in this section come from Griffin, 'Process Theology', 3-7.

'compound individuals' such as humans and animals have a great capacity for awareness and self-determination. Finally, 'agregational societies' such as sticks, stones, and any other object we may think of also have a measure of self-awareness and determination. All of reality experiences and participates in its own self-actualization.

- **Nonsensationist doctrine of perception.** This means that **sensory perception is not the only mode of perception.** It is, in fact, secondary to 'prehension' which is the more fundamental mode of perception. This becomes particularly important when it comes to the experience of God, for prehension is the primary means of interaction with him.
- **All actualities have an objective and subjective mode.** This explains God's providential activity: just as God influences the world, so he is also influenced by the world. Each actuality is the object of causation by a previous actuality and then becomes an objective cause of the next actuality. Thus, 'the things that endure are analyzable according to things that occur'.<sup>18</sup> Needless to say, there is no concept of a static reality in process theology; certainly no 'unmoved mover'.
- **Internal relatedness.** This follows from the notion that causes are internalized into their effect (prehension). Because of this the presence of God, as cause, can be

said to dwell in all things. It is also 'the basis for understanding causation as incarnation'.<sup>19</sup> God is in the world as a kind of soft cause; the world apprehends that cause and allows it to have an effect as it sees fit.

- **Naturalistic theism.** In process theology the 'supernatural' is completely natural. God's relationship to the world is 'a fully natural part of the normal causal processes of the world'.<sup>20</sup> God's interaction with the world is not to be categorized as an interruption ('miracle'), or as contingent or optional. The very nature of God involves reciprocal interaction with the world.
- **Dipolar theism.** God is not to be viewed as entirely static and immutable. He is this in one part, or pole, but in another pole he is temporal, contingent, passible, etc. As mentioned in the process philosophy section, God is like any other serially ordered entity. He is in an ongoing process of concrescence and that process has two poles. The 'dipolar' understanding of God gives process theology a religiously adequate idea of God: one who is both necessary and contingent; one who provides a ground of being, but also participates in the process of the world. 'Although to be loving God must be affected by the world, the fact that God is loving must be an unchanging characteristic of God, independent of

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18 Griffin, 'Process Theology', 4.

19 Griffin, 'Process Theology', 5.

20 Griffin, 'Process Theology', 6.

anything that may happen.'<sup>21</sup>

To summarize, then, process theology is crafted specifically to interpret two major philosophical themes, which are also 'hard-core common sense notions': the existence of process in the universe and the human experience of freedom. It does this by positing a God who is organically involved in the process of the universe and who provides a guiding lure, but does not, because he cannot, control the evolution of the universal process.

#### IV. A Biblical Evaluation of Process Theology

Process theology is a philosophical religion. It does not claim special revelation and the closest thing it has to a founder (Alfred North Whitehead) was not primarily interested in the idea of God. It has no miracles and no prophets. It is an entirely rational explanation of God and reality. Process theology interacts significantly with Christianity and many of its expositions consist of adjustments of the classical doctrines of the Bible and the historic Christian creeds. In theory it does not need revelation. Its principles could be deduced directly from process metaphysics.

A Scriptural response to process theology need not attempt to disprove its metaphysical claims. In fact it is a system that would be difficult to negate. As we have seen in the phi-

losophy section, it might be true, but it also might not be true. Rather, our goal ought to be to simply evaluate the claims of process theology in the light of the teaching of the Bible. As we will see, process theologians do often appeal to the Scriptures, not so much to prove their ideas as to show that they are in continuity with the Bible.

Another important dynamic in this discussion is that process theologians make some insightful critiques of the classical idea of God ('Classical Theism'). These are well worth hearing, particularly because Christians have often been guilty of confusing theological doctrines with the direct teaching of the Bible. Yet, as we will see, the critiques from process theology can also be overstated, not allowing for the variety of thought that has existed throughout Christian history, and not doing justice to the teaching of the Bible itself. It is true that Christian theologians have often spoken more explicitly than the Bible (think, for example, of the doctrine of the Trinity). But it has also been true at times that they had solid biblical reasons for doing so.

I have focused on comparing biblical and process expositions of three topics.

#### 1. Omnipotence

##### a) Can God do as he pleases?

The process theology concept of God provides a striking contrast to the classical doctrine of God's omnipotence. In process theology God is the great director. He provides options, inspiration, guidance—he 'lures'—but he does not have unilateral power. He cannot do whatever he sees fit. Rather, he must contribute his part to the

<sup>21</sup> Griffin, *Reenchantment*, 162. Note that this is just an explanation of Hartshornian dipolarity. There is also a Witheadian dipolarity between God's primordial nature, which provides the aims of process and his consequent nature, which is the actualization of his aims.



world's own self-actualization. There is also another limitation to God's power in this approach—since the God of process theology is finite there is also a limitation on the extension of his power; since he cannot be everywhere, he obviously cannot do anything that might be doable.

God's limitedness features very prominently in process theology descriptions, arising to the level of a polemic against 'coercive power.' Charles Hartshorne, an important early adopter of process theology, identified 'the power to determine every detail of what happens in the world', as the 'the tyrant ideal of power'.<sup>22</sup> For Hartshorne the only viable idea of power is one that influences all things but determines nothing. Elsewhere he connects the 'monopoly of power' to determinism and states that, although God must be unsurpassably great in order to be worshipped, omnipotence is to 'burden the divine worshipfulness with a logical paradox of our own making'.<sup>23</sup>

Some authors have also blamed classical omnipotence for the tendency to see God as the defender of the status quo. If God can do anything he wants to do, it follows that whatever is must be what he wants.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Richard Rice, 'Process Theism and the Open View of God: the Crucial Difference', in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*, eds. John B. Cobb and Clark H. Pinnock, 163-200 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 186. Emphasis original.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967), 119.

<sup>24</sup> Griffin, *Reenchantment*, 133. See also Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: an Introductory Exposition*, 9.

The bottom line is that process theology needs a limited God in order for its version of freedom to work. A limited God who participates in the actualization of all actual entities leaves room for free will; a God who is all powerful calls into question the scheme. David Basinger has argued that the process theology understanding of divine power and coercion is the 'metaphysical linchpin' of the whole system, and that it is not a solid foundation.<sup>25</sup>

### b) The problem of evil

There are some problems associated with this position—the first being that a limited God cannot decisively address the problem of evil. What process theology gains in human freedom it loses in power to act against evil. The problem of evil is not just left unsolved, but becomes a human problem, which must be resolved by human means. This is because evil results from a failure to follow God's lure,

Insofar as the whole creation trusts God to realize the purposes he proposes to us, then the good will triumph. The continued presence of evil, both in man and in the natural order, testifies to the very fragmentary realization of creaturely faith in God.<sup>26</sup>

Since process theism rejects an eschatological intervention,<sup>27</sup> we are left with the possibility of an endless process of existence from which evil will

<sup>25</sup> David Basinger, *Divine Power in Process Theism: A Philosophical Critique* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 113.

<sup>26</sup> Ford, *The Lure of God*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Ford, *The Lure of God*, 24.

never be eradicated.

Another related problem is the assumption that God's lure is indeed a good and wise one. According to process theology God himself is also learning and growing. Might he not also lead the world in an unwise direction? In fact the entire assumption that a process god is good, wise and loving can be only a mere assertion. There is no compelling reason why this must be so.

Cobb and Griffin argue that divine power in classical theism creates a deeply personal problem for believers: the classic question of why God would allow terrible things to happen to certain people and not others.<sup>28</sup> This is certainly not a question to be taken lightly. However, does the process God resolve this existential problem? Is a god who cannot do anything about evil any better than one who can but does not? Are we not faced now with the possibility of bitterness and dismissal? Can an impotent God earn our respect?

We have already seen above that it is important for process theologians to have a God who provides a sufficient ground for being, a God who can be worshipped. But is this really an adequate God? Is he worthy of worship? As David Basinger notes, 'this being cannot unilaterally insure the occurrence of less evil or unilaterally intervene in response to petitionary prayer...or give us direct, conscious guidance'.<sup>29</sup> Clark Pinnock put it well when he said that 'many people will

feel that a godling of this small proportion is not big enough to satisfy their religious needs...and is vastly inferior to the God of the Bible'.<sup>30</sup>

### c) Is this the God of Scripture?

It is also difficult to reconcile the limited God of process theology with the biblical account of God's power. Although the biblical record does not use the term 'omnipotence' and does not present a formal doctrine of God's power, it is clear that there is nothing that the biblical God cannot do: 'not one statement exempts anything from the reach of divine power'.<sup>31</sup>

In Jeremiah 32:17 the prophet prays, 'Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for you.' Particularly striking are statements in which God is completely unfettered and flatly contradict the process notion of divine power: 'Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.' (Psalm 135:6) Or, 'But our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.' (Psalm 115:3)

In the New Testament God's power is transferred to Jesus and this is why his miracles are so important. They show that God was at work in his ministry.<sup>32</sup> The assumption in the gospels is that the world is under the dominion of Satan and God, in the person of Jesus, has begun to wage war against

<sup>28</sup> Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: an Introductory Exposition*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Basinger, *Divine Power in Process Theism*, 113-114.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Basinger, *Divine Power in Process Theism*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Gerhardus Vos, 'Omnipotence', in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 3:592.

<sup>32</sup> *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5:445.



that dominion. His power is adequate to the task, seen particularly in Jesus' exorcisms (for example Mark 1:21–28 and the incident with the Gerasene demoniac). It is not so much that Jesus' behaviour supports 'omnipotence' as such, but that the exercise of power in his ministry is indeed absolute or 'tyrannical'—not collaborative. The demons are not 'lured' or wooed into action. They are decisively commanded. For those who are concerned about the problem of evil, this would seem to be good news. The point is that finally we have here in the person of Jesus someone who can wield power against evil.

So even if the philosophical aspects of the doctrine of omnipotence are not flushed out in the Bible, and even if we might quibble about the precise nature of God's power in the Bible, it is clear that scripture does not present us with a limited God who must rely on the cooperation of the universe in order to accomplish his purposes. Rather we see a God who will accomplish whatever it is that he has set out to do.

## 2. Impassibility

### a) The problem of perfection

A common criticism of the 'classical' view of God which is made by process theologians is that because of his unchanging perfection, the classical God of Christian theology must necessarily be unaffected by the world. This, they argue, contradicts the biblical teaching that God is love. For God to love his creatures he must be able to interact with them. Otherwise how can he be in relationship?

The notion of impassibility comes from Greek philosophy and is based on the insight that anything which is per-

fect must also be static. If it is perfect and then changes, it can no longer be perfect; conversely, if it changes and is perfect, it could not have been perfect before. Also implied in this view is that God has no passions or feelings. These are of course passing and are responses to external stimuli. Perfection cannot respond to external influence for this would mean change and it is already perfect. Nor can perfection depend on anything external—this would imply a lack. Perfection is both unchanging and unresponsive; it is static and hermetically sealed.

Through the Christian centuries some thinkers have accepted this as a valid insight and have applied it to the Christian view of God. David Ray Griffin presents the example of Anselm of Canterbury (12th c.), who meditated on this very problem when he prayed,

If thou art passionless, thou dost not feel sympathy; and if thou dost not feel sympathy, thy heart is not wretched from sympathy for the wretched; but this it is to be compassionate.<sup>33</sup>

Process theology has a compelling answer to the problems raised by impassibility. It affirms that God is not, in fact, perfect. He is not static and he is not complete in and of himself. He exists, process affirms, in relation with and in mutual dependence to the world and is thus able to feel sympathy for people. In process theology the very definition of God implies that he is intimately intertwined with the world. God is seen as a fellow sufferer.<sup>34</sup> Or,

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Griffin, *Reenchantment*, 149.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon E. Jackson, *A Theology for Ministry* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 1998), 33. This is Whitehead's phrase.

as Cousins puts it, 'The deepest reality of God is seen not in his detachment or in his power, but in his love. In contrast with the static Absolute and the all-powerful monarch, the process God is the God of persuasive love revealed in Jesus Christ.'<sup>35</sup>

Since in process theology God is involved in a reciprocal relationship with the world, he is explicitly affected by what happens in the lives of individual human beings.

### b) Perfect and in relationship

Surely many Christians would be just as shocked as Griffin is at the idea that God is static, unresponsive and unfeeling. Donald Nash points out that process theology does make some legitimate criticisms of Thomistic or 'classical' theology in this respect.

However, Nash also points out that process theology lays down an unreasonable gauntlet, as if the only options on the table were impassibility or process theology; a perfect unresponsive God or an imperfect feeling God. In classical theology the views have never been that stark. It has generally been understood that although God is perfect and unchanging in his purpose and character, this does not mean he cannot be in relationship with his creatures.<sup>36</sup>

The Greek thinking that lies behind the notion of God as impassible was never fully integrated into the classical

view of God, and Christians throughout the centuries have always affirmed God's personal involvement in history and in the lives of the individual.<sup>37</sup> Indeed large tracts of the Bible, including the Psalms, flatly contradict the idea that God is passionless and unresponsive. The process theology argument on this issue assumes that the influence of Greek philosophy on Christian theology was stronger and less complex than it really was.

Anselm himself was clearly struggling with this problem, very likely because of his biblical understanding of God's compassion. He does arrive at a solution, even if it would not satisfy most of his fellow Christians. According to Anselm, God does not feel compassion towards us, but his nature is such that we rightly experience compassion when we are confronted with him.<sup>38</sup> Anselm the biblical Christian rightly struggled with this notion. He did not simply accept it as non-problematic.

Classical theism has always promoted the idea of a God who embraces suffering, especially in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross. If we accept the incarnation as God dwelling in a human being there can be no doubt that God is in dynamic relationship with the world. It is the love of God for human beings that brought about God's self-giving act on the cross. It is God's love that leads to his self-giving: 'God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'

<sup>35</sup> Ewert H. Cousins. 'Process Models in Culture, Philosophy, and Theology', in *Process Theology*, ed. Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Nash, *The Concept of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 31.

<sup>37</sup> Carl F. Henry, 'A Critique of Process-Theology', in *The Living God: Readings in Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1979), 405-406.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter vii of Anselm's *Proslogion*.

(Rom. 5:8 ESV).

However, the same Bible that describes this personal self-giving of God to the world also affirms in no uncertain terms God's mighty power (see above on omnipotence), speaks of him as dwelling in unapproachable light, too exalted for humans to see (1 Tim. 6:16), and declares his ways past human comprehension (Rom. 11:33). Therefore, the logic of scripture does not support as necessary the connection that process theology makes between relatedness and limitedness. In the Bible God is both perfect and in relation to the world.

The fact that some Christian theologians in the past developed a theology that lost sight of God's capacity for relationship is really a minor issue. It is inaccurate to paint the entire spectrum of possibilities entailed in the classical view of God as if they were all summed up in the Thomistic/Aristotelian synthesis. Bruce Demarest goes so far as to say that it is 'irresponsible to replace the God of theism with a finite, evolving Deity in order to affirm relatedness to the world'.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. Creation

#### a) Process and ex-nihilo

Since in process theology God and the world are an interrelated pair, it follows that God could not have existed without the world. In fact, the world is essential for God's own process, since it is the stage of his self-actualization. This interdependence carries important implications for the doctrine of

creation, because the classical doctrine of creation affirms that the world is dependent on God and that God is not dependent on the world.<sup>40</sup>

A process theology description of creation goes something like this: 'the fusion of novel form with inherited matter by the self-creative decision of the emergent creature'.<sup>41</sup> This somewhat tortured definition is nothing more than a restatement of the process philosophy concept of becoming that occurs in each actual occasion. Each of these is seen as an act of participatory creation between God and actual entities. Since creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) by God would imply that there was a time when God existed without the world, this must be rejected. Ford suggests that the biblical record does not necessarily entail creation 'out of nothing':

In themselves the Old Testament traditions concerning creation, whether in the Priestly (Genesis 1) or Yahwistic (Genesis 2) accounts, or in Second Isaiah, Job or the Psalms, do not insist upon this. Creation out of nothing is first mentioned in the Apocrypha: 2 Macc. 7:38.<sup>42</sup>

Griffin also calls creation *ex nihilo* a post-biblical doctrine, and states another fatal problem that it poses for process theology: 'Given the doctrine of creation ex-nihilo, God can unilaterally determine the state of affairs in the world.'<sup>43</sup> In calling into existence that which did not exist, God would

<sup>40</sup> Nash, *The Concept of God*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ford, *The Lure of God*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Ford, *The Lure of God*, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Griffin, *Reenchantment*, 137.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Nash, *The Concept of God*, 31.

be exercising complete power over the universe's actualization.

### b) Biblical creation

However, the notion that the Bible does not teach creation out of nothing is very problematic.

Creation in the Bible is more than manufacture or artistic arrangement on the assumption of existing material. God is not just an architect or builder who works with what is at hand. Nor is creation an emanation from God...God is the Creator in the strict sense, i.e., He creates out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).<sup>44</sup>

The simplest interpretation of Genesis 1:1, 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth', is that before the moment in which the heavens and the earth were created, nothing we could call a world or a universe existed. The declaration of verse 1 without any intimation of competing pre-existing matter suggests that the Genesis story is a purposeful affirmation that God is the only source of the universe. This is a contrast to other ancient cosmologies that included the forming of the world out of primordial matter.<sup>45</sup> As the Genesis narrative continues, the creation from nothing continues to be implied, for it is by God's mere word that the earth is moulded and filled. Certainly, there is no hint of primordial matter that participated in its own creation.

Many commentators have mistakenly claimed that the Hebrew word for 'create' (*barah*) in this passage entails creation from nothing, but this is not supported by its use elsewhere in the Old Testament.<sup>46</sup> However, the doctrine of creation from nothing does not depend on the use of a particular word. Rather, the concept is inherent in the creation account.

## V. Conclusion

I have tried to show in this paper that process theology is not compatible with the teachings of the Bible or the classical doctrines which spring from it. It is a philosophical system built on the thought of Alfred North Whitehead. Process thinkers do attempt to attempt to find coherence between the Christians Scriptures and their ideas, but the attempt ultimately fails.

Two notions in particular will continue to create dissonance with the biblical account of God. First, the idea that God's power is limited, and second the notion that God is dependent on the world for his own self-actualization. The biblical view of God, in contrast, shows him to be almighty; that is, able to do anything he sees fit. Further, although the world depends absolutely on God, there is no sense in which God needs the world in order to fulfil himself.

<sup>44</sup> J. Lindsay, 'Creation' in *ISBE*, 1:803.

<sup>45</sup> K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 129.

<sup>46</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 129. It would be strange to have a word completely dedicated to that concept.

# Sabbath—A Biblical Understanding of Creation Care

Christopher Fung

**KEYWORDS:** *Crucifixion, jubilee, resurrection, nature, Lord's supper, redemption, Kingdom of God*

AFTER JESUS' FIRST major conflict with his contemporary Jews, he proclaimed: 'The Son of Man is thus the Lord of the Sabbath.'<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, he repeatedly challenged his opponents on their interpretation of and practice on the Sabbath day and eventually allowed himself to be killed in this apparently earthly cause. In bringing about Jesus' resurrection, God has accepted both the person of Jesus as well as the cause he has taken up—the Sabbath cause. In his death and resurrection, Jesus the man has shown himself to be Christ, the redeemer of the cosmos.<sup>2</sup> The Lord of the Sabbath will take God's creation forward from the very beginning to the very end.

The Old Testament Sabbath cause is

a system of mutually reinforcing institutions aimed to bring God's creation in all its dimensions to the fullness of the Sabbath of God. The Sabbath day for man points him to a future in which he is ultimately in harmony with the works of his hands, as God was in harmony with every part of his creation after his six days of creative work. The Sabbatical year urges man to come into harmony with nature through knowledge and consequential respect and love. The Jubilee brings man into mutuality with other people and consummates this and the former two Sabbatical institutions under God.

Through Jesus' earthly actions and his death and resurrection, the above Old Testament institutions have been transformed into a new set of institutions comprising the Lord's Day, the church and the Kingdom of God. Henceforth, the redemption of God is being extended far and wide through these New Testament institutions. His creation is moving forward to the final Sabbath.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Mk. 2:23-38, also Mt. 12:1-8; Lu 6:1-5.

2 Christopher Fung, 'Sabbath, The Alpha and Omega of God-Man Partnership', *Asia Journal of Theology*, 20:2, October 2006, 455 and 20:1, 182-204.

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3 Christopher Fung, *The Institutions of Hope, Evangelical Review of Theology*, (2008) 32:3, 238-356.

## I The Sabbath-Kingdom

### 1. Sabbath and the Crucifixion

Christianity is founded on God's work in history, hence understanding Jesus' role in God's overall scheme must start from his life and earthly reason for his death.<sup>4</sup> That Jesus was crucified because he acted on a different interpretation of the Sabbath and challenged his Law-abiding contemporaries on this is abundantly clear from the records of this most frequent (at least five separate events) and intense conflict recorded strategically in all four Gospels. His opponents considered Sabbath practice as the decisive criterion by which to judge whether a person is from God.<sup>5</sup> In these struggles, Jesus uniquely took the initiative, was unusually provocative and uncharacteristically ostentatious, and extremely intense. Every single incident here concerns the healing of a person with a debilitating sickness on the Sabbath Day and each of these sicknesses

prevents the sufferer from working for him/herself.

The aftermath of these encounters is a continually aroused opposition by the Jews at large and the Pharisees in particular—bent on destroying (killing) Jesus. These murderous efforts resulted from the first recorded intense conflict that Jesus had with the pious Jews who went as far as seeking cooperation with their sworn enemies, the Herodians. These purposely-fanned conflicts continued late into Jesus' public career with unabated intensity.<sup>6</sup>

Not only has Jesus knowingly stoked so much anger among his opponents leading to his murder, he fully understands the implications of and the reactions to his actions, but nevertheless accepts them and persists in his actions as if to ensure that he would be killed because of this.<sup>7</sup> Jesus clearly wants the earthly reason (why people killed him—the 'because' that he has accepted) to inform and determine the redemptive reason ('for' in dying for our sins), thus linking in this very act the earthly and the heavenly, the material and the spiritual causes.<sup>8</sup>

The Sabbath day for man is modelled on God's Sabbath in which God rested to enjoy, appreciate and love the fruits of his labour—his multi-faceted creation. Every component of his creation was good in itself, but when put to-

<sup>4</sup> Most scholars have not given due attention to the most biblical reason of Jesus's death (Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM, 1974), 87, 183; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 8, 103, 33; Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 334-339, yet all would agree that this is most important (Moltmann, *Crucified*, p. 96, 189); Kung, *Christian*, p. 439; p. 551; C.G. Montefiore (1921-22) 'The Religious Teaching of the Synoptic Gospels in Its Relation to Judaism', *Hibbert Journal* 20:437).

<sup>5</sup> Jn. 9:16; Geoffrey Chapman, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Burns and Oates, 1994), 80; Kung *Christian*, 207-208; Donald Alfred Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 132.

<sup>6</sup> Lk. 13:10-16; Lk. 14:1-6; Jn. 5; Jn. 9; C.E. Graham Swift in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer, A.M. Stibbs, D.J. Wiseman, 1970), 858.

<sup>7</sup> Jn. 7:19-23; Kung, *Christian*, 320; Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Crisis in the life of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1952), 124.

<sup>8</sup> Yoder, *Politics*, 53; Kung, *Christian*, 335.



gether with other parts to play its role in the whole creation, becomes even better.<sup>9</sup> Completed creation is not just good, but very good!

It is this completeness, the completion of goodness and the goodness of completion, that God celebrated during his first Sabbath. Upon the Israelites' deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, at the point where they could begin to work freely and be responsible for their actions, God initiated the Sabbath Day for the Israelites<sup>10</sup> (as a prototype of blessing) so that they could likewise celebrate their works periodically and look forward to their completion at the end. The vision is for the builders to live in the houses they build and the planters to enjoy the grapes of their own vineyard with no one to scare them or take away their fruits.<sup>11</sup> Individuals are thus to celebrate their own Sabbaths as God did at first.

Riding on the Sabbath Day is the Sabbatical Year in which man is enjoined to produce from the land what he wants the land to provide, but only during six years out of every seven. The remaining year in the seven-year cycle is for man to learn from the land what it can spontaneously provide without man's coercion and to get sustenance from there. The land rather than man is the intended beneficiary of such practice.<sup>12</sup> By forcing man to go beyond the sphere of his own knowledge to understand God's providence through nature, Sabbatical year observance is

continuing the work God initiated with Adam to name the animals.

This repeated Sabbatical Year is a pointer to a future redemption of nature, necessitated after the land was cursed because of man's rebellion. This curse on nature is now to be reversed by the same agent—man—that brought it about. Through this, man will progressively appreciate the prowess and potentiality with which God has imbued nature and embark on a journey of learning, respecting and loving God's intelligently designed creation. The resulting mutuality between man and nature is Creation's glorious freedom.<sup>13</sup> To calm man's doubts, God provides a safety net in the abundance of produce from the land in the sixth year in case man's efforts at relying on nature temporarily fail him.<sup>14</sup>

Consummating the above Sabbath institutions is the Jubilee which calls men to become reconciled with each other through provisioning each person with what is necessary to reach the destination pointed towards in the Sabbath Day.<sup>15</sup> The original provision for each person and household which can change through the ups and downs of life is now reset for all on their individual and collective journeys towards the Sabbath. The Jubilee culminates the seven-year cycles of the Sabbatical years and together with the refreshed community is ultimately accepted by God as complete, hence named the favourable year of the Lord. Yet the cycle continues, signifying its own incompleteness, and pointing to a greater

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9 Gen. 1.

10 Ex. 20:9-11; Dt. 5:12-25.

11 Is. 65.

12 Lev. 25:1-7.

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13 Rom. 8:18-22.

14 Lev. 25:20-22.

15 Lev. 25:8-55.

future.<sup>16</sup>

These three intertwined institutions form a system in which the individual persons, nature and the community all converge towards the ultimate destiny intended by God. Through the Sabbath Day modelled on the very actions of the Creator in his Sabbath, God is leading the individuals forward to his future, one week at a time. Man in turn is to lead nature forward to the final rendezvous in which God, man and nature all come together in harmony and love, one Sabbath of years at a time.

With nature fully supporting men at the end of the Sabbatical year journey, and with each person finding fulfilment in the fruitful works of his hands, men have all the prerequisites for the final steps and thus are now called to respect God and act justly towards each other, thus completing the foundation for God's acceptance of his entire creation. Individuals, nature and the entire human community can now resonate together in joyful unison to the praise of the Creator, while journeying onward and upward, one Jubilee cycle at a time.

Yet, this mesmerizing vision never caught on.<sup>17</sup> The Israelites reluctantly implemented the Sabbath Day through burdensome regulations rather than observing its spirit, but never quite progressed to the last two institutions. This resulted in unchecked greed, which further blossomed into all forms of misbehaviour against nature and each other, bringing upon themselves the destruction of their two kingdoms

and their own exile as the fulfilment of the warned-against punishment from God.<sup>18</sup> Thereafter, there were no new instructions from God except the promise that God would write his law directly into his people's hearts so that they would not have to teach each other to obey God's words.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Jesus and the Sabbath

When Jesus appeared on the scene, the three Old Testament Sabbatical institutions were transformed through his life, work, death and resurrection.

Unflinchingly and unrelentingly he took an unyielding stand on the practice of the Sabbath in the most frequent, public, and intense conflicts he had with his foes. He thereby personified his earlier statement that the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath, and he stood the traditional understanding and practice on their heads.<sup>20</sup> When this action became the basic reason his crucifixion, he had vested upon himself the cause of the symbiotic Sabbath institutions. In resting in the grave on the first Sabbath day after the Passover, Jesus has taken the Old Testament Sabbatical institutions with him to the tomb, thereby burying them with himself; upon his acceptance by God<sup>21</sup> for resurrection on the first day of the week, he has given the old Sabbath institutions a new form. What seemed to be Jesus' challenge of a purely Jewish custom has now, through the lens of his death

16 Fung, *Hope*, 242.

17 Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation, An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 289; Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.15.3.

18 2 Chr. 36:21.

19 Jer. 31:31-34.

20 Kung, *Christian*, 208.

21 Kung, *Christian*, 382-383.



and resurrection, become the cosmic struggle for God's Sabbath.

In preparing his disciples for his new creation, Jesus had one last meal with them in which he used the bread and wine—taken from creation—to symbolize his body broken because of our sins and his blood shed to redeem mankind. He instructed his disciples to repeat this in remembering him i.e. proclaim his death until he comes.<sup>22</sup> Between the Lord's death and his coming stands the resurrection of Jesus.

When Jesus did rise again on the third day, his disciples started to remember him, as instructed, through the bread and wine. The person Jesus they remember is now indisputably the Christ, proven by his resurrection,<sup>23</sup> hence 'Jesus Christ'. The framework of Sabbatical time now determines when this is observed. The last day of the week, namely the Sabbath, means completion of one's labour in the working cycle. The first day of the week is the beginning of a new creative cycle. Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week signifies not only a new creative cycle, but a whole and totally new creation, on par with the first creation of God.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Early Church and Sabbath

Given that this new creation is what his followers look forward to when Jesus comes, and following the Sabbath example of a periodic observance, his disciples soon adopted the practice of

remembering their Lord on the first day of every week,<sup>25</sup> now aptly called the Lord's Day. Knowingly or otherwise, the disciples are repeating what God did in instituting the Sabbath for man, but with an added dimension. God freed the Israelites from their slave masters so that henceforth the fruits of their labour could accrue to them on earth. The Lord's Day signifies that the redeemed man is protected from the all-out robbery of another slave master called death, all because of Jesus' prototypical resurrection.<sup>26</sup>

The shift in time reference between Jesus' followers and the Jews cannot be overstated. The Jews saw the Sabbath as solely resting on God's creation and missed the dimension that each person is to move forward to his own destination in the Sabbath, hence the very rigid rules to bind man to the past. By contrast, in the Lord's Table at the core of the Lord's Day, the disciples look forward to the Lord's coming by holding on to the foundation his death and resurrection laid. Rather than locking his followers to that moment in history, Jesus in his death becomes the springboard to God's future through his resurrection, a future that all his followers earnestly seek. His disciples' first-day-of-the-week choice completes the transformation that Jesus initiated in overthrowing the woefully inadequate backward-looking concept of the Sabbath and ushers in the intended hope-filled Sabbath consummated in the Lord's Day.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> 1 Cor. 11:26.

<sup>23</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus, Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 107-111.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17; Wright, *Challenge*, 175-176.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 20:7.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Cor. 15:58; N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), 192.

<sup>27</sup> Kung, *Christian*, 216.

#### 4. Sabbath and Nature

The real Sabbatical year rids man of his anxiety about fickle nature through a gradual learning and inuring process, thus freeing and enabling him to follow God's intention of justice among men expressed in the Jubilee. Jesus continues this by preaching how God's design in nature can be trusted to remove our anxiety.<sup>28</sup> In the process, redemption has started to dawn on nature and all man's anxiety-driven destruction of nature should eventually cease. Yet Jesus has not only physical creation in mind for redemption. When he acknowledged that he, the Jesus who lived within God's very creation, is the Christ and upon this impossible-sounding truth he would build his church, his intention to bring redemption to the entire creation is proclaimed, and the church is his agent.<sup>29</sup>

The human Jesus is now declared the cosmic messiah, the redeemer of creation. Hence Satan's attempt to thwart Jesus' move and limit the scope of redemption through Peter's very-human logic was immediately rebuffed. Henceforth, Jesus proceeded without regrets to Jerusalem to meet his fate at the hand of his accusers.

Like the transformation of the Sabbath day into the Lord's Day through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the church was born by burying the Sabbatical Year with Christ and resurrecting it with an expanded mission to include not only nature, but the entire creation, as fitting for the cosmic Jesus Christ. The cosmic Christ<sup>30</sup>

is inextricably also the earthly Jesus and is thus the cosmic Jesus Christ, a fit founder of his church. At the centre of this expectant community—the church—is the Lord's Table through which the church, the body of Christ looks forward to the consummation of creation through a redemptive process. Nature is an indispensable part of this consummation. The time orientation in the Sabbatical-year-transformed church is now irrevocably locked into a hope, the hope of creation's fullness.

#### 5. Sabbath and Kingdom

Jesus inaugurated his ministry by proclaiming the Jubilee.<sup>31</sup> Thereafter, he preached only the Kingdom of God, signifying that the Kingdom is the continuation and fulfilment of the Jubilee cause in the Old Testament. A main feature of the Jubilee—to restore hope to man—is neatly encapsulated in the beatitudes<sup>32</sup> in which the promised Kingdom (first and last of the eight 'blessed are') brackets the middle six blessings which are each a reversal of one of the common miseries and undesirables of the current situation, something which the Jubilee tries to address and redress in a more rigid institutional form.

The first beatitude simply lays down the prerequisite for these middle blessings—to have such an insatiable longing for the Kingdom that one feels absolutely inadequate (poor), and the last beatitude points out the way to the Kingdom which leads through much persecution because of one's righteous stand. From there, the teaching on the Kingdom expands in all directions to

28 Mt. 6:25-33.

29 Mt. 16:15-23.

30 Col. 1:19-20.

31 Lk. 4:18-19.

32 Mt. 5:3-11.

paint a rather amorphous yet enticing picture of the mystery of God's work in this world. Though the Kingdom narratives elude our easy pigeonholing, the centrality of God, and man's response, in the Kingdom are unmistakable.

During the last meal Jesus had with his disciples, he looked forward to his Father's Kingdom in which he would drink the vine anew with his followers.<sup>33</sup> All the multi-faceted Kingdom teachings are now focused on the coming of God's Kingdom which has been transformed into the City of God, the New Jerusalem that will come down to earth and in which God's presence will be perpetual.<sup>34</sup> In it, all the longings of the Jubilee will be more than satisfied. Tears and death are done away with and the handiwork of man—the glory of the nations—will be brought in to decorate the City. Man, hitherto lowly and unclean, is now recognized together with his works<sup>35</sup> through his resurrection as being in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Through the first and last beatitudes, namely the desire and sacrifice for the Kingdom, respectively, the middle six beatitudes have now become reality. The ultimate Sabbath for man, the goal that the successive Sabbath days point towards, is now fulfilled just as God consummated the individual 'good' of each day of Creation into the 'very good' of the last day. The new creation Jesus' resurrection initiated is brought to fruition in this City built

upon the twelve exquisite foundation stones of God through the hope and consequential work enjoined by the successive Lord's Day remembrances. The remembrance of the future in Jesus Christ has guided men forward and indeed brought about that future in partnership with their Lord.<sup>36</sup>

## 6. Sabbath and the Redemption of Nature

The work of the church is now completed in the redemption of nature.<sup>37</sup> Out of the throne of God flows a river which nourishes the Tree of Life to bear fruits for our enjoyment and put forth leaves to heal the nations. Absent are the hoeing and pruning, or mutilation, by man. The curse on the land because of man's sin<sup>38</sup> is reversed. What God wanted man to do and indeed helped him do—to know nature as in naming the animals—which was carried through to the Sabbatical year despite the Fall, is now brought to fruition through the church. The redemption nature looks forward to, i.e. harmony in freedom and freedom in harmony with mankind, is now reality. The spontaneous constructive mutuality between man and nature becomes nature's salvation.

This mutuality is necessarily part and parcel of the earth resurrected men inherit, the City of God. Both nature and humans are glorified together in this final Sabbath of Creation.<sup>39</sup>

33 Mt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:18.

34 Rev. 21.

35 Rev. 21:24-26; Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 176, 177.

36 Yoder, *Politics*, 242.

37 Rev. 22:1-3

38 Gen. 3:17-18; 4:11-12.

39 St. Augustine, in closing the *City of God* (New York: Doubleday, 1958, translated and abridged by G. G. Walsh et. al.), XXII:30, 544.

God the Alpha is now God the Omega. The tortuous and chequered history of mankind, with all its excruciating and inexplicable sufferings and consequently those of nature, are justified in this final triumph.<sup>40</sup> Nature's groaning is wiped away along with man's tears. The beauty of man's work now sits alongside the mighty display of nature. God's presence is through all and in all when he proclaims: It is done. The prayer we have uttered so many times—'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'—is now fully answered.

Jesus' Sabbath's actions unfold the Decalogue<sup>41</sup> in a three-fold division with the Sabbatical hope (future of man in creation; 4)—flanked by faith (God-man; 1-3) and love (man-others; 5-10), thus unifying God's demands for man seamlessly between the Old and New Testaments. On the foundation of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, creation is inching towards the Sabbath-Kingdom through man's growth in faith, hope and love.

Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, fulfils the Law<sup>42</sup> and becomes the Lord of the Sabbath.

## II Lord of Sabbath as Leader of Creation Care

Of all the battle fronts that Jesus could have opened with the Jews, why has he uniquely chosen the Sabbath cause? Any cursory comparison with other enjoined observances would show that the Sabbath cause, seen through its institutions, is in a class of its own.

First, the Sabbath does not derive its origin from history (e.g. the Passover celebrates redemption in history), but from an event that birthed history—creation. This unparalleled super-historicity qualifies it to be taken up wholly by the only super-historical Creator.

Second, the reference of other observances are in nature, e.g. the month linked to the solar-lunar cycles ...etc.; but the Sabbath replaces this by God's reference in creation—seven days, seven years and its multiples—which are not found in, but imposed on nature, thus bringing a rhythm into nature according to God's super-natural acts of creation.

Third, while all other biblical observances punctuate continuous time (*chronos*) without demanding anything in between observances, the Sabbath places demands on both—six days you shall work. Without work, there is no Sabbath and without the Sabbath, work becomes meaningless and unbearable toil. Work enables the Sabbath and the Sabbath redeems work. Together, they give existence a meaning. This process-goal balance, emphasized by the exact periodicity, is fitting for the God-man partnership in continuous creation.

Fourth, even before Jesus re-oriented the misunderstood Sabbath towards God's future (God's first Sabbath, being what the six days of Creation were looking towards) he sets the paradigm for a purposeful, future-looking pursuit by man towards his ultimate abode together with the rest of God's creation. With Jesus' actions on the Sabbath, the Sabbath points unmistakably to the final rest for all of creation.

Fifth, depending on one's under-

40 Ellul, *City*, 162.

41 Ex. 20:1-17, Dt. 5.

42 Mt. 5:17.

standing of time, periodicity can mean two things: either endless recurrence in circular history, or incremental movement towards a goal in linear history. God created and is bringing his work forward to a fitting conclusion. Thus periodic Sabbath observance, while constantly reminding creation of incompleteness, is simultaneously working itself out of existence through each of its cycles. Incompleteness is giving way to its opposite in the onward march of God's Sabbath.<sup>43</sup>

Sixth, the general rule of biblical festivals is to have participants re-enact some events in which their forebears participated. This anchors the celebration in reality to save it from the ravages of unchecked fancy. But instead of the past, the Sabbath, though fully a biblical festival,<sup>44</sup> is oriented to the future. Thus man's Sabbath observance is a call to participate in the future—that grand rest of all creation. How one chooses to labour during the six working days gives meaning to the interlude of 'thou shall not work'. As opposed to re-enacting the humanly impossible—the foundation God laid in the past, Sabbath observance hands our posterity a future according to God's grand intention. This is what humans can take pride in. The Sabbath seeks god-oriented participation of all who are made free and creative.

Finally, man's temptation in any participation is to gain control to decide the future. Yet man's Sabbatical participation recognizes the foundation God lays and the final super-structure

in God which must fittingly be consummated by the same Creator and Covenant. Thus participatory hope is not an oxymoron. Rather, it rescues man's hope from passivity, redeems man's control instincts from idolatry and humbly offers both to the giver of them all. In the festival of all festivals which God consummates, the intended partner of God during the journey—man—also receives his covenanted glorification together with all of creation.

### III Framework of Creation Care

The overarching reach and orientations of the Sabbath-Kingdom bring the heavenly into the mundane, the eternal into the temporal, the spiritual into the material and vice versa. No wonder Jesus, the incarnated Creator, naturally picks the fight of his life on the Sabbath cause when it was hijacked and distorted. In this a comprehensive framework for Creation Care is displayed. Seven aspects of this framework are described below.

#### 1. Bible-based

In the Bible, God reveals himself as creator before he reveals himself as the covenanting God. The consummation of his creation is the Sabbath, which leaps right out of the first section of the Bible—God rested. It then continues right through the Bible, in God's commandments at a very critical juncture in biblical history—the Israelites' miraculous deliverance and the giving of the Law, together with the very grave consequences for its breach. Not only is there a Sabbath day, but a whole set of institutions is enjoined. These are

<sup>43</sup> Compare the opening time of the city's gates in Ezek. 46:1 with Rev. 21:25.

<sup>44</sup> Lev. 23.

to be observed at different intervals and touch on all aspects of creation. The prophets refer to the Sabbath as a guide as well as the ultimate state people can look forward to. The Sabbath is the Old Testament hope (*eschaton*), and consistently so.<sup>45</sup>

Somewhat surprising to New Testament believers, the consistent testimony of all four Gospels is that Jesus took the Sabbath issue with deadly seriousness and tenacity. When people think the Sabbath has passed away, like the rules of hand-washing and unclean food,<sup>46</sup> with the closing of the Old Testament era in Jesus' death and resurrection, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reverts to the Kingdom's Old Testament equivalent—the Sabbath.<sup>47</sup> Thus the Sabbath theme runs right through the Bible from the beginning to the very last page where the salient features of the Sabbath reappear in an even more elegant and sublime form.

The periodic Sabbath points forward and upward to a final reconciliation between humans, creation and ultimately God—the final Sabbath. But like the trunk of a tree, this *eschaton* is supported by its Sabbath roots that run deep and strong in the Bible: freedom, creativity, responsibility, forward-lookingness (hope), and satisfaction in the fruits of one's labour (reward). With God revealing his plan for and expectation of his work so clearly in the Bible, the believers' care for creation is necessarily firmly centred.

## 2. Jesus Christ-centred

The Bible presents Jesus Christ holistically, with the centre of his earthly actions informing his theology. When this basic respect for Bible interpretation is granted, the 'Son of Man is consequently Lord of the Sabbath' claim takes on its intended meaning. According to the Old Testament, Jesus' enigmatic self-designation, Son of Man, conflates the notion of simply a man (*Ben Adam*, derived from the earth—*Adamah*), with an apocalyptic being who will come to establish an everlasting Kingdom.

Jesus' many sayings well illustrate these two elements.<sup>48</sup> Inasmuch as one can infer the nature of this Son of Man from these sayings, from the actions Jesus promised and the treatment he received,<sup>49</sup> only two incidents forthrightly spell out who this Son of Man is. First, midway through Jesus' career, he asked his disciples who people say the Son of Man is, and the accepted answer is that he is Christ, the Son of the living God.<sup>50</sup> Yet the earlier, most consistently recorded<sup>51</sup> is that this Son

<sup>48</sup> Dan. 7:13 vs. 8:13 and the numerous references to Ezekiel in his book. Among the many Son of Man references in the NT, some clearest pointers to Jesus' humanity are Mt. 20:28, Mk. 10:45, Lk. 7:34, 9:58 and to the apocalyptic judge are Mt. 9:6, 24:27,30,44, 25:31, Mk. 14:62; Lk. 21:27,36, 22:69.

<sup>49</sup> James Jones, 'Jesus: Savior of the Earth' in *The Green Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 1-65-71.

<sup>50</sup> Mt. 16:13-36.

<sup>51</sup> When Jesus asked who people said he was, only Matthew, among the three records in the Synoptics, indicates Jesus used the 'Son of Man' self-designation. This compares unfavourably with the concerted use of Son of Man in all three synoptics when Jesus declared himself Lord of the Sabbath.

<sup>45</sup> Ex. 12:20; Lev. 25; Num. 15:32-36; Is. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Mt. 15:1-11; Mk. 7:1-2; Acts 10:15.

<sup>47</sup> Heb. 4.



of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath.

This unique and direct teaching coming from Jesus builds a bridge between the flesh and blood Jesus and the coming glorious and powerful ruler, and consequently sets in motion a process that leads from the beginning to the end. The ambiguous tension<sup>52</sup> inherent in this Son of Man, and later in the Christian understanding of Jesus (man) being identified as Christ (God), is totally resolved in the dynamic Lord of the Sabbath. What are seemingly contradictory (e.g., evil in God's good creation) and hitherto unrealised and seemingly unrealizable (e.g. ultimate justice) will all work out together for the good of God's creation towards the final Sabbath.

When the Lord of the Sabbath acted repeatedly according to this self-claim (healing the sick on that consecrated day) to drive home his message, the seminal reference for all subsequent actions of his followers is set. Creation is moving forward, following its Lord.<sup>53</sup>

The death Jesus so earned for himself through his corrective actions on the Sabbath was seen to be accepted by God in his resurrection. Jesus Christ, now enthroned Lord of the cosmic Sabbath, rejects man's nebulous repository of unfulfilled longings for God's work, euphemized as the cosmic Christ,<sup>54</sup>

and lays out clearly his expectation of creation through the Old Testament's Sabbath institutions which he buried and resurrected in a new form. This fittingly enables the Lamb that was slain to open the book of creation's destiny.<sup>55</sup> The many superficial dichotomies—temporal vs. eternal, material vs. spiritual, heavenly vs. earthly—that have plagued attempts to mainstream creation care—have now been removed in this biblical Jesus Christ.

### 3. Redemption enabled

No theology of creation care can avoid dealing with man's freedom since man's abuse of his freedom in his treatment of nature is the antithesis of creation care. Only mankind among all creatures has the sentient freedom that can turn destructive. Yet the seemingly logical choice to robotize man cannot be entertained<sup>56</sup> since God's Sabbath calls first for man's love of his work which can spring only from man's free choice. Without man's freedom, the finality is not complete,<sup>57</sup> hence anti-Sabbath.

The only option open to God is to redeem this freedom so that it can be exercised properly towards the final end. In Jesus' choosing to be sacrificed for the Sabbath cause, and the subsequent vindication in his resurrection, freedom to follow the Lord to the Sabbath and enjoy its wholesome fruits is proclaimed to all aspirers to the Sabbath-Kingdom. With these, the way-

**52** Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1950), 313.

**53** Ernst Kasemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 123f.; Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 321.

**54** It is unfortunate that the Cosmic Christ has been hijacked by pantheism, e.g. Matthew Fox, *The coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988), 133.

**55** Rev. 5:5.

**56** Moltmann, *Creation*, 188, 77-78, 224; Kung, *Christian*, 393, 251.

**57** Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 64.

ward steward is once again set to do the only work ever assigned him<sup>58</sup> with the guarantee that he will not be short-changed by eternal estrangement from God, his own work and all creation, if he chooses the side of the victor.

As opposed to viewing humanity's role as two parallel tracks<sup>59</sup>—creation and redemption—the Lord of the Sabbath sees only one task (the original task of caring for God's creation) and one hurdle (sin) to overcome which Jesus did through his sacrifice and eventual triumphal redemption. Creation care is the purpose of man's redemption.

#### 4. Reality respecting

Some have laid the blame for the global environmental crises on the desecralisation of nature in the process of birthing the modern scientific outlook which objectifies nature.<sup>60</sup> To undo the purported damage, two views have been considered: pantheism and panentheism with Christians rejecting the former as unbiblical. The latter makes use of the biblical space for God's immanence and indwelling and argues for some non-articulable interpenetration between divine substance and material substance with the aim of re-inspiring in us a sense of awe and respect towards nature.

While this may be poetically pleas-

ing,<sup>61</sup> its practical worth is non-existent.<sup>62</sup> Yet the Lord of the Sabbath sees God's creation as his prized handiwork, his object of appreciation, and love which he, working together with his appointed stewards, is going to bring to even greater perfection. During this journey, man regards nature objectively to know, love and appreciate it as God did in his first Sabbath. Divine-mundane interpenetration is nothing but a distraction<sup>63</sup> from this wonderful and rich relationship.

This vantage point makes room for meaningful investigation of nature which no person should disparage without first resolutely and personally disavowing any benefits from science. Treating nature as the other party does not mean any less respect or love for it if it is modelled after God's loving action, in the same way as marital relationship—between two mutual objects—is to be modelled after God and the church.

God has constituted man after his image as an insuppressibly creative entity and left room for man to mould creation according to the Sabbath goal. In that finality, humankind will have created a niche<sup>64</sup> for itself through initiating nature into the extra-natural

58 Moltmann, *Creation*, 228.

59 John Stott *The Lausanne Covenant—An Exposition and Commentary*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 3, 1975, <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-3.html>.

60 Lynn White Jr., *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, *Science*, 155, (1967) 1203-1207.

61 Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: an Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

62 Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 205.

63 Moltmann, *Creation*, 13-17. John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology, based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) (2nd ed); McFague, *Body of God*, 99-129.

64 Moltmann, *Creation*, 46; Schwarz *Eschatology*, 206.



rhythm<sup>65</sup> of the Sabbath, while simultaneously loving and respecting God and nature. While being harmoniously nurtured by nature, man will find himself standing above and beyond nature<sup>66</sup> in an 'in nature, but not of nature' symbiotic-yet-transcending existence as the consummate steward. Man is placed between God and nature, not as the centre, but as the caring leader of creation towards God's finale.

While inching forward, mankind is guided by the Sabbath institutions to defeat repeatedly the evil Siamese twins of human's and nature's impoverishment,<sup>67</sup> both resulting from man's ignorance and guilt. Unjust wealth distribution and environmental degradation are to be anathematized and continually reversed through concrete actions. Thus the Sabbath intention synergises the totality of existence towards the intended destiny of God: man's and nature's fullness. Only through man understanding and respecting the reality of God, man himself, nature and the inter- and intra-actions therein can creation—both man's and God's—move forward without inviting more demons than were cast out. The Sabbath-Kingdom institutions are an unchanging reference by which man can truly actualise himself through his work in God's creation.

## 5. Present-future coherent

Among the dichotomies the Lord of the Sabbath overcomes is also one between present efforts and future rewards which has placed an erroneous obstacle towards creation care. To put it succinctly, our current efforts at improving our earthly material situation, in some popular views, do not register on God's scale for the future, not because they are insufficient, but because the future is not material but spiritual with no commonality<sup>68</sup> between them.

Some misunderstandings in the Bible<sup>69</sup> seem to have deepened this. Yet, a strong rebuttal<sup>70</sup> comes from Jesus Christ himself who, true to God's consistent demand, has healed the sick on the Sabbath to enable the healed to work freely for in-kind rewards, as God was rewarded in-kind for his six days of creation through the Sabbath. Capping this is of course Jesus' consequential bodily resurrection into this material world. Even the resurrected Jesus remains *Adamah*, requesting and eating food.<sup>71</sup> Reaping what is sown within God's creation is now guaranteed by God the Father, through his Son and mediated to us through the Holy Spirit.

With the core actions and fate of Jesus speaking so loudly, the rest of his

65 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath Its Meaning for Modern Man* (n.p.: HarperCollins, 1979), 10; Moltmann, *Creation*, 285.

66 Moltmann, *Creation*, 190. For the opposite view point, see J. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1976); John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 142.

67 Rachel Roach, *Dried up, drowned out Voices from the developing world on a changing climate* (Tearfund 2005).

68 Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 289; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 241.

69 Popular misunderstandings include Rick Warren *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 34. Mt. 6:18-19; Lk. 16:9; 1 Cor. 15:44 are often misconstrued; see Wright, *Surprised*, 152-156; Wright, *Challenge*, 144.

70 A common approach is in Rom. 8:20-22, e.g. Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 163-164.

71 Lk. 24:37-42.

words and works and those of his disciples as they interpret him must fall into line with this basic present-future continuity.<sup>72</sup> All teachings on stewardship, ruling for God, reversal of fortunes of the oppressed and oppressors, coming of the Messiah, the Kingdom coming to earth, the saints co-reigning with God and God reigning forever and the like would be completed only by this demonstrated continuity. Labouring will continue.<sup>73</sup>

How would the present and future be bridged in actual fact, and the details of that continuity<sup>74</sup> remain one of the deepest mysteries of the cosmos, unless the prototypical bodily resurrection of the Lord of the Sabbath gives this an appropriate down payment and demonstration. God's future is and will remain mysterious; in this is creation's participatory hope.<sup>75</sup>

## 6. Vision led

Among all the clamouring for solutions to the many inter-linked global crises, what does biblical faith have to offer? Visions to go forward to pursue more advanced technologies, ideologies and political organisations are pitted against the opposite calls to return to some fabled good old days when damage to nature was less rampant and man less dehumanised. Yet Jesus' Sabbath challenges—all forward look-

ing—have argued against any backward move,<sup>76</sup> not to mention that going back is not only undesirable, but impossible, given mankind's unwitting fulfilment of God's call to fill the earth and to understand creation (initiated in naming the animals). Undoing those would mean genocide and intellectual suicide.

Yet that does not leave more 'advanced' science and politics as our saviours. On the contrary, all these would-be saviours are inadequate, thus fakes and must be judged as such. The true Saviour, through his Sabbath challenge, has centred hope in both the Old and New Testaments as a unifying virtue organically cementing faith and love as universal and unchanging guides into God's future.

Trite as this may sound, faith, hope and love constantly bring mankind back to where his central concern must be and rejuvenate his movements when he has lost his way in the maze of self-proclaimed salvations. Faith, hope and love are non-quantifiable virtues which must rein in and arbitrate any concrete proposals.

These virtues must also be pursued holistically for any positive movement; emphasizing one at the expense of the other two has and will lead to disasters<sup>77</sup> as history has repeatedly taught. The Sabbath institutions, taken together and consummated by their Lord, show the need of the interpenetration of the three virtues. Hope

<sup>72</sup> Wright, *Surprised*, 161-162.

<sup>73</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1964), 319-320, 399; Heschel, *Sabbath*, 27-28; Ellul, *City*, 180, 188, 178.

<sup>74</sup> Mt. 5:4-9; Rev. 21:17; 24; 26; 1 Cor. 15:58; He. 2:5.

<sup>75</sup> Fung, *Hope*, 254.

<sup>76</sup> Cox, *Secular City*, 95; Moltmann, *Crucified*, 106; Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 284; Moltmann, *Hope*, 123.

<sup>77</sup> Heb. 11:1; 1 Cor. 13:7; Moltmann, *Hope*, 18; Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 368.

for all creation—epitomized in the Sabbath cause—requires the guarantee of faith in the one and only unfathomable Saviour of the world. This is to be further buttressed by the love that must pervade the final Sabbath-Kingdom under God in all dimensions, including nature. Hope calls us to rise above individual concerns and present gloom to situate ourselves within God's coming Sabbath-Kingdom,<sup>78</sup> faith believes our seemingly ineffectual submission to God will bear fruits and love of all God's creation will enliven and beautify our journey ahead.

### 7. God consummating

History can be construed as God dealing out his responses to mankind to bring his creation to the omega point, the Sabbath-Kingdom. What God seeks is justice for himself, understood as fitting reward—'let there be' followed without fail by 'there was', culminating in his first Sabbath. This direct causality was disrupted when man rebelled against God. Thereafter God has been seeking a fuller Sabbath that includes man in God's creation. This Sabbath reference defines justice for all<sup>79</sup>—man, nature and God himself through broadening the meaning of justice to include amoral nature (eco-justice) by reference to the moral God's ultimate demand in the Sabbath. Any move away from God's wholesome creation would then be sharply felt<sup>80</sup> by the Lord of the Sabbath as a painful body blow against his ultimate perfection.

The critical act of reversing the injustice committed against God, i.e. redeeming creation by first redeeming the fallen steward through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, succeeded. All the brokenness inflicted on God's creation is and will be mended through the transformed stewards following their Lord. Despite the battles still raging and some setbacks, the war is won. Redeemed humankind can henceforth look forward to that final Sabbath-Kingdom of God,<sup>81</sup> man and creation, through the Lord's Table remembrance. Elements of this bountiful earth, the bread and wine, are held up as a telescope to catch a glimpse of the renewal of God's entire creation when Jesus Christ returns.<sup>82</sup>

### IV Enabling Mosaic

By appropriately resting theological superstructure on the historical foundation of the Bible, a vivid earthly-yet-cosmic picture of the Bible's central character—Jesus Christ—naturally emerges with creation care at its core. After redeeming the wayward steward, the Son of Man reemphasizes (not re-assigns since it was never abrogated) for man his only original role of stewarding creation with due respect for its multi-faceted reality.

By placing before creation an all-encompassing yet consistent *eschaton*, the Lord of the Sabbath guides mankind forward by three empowering virtues—faith, hope and love—to meet God's aching demand for justice and completeness. This superstructure sits

<sup>78</sup> Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 207; Cox, *Secular City*, 95.

<sup>79</sup> Yoder, *Politics*, 215; Rom. 3:21-22.

<sup>80</sup> Moltmann, *Creation*, 77, 258.

<sup>81</sup> Moltmann, *Creation*, 197.

<sup>82</sup> 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Moltmann, *Hope*, 310.

comfortably within orthodox Christianity without ever needing to speculate on or borrow from other obscure attrib-

utes of God. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega as claimed.

## Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology A Constructive Approach

Richard Harvey

Messianic Judaism is a contemporary movement that integrates faith in Jesus as Israel's Messiah with Jewish belief and practice. As such it challenges the neat division between Christianity and Judaism.

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# Gender Diversity in Mission Work and Leadership: Moving towards Kingdom Transformation

Leanne M. Dzubinski

**KEYWORDS:** *Justice, equality, women, mission organisations, gender stereotypes, oppression, cognitive dissonance*

THE MESSAGE OF THE gospel is a message of transformation. Biblical and theological studies often focus on the transforming power of the gospel in individual lives, and this transformative power is indeed tremendous. Yet full transformation also reaches into relationships, families, communities and organisations. The apostle Paul states in his letter to the Roman believers that the whole creation groans in its present state of bondage to decay, and few doubt that the world needs transformation on a large scale. Social justice issues and human rights issues often arise precisely because the society lacks the transformation brought by the gospel. Yet even in areas where the gospel has permeated to some extent, unjust social practices and lack of transformation can continue to plague

nations, communities and neighbourhoods. The purpose of this article is to help missions organisations to seek the kind of transformation that does good for women, for men, for society, and for the spread of the gospel.

In 1871, Maria Brown and Mary Porter sailed for China as Methodist missionaries. On the way, they struggled to find a Christian perspective on the Chinese custom of foot binding, which had been going on for a millennium. Eventually these women concluded they must oppose the practice. It was clearly harmful to women since it was painful and left them unable to move about freely without assistance. Brown and Porter also realized that physically impaired women were limited in their ability to contribute to society, thus raising the country's poverty level. For them, foot binding was clearly detrimental to the whole society, not just the women themselves. They also saw the implications for evangelism. They reasoned that a woman with bound feet

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could not become an itinerant preacher or Bible woman after her conversion, if she could not walk unaided. So the two women decided that an admission requirement to their gospel training schools would be unbound feet.

Six years later at an inter-mission conference in Shanghai their ideas were presented to all the missionaries. Some of the men at the conference recognized that they had never considered all the implications of foot binding, and joined the women in using moral persuasion to stop it when they could. Gradually more and more missionaries and Chinese people became convinced that foot binding was a harmful practice. The result was that in 1907 the Chinese government itself outlawed the practice. In just one generation, Brown and Porter were catalysts for transformational change in the whole country of China.<sup>1</sup>

### I Women Lost as Leaders

Brown and Porter went to China to start schools for girls. They were not sent in any official agency leadership role, yet their insight brought widespread influence. What about women today? Are women being included in leadership roles in mission organisations? Is their insight and influence being widely felt in the work of mission organisations?

A look at one contemporary organisation, which is considered one of the best at gender integration, illustrates that women are indeed lost as leaders. With approximately 350 workers, over

half of whom are women, this organisation has only six women in leadership positions. There are three women and nine men on the top leadership team. Two of these women share job responsibilities and titles with a male colleague, and one of the two is a short-term worker. The third woman is an at-large member of the team, with no direct responsibilities. The organisation works in over twenty countries; only one country leader is female.<sup>2</sup> The leader of the women's ministry is a woman, as is the leader of family services. Every woman who does hold a leadership role is married, although about seven per cent of the organisation's members are single women staff.

One indicator of the level of female leadership in an organisation is the number of women who return from the field to the home office and then take on a leadership role there. At present in this organisation, there is one woman who fits this profile, though she is leaving within a month. On the other hand, there are at least five men who have returned to the US and taken a position of leadership. In a doctoral thesis written in 2008, titled 'The Trailing Spouse in Mission Leadership',<sup>3</sup> the author relates that she was unable to locate even one 'trailing husband' for her study of couples who returned from the field to the home office in order for one spouse to take a role in mission leadership. What message does that

<sup>1</sup> Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 174-176.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Caes, 'Gender and the Christian Workplace' (La Habra, CA, 2009), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Julie Tiessen, 'The Trailing Spouse in Mission Leadership: Stewarded Commodity or Lost Resource?' (Dissertation, South Hamilton, MA: Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2008), 3.

communicate to women, to men and to the wider community about the value of women missionaries' expertise and their leadership contributions to the sending organisation?

When the women of this organisation were asked about their concerns, first on their list was the perception of women. They expressed concerns about being viewed as second-class citizens and frustrations with limitations in the kinds of ministries in which they can participate. They believe they have to be like a man to be heard and that they need to achieve more than a man to be valued. The inability to gain leadership positions or have women leaders as role models was a significant source of frustration for them. Most women with leadership gifts found little or no support within the organisation for the use of those gifts, and turned to other ministries or organisations in order to put their gifts to use. For their own sending organisation, these women are lost leaders. It is as though their feet are bound and their footprint limited. A similar study done among theologically trained women leaders in the US found being disrespected and being rejected as second and fourth on their list of challenges, as well.<sup>4</sup> The problem is not geography but gender.

What is it that causes women to perceive that their leadership is neither wanted nor valued within the organisation that sent them overseas, yet at the same time causes male leaders to exclaim, 'Where are the good women?'<sup>5</sup>

4 Natalie Eastman, 'Christian Women Making Biblical and Theological Decisions' (Dissertation, South Hamilton, MA: Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2005), 180.

Part of the answer may lie in gender stereotypes and expectations that continue to persist, and may even be promoted as biblical in Christian organisations. In the business world, Dr Alice Eagly of Northwestern University has written extensively on the subject. She asserts that 'Gender stereotypes are one of the culprits behind the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions'.<sup>6</sup> She and Professor Madeline Heilman of New York University add, 'Gender stereotypes create "double binds" for professional women that perpetuate biased evaluations of their competency and leadership abilities and hinder their professional trajectories.'<sup>7</sup> They go on to explain that men are expected to be 'agentic', that is, able to get things done, while women are expected to be 'communal', that is, focused on nurturing and caring for the needs of others.

If leadership is a visionary, achievement-oriented position, women are not expected to be able to fill the role. If a woman does prove herself to be agentic, then she has violated the expectations of communality that underlie gender stereotypes. They explain, 'Gender stereotypes can simultaneously lead to expectations that women

5 Nicola H. Creegan and Christine D. Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 9.

6 Hannah R. Bowles, 'Gender stereotypes and the double binds for women in leadership'. *Women and Public Policy Program*, (2009:2). <<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/wappp/news-events/news/e-newsletter/spring-2009-%7C-issue-no.-2/gender-stereotypes-and-the-double-binds-for-women-in-leadership>> accessed 1 February 2012.

7 Bowles, 'Gender stereotypes'.



are ill-equipped to handle jobs and roles traditionally held by men, and induce disapproval and social penalties for women who are successful in these male gender-typed positions.’<sup>8</sup> Successful women leaders have violated the gender-stereotype expectations placed on them, while women who fulfil the stereotype cannot lead successfully.

These professors represent the business world. What happens when such ideas are translated into the Christian realm? The phrases ‘Biblical manhood’ and ‘Biblical womanhood’ have been widely popularized by a variety of writers over the last twenty-five years.<sup>9</sup> The basic philosophy underlying these phrases is precisely that the gender stereotypes are correct; the difference is that the basis for these stereotypes is said to be God’s design for men and women, rather than social beliefs and pressures.

In this system of thought, men are leaders and women are followers. Not only are Christian women not expected to be leaders, if they do exhibit leadership qualities they are thought to go against a God-ordained ‘role’ for women. They are told they do not really have the gift of leadership, or that they are rebelling against their God-ordained place. They are limited to working with other women or children and told their gifts are not intended for the whole body of Christ.

Women, and Christian organisations as well, find themselves enmeshed in a web of demands and expectations that have little to do with the reality of how

the Holy Spirit creates, calls, redeems and gifts each person. Instead, the emphasis is on culturally stereotypical expectations for men and women. In this view, there is little room for women who exhibit leadership gifts, are drawn to intellectual pursuits, are good at strategic or analytical thinking or have visionary leadership styles. A good Christian woman must fit the gender stereotypes, which make her unsuited for leadership. If she is suited for leadership, she is not a ‘good’ Christian woman, and finds herself excluded on that basis. Either way her gifts are shunned and she encounters disapproval in the Christian organisation.

The double bind that Eagly and Heilman describe often functions quite strongly within the Christian organisation, with the added pressure of being promoted as God’s plan. Fearful of causing discord or of being called rebellious, a Christian woman with leadership gifts and abilities may go elsewhere to exercise those gifts that God has given her. The organisation does not benefit from her abilities, and the male leaders wonder what has become of all the good women.

## II Results for the Women

A woman with leadership gifts in an environment which tells her not to exercise leadership suffers the type of stress known as cognitive dissonance. This is the anxiety experienced by an individual when their experiences are inconsistent with their beliefs or ideals.<sup>10</sup> Cognitive dissonance theory

<sup>8</sup> Bowles, ‘Gender stereotypes’.

<sup>9</sup> CBMW <[www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org)> accessed 1 February 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Cognitive dissonance <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/cognitive+dissonance>> accessed 1 February 2012

states that people will seek to bring consistency to their behaviours and attitudes in order to reduce the distress they experience.<sup>11</sup>

Women in Christian organisations typically follow one of three paths to reduce their distress. Some choose to isolate themselves from the organisation promoting the teaching. They may become passive, disconnected, or uninterested, choosing to pursue other interests. Some may go so far as to reject the organisation or even their faith. Mission agencies certainly have some women who would fit this category. Disconnected from the broader work of the organisation, they find a productive place to invest their time and energy, one that typically has little or nothing to do with the agency that sent them.

A second coping strategy is for a woman to attach herself to a male, perhaps her husband, and seek to become the 'power behind the throne'. With clear gifts, yet lacking the freedom to exercise those gifts openly, these women may become persuaders, or in negative terms, manipulators, seeking to employ their gifts through the position of another person. At its best, this can function as a working partnership between two people with complementary gifts. However, since the environment is hostile to the woman's free exercise of her own abilities, the likelihood is strong that eventually problems will arise. Often the husband will be promoted to a higher position of leadership or responsibility within the organisation, one in which the woman

is unable to participate.<sup>12</sup> In this case the danger is real that she may also slip into the disconnected category mentioned above.

A third possibility occurs when the organisation is inconsistent in its view on women and allows a select few to be leaders as a sort of exception to the general rule. A woman who accepts a leadership position in this organisation must look for reasons to justify her own job while simultaneously affirming the teaching that women do not belong in leadership. To reduce the dissonance this brings, a woman may slide into self-deception.

This coping strategy carries a number of hidden dangers. One is hypocrisy: the woman is using her leadership gifts while denying that she is doing so. She may lead, while continuing to insist that she is 'just' a wife and mother, for example.<sup>13</sup> Another risk is that the woman may begin thinking that she is somehow superior to other women. The seduction of power and the desire to be accepted into the top circles can conspire to make her think that she really is different from other women and not subject to the same limitations as the rest. She may rejoice in having broken through the stained-glass ceiling, and simultaneously work hard to pull the ladder up behind her to prevent other women from competing for limited space or making similar achievements. Or she may simply assume that the barriers are not real,

<sup>11</sup> Cognitive dissonance <[http://changing-minds.org/explanations/theories/cognitive\\_dissonance.htm](http://changing-minds.org/explanations/theories/cognitive_dissonance.htm)> accessed 1 February 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Tiessen, 'The Trailing Spouse in Mission Leadership', xv.

<sup>13</sup> 'About Dorothy Patterson', <<http://www.dorothypatterson.info/about.cfm>> accessed 1 February 2012.

and that any woman who wishes to can succeed as she did.<sup>14</sup>

If a woman does achieve a position of significant leadership in an organisation, she still faces obstacles to leading well. Two of the most common were named by the women in the organisational study referenced above: they feel pressure to become 'fake men' in order to acculturate to their new setting,<sup>15</sup> and they feel pressure to prove themselves by achieving more and working harder than their male counterparts. Missionary women, skilled as they are at working very hard<sup>16</sup> and adjusting to new cultures, may be particularly prone to these pitfalls.

Furthermore, there is evidence that both of these pressures have some basis in fact.<sup>17</sup> In general terms, women continue to work harder and longer for the same amount of recognition, and men continue to discount certain kinds of interactions. For example, a person speaking with great emotional energy on a topic may be called 'emotional' if they are female but 'passionate' if they are male. All these inconsistencies strengthen a woman's belief that she must change who she is in order to be

accepted into the boys' club.<sup>18</sup>

The bottom line for mission work and mission organisations is that the woman's leadership footprint is restricted, bound by social preconceptions masked as biblical principles.

### III Cultural Issues

North American and European culture and North American and European Christian sub-culture are in good company to the extent that they assign a subordinate place to women in relation to men. (This is not a comment on the legal status of women, but rather on lingering stereotypes.) Many Eastern religions as well as much of Islam also promote this view.

Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wu-Dunn, Pulitzer-Prize winning journalists, published a book in 2009 entitled *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. From the Middle East, through Africa and across Asia, they document some of the most blatantly oppressive practices directed at women, in every case because female life is deemed less valuable than male life in a particular society, tribe, or country. North American, European and Christian cultural values find themselves at present in a kind of midway position, having elevated the value of women to a certain extent while still maintaining them in a subordinate position in relation to males.

What implications does this have for the work of the mission organisation? Issues of culture, acculturation

<sup>14</sup> Caes, 'Gender and the Christian Workplace', 4.

<sup>15</sup> Caryn Rivadeneira, 'What We're Asked to Change', *Gifted for Leadership* <[http://blog.kyria.com/giftedforleadership/2009/12/what\\_were\\_asked\\_to\\_change.html](http://blog.kyria.com/giftedforleadership/2009/12/what_were_asked_to_change.html)> accessed 1 February 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Dzubinski, 'Work Practices of Missionary Women', (Dissertation, South Hamilton, MA: Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2007), 95.

<sup>17</sup> Tiessen, 'The Trailing Spouse in Mission Leadership', 38.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Beach, *Gifted to Lead: The Art of Leading as a Woman in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 32.

and cultural adjustment figure largely in most agencies' training plans and strategies for overseas service. In fact, the organisation studied has used culture as a reason for not promoting many women to significant levels of leadership. Both the host cultures' values and the sending culture's values are cited as standards to which the organisation must submit.<sup>19</sup> Yet it is not clear whether the host or sending cultures' views on this topic have ever been examined.

Even more significant are the questions about the transforming nature of the gospel message. Is the desire to acculturate taking precedence over the true message of the gospel? When missionaries unquestioningly submit themselves to cultural values that are clearly contrary to scriptural ones, they miss an opportunity to bring holistic transformation to the society. Missionaries are thoroughly trained to observe and adapt to their host culture. They also need skills in determining when to fit in and when to resist.

Gender practices are one area in which the easy path is to accept the host culture, especially if their own culture has similar tendencies. There are certainly times when God works despite the sinful practices of a society.<sup>20</sup> In their eagerness to fit in, however, missionaries can forget this aspect of transformation: that being different can serve to reflect different values, Kingdom values, which make people

thirsty for the good news the gospel brings.

The two Methodist missionary women who opposed foot binding understood this principle clearly. Kingdom values are different from culture's values. Jesus and the gospel affirmed the value of women, so to them, even what appeared to be an entrenched cultural practice was not acceptable since it was damaging to women. Interestingly, their firm stance had such a far-reaching effect that the secular writers of *Half the Sky* make the following comment about China:

We sometimes hear people voice doubts about opposition to sex trafficking, genital cutting, or honor killings because of their supposed inevitability. What can our good intentions achieve against thousands of years of tradition?

One response is China. A century ago, China was arguable the worst place in the world to be born female. Foot-binding, child marriage, concubinage, and female infanticide were embedded in traditional Chinese culture.... So was it cultural imperialism for Westerners to criticize foot-binding and female infanticide? Perhaps. But it was also the right thing to do. If we believe firmly in certain values, such as the equality of all human beings regardless of color or gender, then we should not be afraid to stand up for them; it would be feckless to defer to slavery, torture, foot-binding, honor killings, or genital cutting just because we believe in respecting other people's faiths or cultures. One lesson of China is that we need not accept that discrimination is an intractable

19 Caes, 'Gender and the Christian Workplace', 5; 17.

20 Kate Sauter, 'Culture Shock! Successfully Navigating the Transition Phase of Ministry', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (46:2, 2010, 142-145), 148.

element of any society. If culture were immutable, China would still be impoverished and Sheryl would be stumbling along on three-inch feet.<sup>21</sup>

For Kristof and WuDunn, there is no question at all about standing up for what is right. History may have largely forgotten that it was two missionary women who initiated this change, but these two women serve as an example for all who seek to carry the gospel that real transformation is holistic transformation, reaching to all members, levels, and structures of society. The transformation of individual hearts leads directly to a ripple effect outward through society, leading to the destruction of prejudice and the breaking down of unjust social structures, no matter how deeply embedded in the culture they may appear.

#### IV Theological Issues

Christians, and more specifically, missionaries and mission agencies that are wholly committed to the spread of the gospel, need to rethink the demands of the Kingdom of God versus the practice of culture in relation to their views and practices regarding women. A good place to start is by looking at the life of Jesus as a model for today.

The Bible describes life in a patriarchal culture. Men are the primary actors, with some accounts of noteworthy women who accomplish significant things sprinkled throughout. Yet Jesus,

in his interactions with both men and women, never allowed himself to be limited by cultural definitions of gender roles. None of the cultural valuations of human beings held weight for Jesus. He healed, called and related to all: gentiles, sinners, women, children, Samaritans. He had women among his disciples, women who followed him and women who supported him. He healed women, raised a girl from death, accepted the support of women and used women's life stories to illustrate the Kingdom of God. He loved Martha, her sister Mary, and Lazarus.

He revealed his full deity to the woman from Samaria with the statement, 'I am'. Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection. Not once did Jesus encourage women to pursue certain kinds of activities but not others. He never told them they should remain at home or stick to domestic tasks. He never reinforced in any way the religious or cultural demands on women of his day.

The impact of Jesus' life and practice toward women is probably best summed up in Dorothy Sayers' statement:

Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there has never been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, flattered or coaxed or patronised; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as 'The women, God help us!' or 'The ladies, God bless them!'; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half The Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity For Women Worldwide* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 206-207.

mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unself-conscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything 'funny' about woman's nature.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus' treatment of women during his time on earth shows that he never felt himself or women to be bound by cultural definitions of what women could or should do. Rather than encouraging women to stick to a carefully defined sphere, fulfil domestic duties and obey the males in their lives, he treated them as full, complete, competent and independent persons, capable of making their own choices and decisions. Christian mission organisations and workers can certainly look to Jesus' interactions as a model for how to treat all people.

Any consideration of the New Testament value of women must also take into account the writings of the apostle Paul. Though a thorough examination of the so-called 'problem passages' is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to notice some aspects of Paul's writings.

Paul encourages women to do the following: pray aloud in the worship service, prophesy aloud in the wor-

ship service, learn, be taught the faith, teach others, and form an integral part of the body of Christ. In his long lists of commandments, he never suggests that some commands are for women and some for men. There are no sins listed that are sins if done by women but not by men. The passages on spiritual gifts do not even suggest that some gifts are for men and others for women. The 'one another' commands about how believers are to treat each other in the body of Christ are for all believers.

1 Timothy 2:12, the passage most often cited today by those who wish to limit women's participation in certain ministries, starts with a third-person imperative verb form which is impossible to translate exactly into English: 'a woman [is to] learn.' Emphasis is frequently placed on 'quiet'; rarely is the imperative form of the verb that commands her to learn the focus of attention. Paul wanted believing women to be trained, taught, and prepared and he commended them numerous times in his letters for their diligence in ministry.

Church history illustrates what Jesus and Paul taught. Women have always played a vital role in the growth of the church and the spread of the gospel. In the early church, orders of widows, virgins and deaconesses quickly developed as a 'distinctly pastoral ministry'<sup>23</sup> that was remarkably effective for 500 years. The monastic movements of the Middle Ages always included women. Pachomius and his sister Mary founded the first monastic

22 Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 68.

23 Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 67.



orders for men and women in the late third century.<sup>24</sup> Benedict and his twin sister Scholastica were the founders of the Benedictine order, also for men and women.<sup>25</sup> Many monasteries throughout England and Western Europe were 'double' or co-ed monasteries, often led by women who became quite influential in their towns or villages.<sup>26</sup>

Later, the modern missionary movement became a place for women, both married and single, to exercise their gifts in ministry. From the 1860s to 1900, women founded over forty sending agencies.<sup>27</sup> More than three million North American women<sup>28</sup> worked to raise money and send women to the mission field to preach, teach, evangelize, heal and in general minister holistically to men, women and children around the world. By 1890 women made up 60 per cent of the missionary force,<sup>29</sup> a number that remains constant today.

From the start of the church, women with a vocation have always had a place to love and serve God through ministry. History clearly confirms that women have continually played a vital part in the founding, spread and health of the church worldwide.

Despite the clear record of participation and accomplishments by wom-

en, on a philosophical level theologians throughout the ages show a certain ambivalence towards them. Praise for their accomplishments or piety are countered with comments on the apparent sinfulness of female nature. Within evangelical circles today, there remains a push to maintain women in a subordinate position in relation to men. 'Equal in being but different (subordinate) in role' is the key phrase.

Race relations in the US have already amply demonstrated that 'equal but separate' is, in its very essence, a declaration of inequality. When 'separate' is maintained and enforced, based on a deterministic factor such as race or gender, the effect is of essential, and not merely functional, inequality. It is time to recognize this fact and move forward into practices that truly value women as men's partners.

As agencies continue to ask what Jesus would do, they should recognize that he would not be inconsistent and confusing in his message to women. Neither Jesus nor Paul would adopt the form of culture that devalues women. The historical record of women's contributions to the spread of the gospel throughout the history of the church clearly demonstrates the gifts, leading and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. God faithfully demonstrates his blessing on women who love him, serve him and diligently use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given them. If missions organisations embraced the behaviour of Paul and Jesus in leadership appointments, then a deeper and more powerful transformation would occur in those organisations and their ministries.

24 Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2001), 145.

25 Gonzalez, 239; Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 134.

26 Tucker and Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church*, 135.

27 Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 129.

28 Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 129.

29 Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 130.



## V Missiological Issues

The central missiological issue that arises alongside questions of diversity in mission today, whether it is age, gender, race or any other type of diversity is the question, 'What kind of gospel message are western missionaries taking to the world?' The gospel is a holistic message of total transformation, stated clearly by the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:26-28.

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In Christ, racial, social, economic, class, gender, educational, and any other barriers that society uses to divide and classify people ought to be broken down. This is the message that transforms: You are all one in Christ Jesus.

A list of twenty-five common oppressive practices towards women (see the appendix) shows that the nine most egregious are those criticized by Kristof and WuDunn, and are mainly practised in the majority world. The remaining fourteen are or have been staple practices of the Christianised West during the last 150 to 200 years. The vast majority have to do with prohibiting women from exercising certain rights or privileges freely granted to males in the same society.

The best known struggle was certainly for women's enfranchisement, but women have also had to fight to gain university entrance, to be able to divorce unfaithful or abusive spouses,

to be able to raise their own children in the case of a divorce or death of their husband, to own property or to spend the family income. Women still are not paid the same for the same work, are restricted in certain professions, are limited in some educational institutions, and face prohibitions and limitations in churches. Whether women are not allowed to speak in front of men at all, or merely not allowed to speak on certain topics in front of men, the underlying rationale is the same.

All of these limitations, regardless of the religious or sociological reasons given to support them, in the end stem fundamentally from the belief that women must remain subordinate to men.

In an article called 'A Disturbing Question', Pastor Ken Fong explains his response to *Half the Sky*:

When some Christian groups interpret the Bible as teaching that God created women to live in a male-ruled hierarchy, that they must obediently submit to male 'heads' or risk violating a divine mandate, aren't they also contributing to the oppression of girls and women?.... Even if the point is made that the Bible teaches that women are of equal value before God, if a person's being a female automatically and always means that she is overtly or subtly denied equal opportunities to learn, to lead, to teach, etc., that is oppressing her in the name of God.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ken Fong, 'A Disturbing Question and a Determined Conviction on the Treatment of Women'. *Sojourners: God's Politics Blog*. <<http://blog.sojo.net/blogs/2010/03/08/disturbing-question-and-determined-conviction-treatment-women>> accessed 1 February 2012.

This is indeed a crucial observation. Christian missions do a great deal of work in developing nations, and some of these nations are often the very ones that practise the devaluing of women in overt ways: sex-selected abortion, exposure of infant girls, limited access to education, health care, or even food, slavery, prostitution, honour killings, and more. If sending agencies also subscribe, no matter how subtly, to practices that devalue women, then they will be limited in the kind of transformation they can offer when they bring the gospel to those societies.

The difference between withholding learning from poor girls in a remote tribal village and withholding seminary training to them in North America is only one of degree. Women are maintained in a subordinate position in relation to the men and Paul's explicit command for a woman to learn in 1 Timothy 2:12 is ignored. The holistic transformation of the gospel message fails to penetrate the society.

Fong points out that if women are 'overtly or subtly denied equal opportunities to...lead' then women are being oppressed, though in a softer way than much of what is described in *Half the Sky*. He sees that oppression is oppression, and the difference is simply one of degree. Yet the true gospel message is not one of oppression, but of liberation, as Jesus read from Isaiah in the synagogue:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk 4:16-21).

Freedom for the oppressed, says Jesus, is a central part of his message. For the mission agency as well as the mission worker, the transformation brought by the gospel must be holistic, encompassing this present life as well as the one to come. A message of future redemption only, that fails to address the injustices in this current life, is like that condemned in James 2:16, 'If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed", but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?'

The demands of the gospel include the needs of the present life, as well as transformation in the life to come. For mission agencies, incorporating women as full partners in the work and leadership of the mission is an essential step toward bringing that holistic transformation and freedom from oppression that the gospel requires of Christ-followers.

## VI Implications for Mission Agencies

The potential gains in efficiency and effectiveness for mission agencies that fully value their women and intentionally integrate them into positions of leadership responsibility are tremendous. Perhaps the most obvious is maximizing the available resources for the work at hand. Women typically comprise at least 60 per cent of any given mission agency; therefore, maximizing the contributions of the women is an obvious way to expand the work of the organisation.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore,

<sup>31</sup> Leanne Dzubinski, 'Innovation in Mission: Women Workers in the Harvest Force', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (46, no. 2, 2010: 150-156), 151-152.

supporting 60 per cent of the organisation can have a significant impact on staff retention.<sup>32</sup>

Women who know that their agency will support them and truly value their contributions will work harder and stay longer with that agency. Additionally, healthy practices regarding women staff can be of significance in attracting new workers to the agency. Today's adults who have grown up in an increasingly egalitarian society are often not interested in participating in something that looks and sounds very male-dominated in its attitude and practice.

In regards to leadership in particular, agencies could benefit greatly from including women at all levels of strategy, policy-making and planning. Those women who represent 'communal' female strengths of relationship, networking, and empowering offer a kind of leadership that Christian organisations usually value highly. Women who represent 'agentic' strength also bring a different life experience and a different viewpoint, therefore offering a broader perspective on questions of planning, strategy, decision-making, influence and leading. Like the men, women workers bring a vast quantity of experience and wisdom, and astute agencies will seek to benefit from this wisdom.

Studies in the workforce continue to demonstrate that companies with higher numbers of women in top leadership positions consistently perform better

than more hierarchical, male-run companies.<sup>33</sup> This is likely to be equally true of mission organisations. The apostle Paul did repeat his description of the interdependence of the physical body several times to illustrate how things work for the Body of Christ on earth.

For the mission agency to benefit fully from the expertise of its women, it may need to ask some hard questions regarding women staff.<sup>34</sup>

- Are married women classified as staff or volunteers? Are they included in the pay and reporting structures?
- To what extent are married women functionally trailing spouses, sent to the field along with their husbands and then left to find their own way?
- Are there significant numbers of women in leadership positions in the organisation? When leadership positions become available, to what degree are women considered or deliberately sought out to fill those positions?
- Do women receive the same kinds and levels of support, whether it is financial, educational or structural, as the men?
- To what degree are women's different life-patterns supported as they contribute to the agency, or to what degree are they expected

32 Rob Hay, 'The toxic mission organisation: Fiction or Fact?' *Encounters Mission Ezine* (October 2004), 2 <[http://www.redcliffe.org/uploads/documents/toxic\\_mission5\\_02.pdf](http://www.redcliffe.org/uploads/documents/toxic_mission5_02.pdf)> accessed 1 February 2012.

33 Sylvia Ann Hewlett, 'Are Your Best Female Employees a Flight Risk?' *Harvard Business Review* <[http://blogs.hbr.org/hbr/hewlett/2009/10/smart\\_women\\_stronger\\_companies.html](http://blogs.hbr.org/hbr/hewlett/2009/10/smart_women_stronger_companies.html)> accessed 1 February 2012.

34 Dzubinski, 'Innovation in Mission', 154-155.

to navigate what may be male-biased agency structures on their own?

- What subtle or unintentional messages do women receive that their contributions are less significant than those made by men?

If women are not classified as staff, function as trailing spouses, are not present in leadership in a significant way and do not receive sufficient support from the organisation, then the sum total of these messages is one of the diminished value of women workers. If the sending agency itself does not highly value its women, its attempts to bring a complete message of life and value to women in the target audiences around the world will be less effective.

## VII Practical Steps toward Change

Sending agencies that want to move towards greater inclusion of women in organisational leadership may benefit from taking proactive steps to empower and support their female leaders. While both male and female leaders can benefit from positive organisational practices, gifted women may also need some help aimed specifically at their needs. This is simply an acknowledgement that the playing field has not been level in the past and that women are often starting from a position of disadvantage relative to that of their male colleagues. These are some potential first steps:

- Ask the hard questions, and listen carefully and non-defensively to the answers. Find out what kinds of support the women

themselves need. Then follow through on the information.

- Make clear decisions and statements about women's contributions. If the organisation chooses to limit women's activities, state this clearly from the recruiting phase. If women candidates show strong leadership gifts, counsel them to consider other organisations that might be a better fit for them.
- Learn to recognize women's non-traditional paths towards leadership.<sup>35</sup> Many married women prefer to spend the early years concentrating on their children, and then later are ready to enter whole-heartedly into leadership using the store of experience and knowledge they have accumulated. They will not look anything like the twenty- or thirty-something males who are beginning their leadership journey.
- Learn to support leaders' families. If women leaders have children at home, the agency should give husbands the right to participate as equal partners in home and childcare responsibilities while their wives are involved in ministry, rather than tacitly expecting a traditional gender-based division of labour.
- Actively seek women with leadership gifts and train them. Leadership development in the organisation should include both

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35 Gascho, 'The Needs of Women in Organizational Leadership,' 5, <<http://www.impactleader.org/articles/?cat=16>> accessed 1 February 2012.

men and women. Coaching, mentoring, seminars and classes are all ways that leaders can grow in skills and character. Make sure women are included in all kinds of training offered by the organisation.

- Put some women leaders in place in the home office. Women with years of field experience and leadership gifts can make a significant contribution to the organisation when they return from

the field.

The history of women in God's kingdom shows that despite their often-limited footprint women have been incredibly effective in evangelizing, teaching, training and spreading the gospel. They have established faith communities and brought transformation to whole societies. It is time to cease hampering them through the binding of their feet, and time to partner fully as redeemed humans, male and female, in the cause of the gospel of Christ.

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## Appendix:

### Twenty-five Common Oppressive Practices Towards Women

Sex-selective abortion	Not allowed to leave/divorce a husband
Exposure of infant girls	Not allowed to travel without husband/father's permission
Genital cutting	Not allowed to study certain subjects
Restrictions of food, medical care, and/or education	Not allowed to control the family finances/spend the family income/her own income
Rape (especially to force a marriage without a dowry)	Not paid the same wages as a man for the same work
Selling into slavery/prostitution	Not allowed to speak in the presence of men
Acid attacks	Not allowed to speak on certain topics in the presence of men
Honour killings	Not allowed to enter certain professions
Polygamy	Not allowed to educate males
Lack of maternal care/high maternal mortality or infant mortality	Not allowed to exercise certain spiritual gifts
Not allowed to go in public unaccompanied by a male	Not allowed to fulfil certain positions in the church
Not allowed to own property	Not allowed to be in a leadership position in home, church, or society
Not allowed to vote	
Not allowed to drive	
Not allowed to keep children if divorced/sent away by husband	

While the first nine practices on this list are the primary focus of the book *Half the Sky*, and mainly occur at present in developing nations, the remaining eighteen have all been a regular practice of Western, Christianised society in the last two hundred years. The last six on the list continue to be advocated in certain circles today as 'appropriate' limitations on the personhood of women, who are deemed unsuited by their female nature to carry out these tasks.

# Is Mission Diverse, or is it all just Money? An Examination of Western Mission to Africa

Jim Harries and Fred Lewis

**KEYWORDS:** *Dependency, vulnerable mission, money, aid, donations.*

## I Introduction

That America itself, and American mission activities in Africa are diverse at the point of origin, cannot be denied. Theologically and practically, there is no doubt broad agreement that mission actions ought to be diverse, even though the gospel message is one. Pop stars, sportsmen, businessmen, economists—people from many walks of life (plus of course the mission-minded) are giving of themselves and their time to Africa. Mission organizations and individual missionaries are involved in various kinds of activities including building projects, theological teaching, clothes handouts, scholarships for study, evangelism and church planting, agricultural and other development projects. All of these examples—and many others—would seem to substan-

tiate the common-sense notion that the contribution of western and American missionaries to mission in Africa is diverse.

A problem arises when that apparent diversity of ministries hides what in reality is being transmitted. We propose in this paper that the apparent diversity of mission activities in Africa actually conceals a peculiar kind of monism: all or nearly all of those diverse mission activities translate (for the African people) into one thing—money. This paper explores how and why this happens, and how it can be avoided. That is, how we may foster diversity in mission not only by senders, but also in a sustainable way for receivers. In other words, when we talk about diversity in mission, do we mean diversity at the point of origin, or do we mean diversity at the point of impact? The authors of this paper believe that diversity at the point of impact is at least as important as diversity at the point of origin.

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## II Diversity from the Western Point of View

Figure 1 summarizes both the western and African sides of the apparent diversity in mission. For the moment, look only at the left side of the diagram, the part of the diagram most western churches and mission agencies focus on. They see the apparent diversity referred to earlier, diversity conceived as various kinds of ministries—all for the sake of the Kingdom! Literacy work, clinics, theological education, etc. are all worthy and needed programs, they presume. No one, for example, disputes that Africans could be, and should be, healthier and better educated. Of course, we all know that money must be raised to support these ministries, since Africans couldn't possibly fund ministries out of their own resources. It also stands to reason that some money must be transferred to Africans in the course of these ministries. But the main thing is the ministry itself, many westerners naively seem to believe.

To be sure, debates on 'money in mission' are certainly raging. Jonathan Martin in *Giving Wisely* has explored

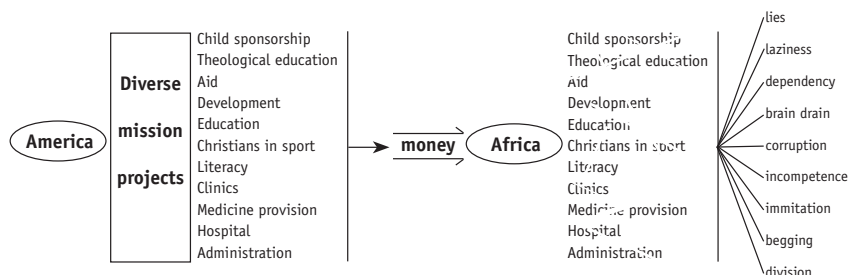
the whole 'giving' issue. Despite exploring case study after case study in which 'giving' hurts, divides, injures or even kills churches in the Global South, he keeps telling us that we need to keep giving!<sup>1</sup>

A similar debate occurred at a 2007 conference on short-term mission, attended by one of the authors of this paper. The thinking was that it was 'wrong' to go on a short-term mission trip and not leave money or things behind. A suggestion that short-term teams should not leave gifts was met by incredulous (yes, almost) horror! 'We must leave money' was the implicit retort.

To be fair to the western point of view, it should be mentioned that it is not monolithic. That is, there are differences of opinion among westerners about the right and wrong ways to help the poor. Corbett and Fikkert's recent book on alleviating poverty has an entire chapter entitled, 'Doing

1 Jonathan Martin, *Giving Wisely: killing with kindness or empowering lasting transformation?* (Sisters, Oregon: Last Chapter Publishing, LLC, 2008), 26 (and throughout the text).

**Figure 1. Diversity of Mission from the West to Africa**





Short-Term Missions Without Doing Long-Term Harm'. Their criticism of short-term missions is worth quoting at length.

Unfortunately, STM teams are generally in 'needs based' mode, bringing their knowledge, skills, and material resources to poor communities in order to accomplish a task as fast as possible. Indeed, there is not even time for the STM team to identify existing resources in the recipient communities. As a result, paternalism rears its ugly head, and we undermine local assets and increase poverties of being, community, and stewardship.<sup>2</sup>

The point the authors of this paper wish to make is not merely that when money is given, it should be given wisely. Who would wish to dispute that idea? Who wants to give money foolishly! Rather, the authors assert that *some* western missionaries should *not* be donors. That is, some western missionaries should not be giving outside finances to their key ministry.

### III How Africans Experience this 'Diversity'

Let us return now to Figure 1, this time looking at the right side of the diagram. At first we see the same list of ministries that is located on the left side of it (although they are no longer written clearly to indicate that these things aren't actually happening properly): Child sponsorship, Christians in

sport, etc. When we look still farther to the right, we see ten outcomes of these ministries, which are shockingly different from what is expected: Lies, dependency, incompetence, etc. How can this be?

Martin in *Giving Wisely* illustrates how this occurs. Orphans in Mexico sell gifts given to them by American churches to pay for the services of prostitutes.<sup>3</sup> Boys who are given biscuits end up scrapping and fighting.<sup>4</sup> Evangelists paid by the West are considered to be doing evangelism only for money.<sup>5</sup> Families are split apart by child sponsorship programs.<sup>6</sup> Donated money 'chops the legs out from under a man', Martin tells us.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps most striking from Martin's book is the example given from the Karamajong in Uganda. We are told that giving gifts by short term mission teams created disasters. The solution, according to Martin, is that short term missionaries should have 'experts' (long term missionaries) to do the distribution for them. The missionary he mentions has 'taken [14 years]... to know how to do it right'.<sup>8</sup> But as he writes (eight months later) that missionary has yet to hand over the stuff!<sup>9</sup> It seems even 14 years of mission experience do not teach an easy way to 'give'.

Even granting that short-term missions creates many unnecessary prob-

<sup>2</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 169.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 124.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 94.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 102.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 128.

<sup>9</sup> Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 128.

lems, it is evident that the solution to the problem of money in missions is not simply to say, 'Let the long-term missionaries take care of it.' Long-term missionaries often face the same difficulties as short-term missionaries. Having a more profound understanding of the difficulties associated with giving does not make them go away.

Let us try to imagine the situation from the point of view of 'poor' Africans. People are busy, Africans included. When something new comes, many people have trouble making time for it. They need to be convinced of its value; then they might appropriate it. But what if they are not given time to be convinced, but instead are paid to do 'it', whether they inherently value whatever 'it' is or not? Someone who is hard up may do whatever 'it' is for the money; and why not? The missionary is offering a way to earn desperately needed money. The rational point of the exercise then becomes to maximize financial profit. You are in it for the money, so make as much money out of 'it' as possible. You want the maximum amount of income for the least possible time and effort. It is very easy to see how dependency and corruption can be the natural results of these circumstances.

If someone is 'convinced' by the value of something, then they will make room for it (as far as they are able) in their normal lives. For example, if someone convinces me of the value of knowledge of Greek to read the New Testament, then I may put aside some of the precious hours in my life to study Greek. The situation changes if the person encouraging me to learn Greek is also offering to pay me to learn Greek. This is especially so if the

rate of pay I will receive from Greek classes is *higher* than that which I am getting from my current employment—whatever that may be. I will obviously choose to study Greek. I will defend the value of Greek to the hilt (through fear that if I do not do so I may lose my generous donor). I will study it arduously, as long as the financial carrot is there. Take away any carrots, and I will stop. It is as simple as that.

As for Greek, so for school in general; so for the playing of football; so for singing in the choir; so for boiling my water; so for preaching the gospel<sup>10</sup>—as also cited above. I will do all I can to continue doing all these things even amounting to producing a barrage of lies should anyone threaten the propriety of what I am doing.

To repeat our essential question: Is this diversity in mission? Or is it just money?

#### IV What is Important to Africans?

A Zambian association of churches in November 2001 interviewed one of the authors of this article in order to decide if he should be 'their missionary' for a year following the retirement of a North American. Sixty of their pastors were gathered. 'It seems this new missionary has no money', said the Zambian chair of the meeting. 'What use is a missionary without money?' he added rhetorically. No use apparently. The missionary was rejected.

Another example: one of the authors of this article has been ministering for many years in Kenya. Recently a new

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10 Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 94.

government university college was opened in the area where he works and he contacted the Christian Union at the University and twice spoke to encourage them. Then 'I need to meet you urgently' were the words in a phone message from a Christian Union leader. It felt good to the missionary to be needed apparently as 'Christian older brother'. A meeting was arranged. Did the African need advice? Was he looking for spiritual counsel? Then came the explanation: 'I don't have enough fees. Can you help me find a sponsor?' was the request; money again.

A Bible training program was taking off in a small town. African church leaders formed the board with the missionary. In board meetings the missionary seemed to be the intended 'victim!' Every means was used to try to get money out of her. 'This cannot work if you do not put money in' was the final conclusion after about five, long, drawn out meetings. 'You can use our churches to teach in, but don't expect any more help than that' the missionary was told. Why; because she would not provide money.

These are not the isolated experiences of only a few missionaries. 'Westerners are people who appear to have ample resources that many Africans would like to have them share, but lack most other qualifications for meaningful relationships.'<sup>11</sup> It seems to some African Christians that Western missionaries are only as valuable as the money they carry.

The corrupting influence of money on Africans runs still deeper. There

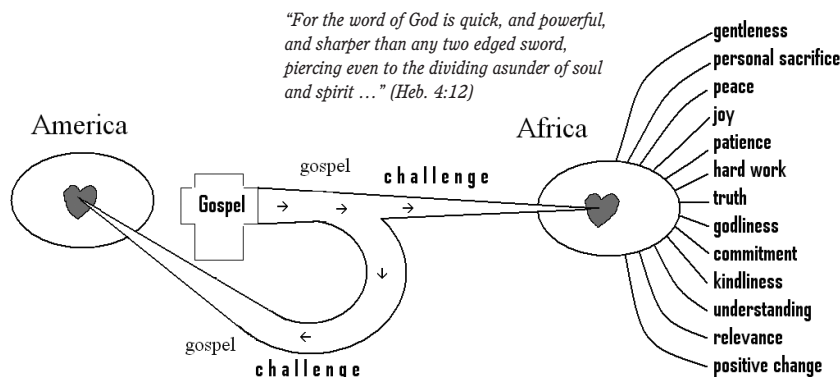
was a Nigerian businesswoman 'who believed she was saved because she was making great progress in her business ... the danger here for a prosperity gospel (i.e. where material salvation comes to be seen mainly in terms of material prosperity) is serious'.<sup>12</sup> It seems that Africans have learned too well the lesson that the gospel and money are inextricably linked, for this linkage occurs even when Whites are not present.

This to us may appear incredible. westerners appear to resemble lemmings that keep running over the cliff. Except, that is, it is not the westerners who fall to their death. It is the 'poor,' the Africans who have no chance of getting their act together under a constant bombardment of foreign goodies, and succumb as a result. The main value Africa is getting from western mission, it seems, is money. That hardly seems to be following in the footsteps of either Jesus or Paul. The Bible tells us that the gospel is like a two edged sword that penetrates the heart (Heb. 4:12). Meanwhile what it says about money is that the love of it is the root of all evils (1 Tim. 6:10). It seems that Bible scholars haven't always been paying enough attention to the Bible. Yet the western money-machine won't stop!

For all the 'diversity' of ministries discussed by Martin there are some forms of ministry he apparently does not consider—and that is any form of ministry for westerners that is rooted

<sup>11</sup> David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters: observations from Africa* (Dallas: SIL International, 2001), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Chiger Chike, 'Proudly African, Proudly Christian: the roots of Christologies in African Worldview'. *Black Theology. An International Journal*. 6(2) 2008. 221-240, 237.

**Figure 2. The Gospel that Penetrates the Heart**

in something other than western money. It is not only Martin but (almost) the whole western missions force to Africa that appears to fail to perceive this.

Are we really willing to say that money equals diversity? Figure 2 is an alternative model to what we find in Figure 1:

Many engaged in mission see themselves as practising Figure 2 (challenging the heart of a culture with the gospel), *by the means illustrated in Figure 1*. Martin suggests by his numerous examples that they are not. There are many reasons why this is the case, some of which we have articulated above, others we have not.<sup>13</sup>

### V Another Way

There is a solution to the dilemma we have explained. As with many good solutions, it is both easy and difficult. Proponents of giving seem to assume that every westerner who goes to Africa must be responsible for the distribution of his/her own raised funds. That is, that every westerner's identity in the Third World must be that of donor. The question remains for them, as Martin clearly demonstrates, how to give. The question is always of how to give wisely, and never whether one ought to give (material things) at all! Should this be so?

Perhaps what concerns some Christians is the evident biblical command to 'give', and their own desire to help the poor. How can a Christian from the west live amongst the poor in Africa and not constantly be giving? Let us consider this case: Martin says that his church has a budget of giving to mis-

<sup>13</sup> See also: Jim Harries, 'The Immorality of Aid to the "Third World" (Africa).' 23-40 In Jim Harries, *Vulnerable Mission; insights into Christian Mission to Africa from a position of vulnerability* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2011).

sion of almost \$1 million.<sup>14</sup> If I, as a missionary, succeed in convincing Martin's church to give me \$20,000, the result is that some other worthy cause will get \$20,000 less. This means in effect that, should I not take \$20,000 from his church to use in my ministry, I am donating \$20,000 to another worthy cause. That is to say—giving away someone else's money that they have already donated to 'charity' is different from giving out of your own private income. This is because once money is in the 'charity' pot, it is only its allocation that remains in question. If 'I' do not receive it, then some other worthy (presumably) cause will instead.

The reason we do not consider the above to be the case is because we consider (by faith) the body of donors—and the amount they have to give—to be infinitely large. We assume that one person's fundraising at a certain church, for example, will not reduce the funds available to another. But is this the case in reality? To a limited extent perhaps, but certainly not entirely. In other words, for an individual westerner in the Third World not to be 'giving' does not mean that less will be given in total, but only that this individual will have less impact on determining the route that the giving follows.

Western Christians see money as 'help,' but often do not see it as an expression of power. Yet it is an expression of power. Telling every western Christian in Africa to be a generous donor is in effect to tell every one of them to be powerful in their impact on Africa. Such power on the part of a new missionary (or even a seasoned mis-

sionary) brings competition amongst nationals for one's time and favours. Nationals devise strategies for getting to the top of the pile of recipients. Thus our missionary power can unwittingly encourage lying and deception to keep the money coming in.

Ironically, it is western missionaries' pre-occupation with money and administration that curtails the possibility of their having an impact in almost any other way than through money and administration in Africa. 'The besetting sin of European missionaries is the love of administration.'<sup>15</sup> Very often a missionary who gives money also ends up having to administer its use.

Those westerners who are not primarily givers of money may be able to avoid the barrage of lies, deceit, corruption, jealousy and in-fighting that so often troubles donors. Instead they can relate to Africans like, well, 'normal' people who want to share something of what God has done for them and in them. They can give time and other things that are not money. They can work in a way that the African can understand, follow and imitate. They can share important things and be heard for what they are saying instead of in the interests of the money that will come with it. They can 'compete' on the level with indigenous people. This is why we suggest that some missionaries should work in their key ministry without themselves subsidizing that ministry.

Figure 2 illustrates something else that happens when the gospel is spread by persuasion rather than by money.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, *Giving Wisely*. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods—St. Paul's or Ours?* (London: World Dominion Press, 1960), 120.

That is, the two-edged sword comes back and pierces the heart of those who have sent the missionary! When one does mission by using money, then one has paid in full and can live in the contented knowledge that 'I gave'. Mission done by persuasion is different. The act of persuasion challenges the whole life of the person persuading and his/her church, not only their bank balance. When persuasion is successful, the actions of those persuaded further challenge the originators of the message to pull up their Christian socks!

Cross-cultural workers should convey a biblical message in a way that is understandable to its recipients. They are to be living models of Christ-like behaviour. As the believer matures in Christ, ministry should more and more come out of who the cross-cultural worker is; out of his own real spirituality. Some followed Jesus simply because of the miracles he performed, which were expressions of his power. However, there was more to Jesus than the miracles he performed. There should be more to a missionary than the money she can give.

Close association with missionary colleagues who are operating as donors will result in suspicion. It is quite likely true, that the missionary who does not have resources to give out is nevertheless influencing another missionary's allocation of resources. This is an indirect way for that missionary to be giving out resources. This is why missionaries (and the same applies of course to nationals) who intend their ministries to be rooted in something other than the power of money must keep a distance from donor-oriented missionaries working with those who

they are reaching.

The kind of missionary who works by persuasion, who maintains friendly but slightly distant relationships with his 'donor' colleagues, can be involved in diverse ministries. Such missionaries can promote football, chess, health-care, singing, brick or tile making, agriculture, business, and you name it. Their ministries and approaches can be extremely diverse. The only requirement is that instead of buying people into these activities, they have to persuade them (as missionaries anyway used to do before the modern era) or pray for them to be convinced to join them by the Spirit of God.

That life in Africa is highly politicized is widely known. According to Maranz, Africans talk for money but Americans work for it!<sup>16</sup> One reason Africans do this, as already indicated, is that for many, acquiring money is best achieved by relating to westerners. Much effort is expended on finding lucrative ways of relating in the interests of gain.<sup>17</sup> Whatever 'ministry' a missionary has can easily be valued as a means of access to that money.

Ironically, this relational reality may block a more fully indigenous expression of the faith. Because relationship is primary and access to money vital, offending the missionary by appropriating what he/she has into contextual clothes, is to be avoided if possible. Not being locally clothed, what is brought by the missionary may not acquire local roots.

Another reason that Africans may talk for money rather than work for

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<sup>16</sup> Maranz, *African Friends*. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Maranz, *African Friends*. 137.



it is that African communities, who were introduced to money as recently as one hundred years ago, have not necessarily learned internally how to handle it, and continue to see it as something brought to them by others. While it is true that there are some people in almost any community who are less adept at handling funds, many African people excel in this. At least two factors are at work to create this situation. Traditional African culture that is often still being lived out arose in the absence of money. Also, being poor, many African people do not have opportunity to learn how to handle it. Handling money well requires practice, which the poor simply do not get.

In contrast, consider again the situation of missionaries who carry no financial inducements. Their ministry will be rejected for its foreignness<sup>18</sup> unless or until it is adapted to the local context. Once adapted to a local context, it can take hold. Alternatively, people may be so impressed by the long-term gritted determination of missionaries so as eventually to take them seriously even when the message they

bring clashes with the local context.

## VI Conclusion

This article describes some hidden ways in which the church in Africa has been built on a foundation of dependence on western money. What is prescribed here is not merely that missionaries use money wisely, but more importantly that some do mission on the basis of persuasion, witness, and the power of God, instead of on the foundation of money. The apparent diversity of mission based on foreign money could quickly collapse if funding were withdrawn. Having some western missionaries operate in their ministries without the support of western money could enable sustainable and diverse elements of mission from the west to take hold in appropriately contextualised ways. Then mission would be truly about God and not primarily about the West and how to make money.

For more information on this topic see [vulnerablemission.org](http://vulnerablemission.org). *The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission* advocates that some missionaries to the non-West operate using local languages and local resources. This essay has articulated some of the reasons for the need of the latter. It has not considered language issues.

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<sup>18</sup> George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* (3rd Ed) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 315.

# Teaching Patristics for Muslim Students

Wendy Elgersma Helleman

**KEYWORDS:** *Early Christianity, Religious Studies, Trinity, suffering, incarnation, Arius, ecumenical councils, translation, Sufism*

THIS PAPER FOCUSES on the specific issues which arise when Patristics, or Early Christianity (including the seven ecumenical councils) is taught to students in Nigeria coming from a Muslim background. Much of the terminology which is familiar to Christian students needs elaboration, but Muslim students have difficulty understanding the deity or Sonship of Christ, his suffering and crucifixion, the Trinity, and the development of the biblical canon. The course is helpful in making them aware that these issues were discussed at length, and settled before Islam arose.

## I Federal University of Jos, Nigeria

The University of Jos is located in Jos, and thus situated in the Middle Belt, and sandwiched between the largely Muslim (Hausa and Fulani) North and

the Christian (Igbo and Yoruba) South. Known for tin mining, Jos attracted Hausa settlers from the North at the turn of the century (1900). The city is about 60-70 per cent Christian, and 30-40 per cent Muslim; the area of northern Jos where the university is located is predominantly Muslim.

As a city, Jos was relatively peaceful until September 2001, when serious riots broke out, just before the September 11 crisis in New York; there were problems once again in May 2002, with voter registration in Jos North. Since then some serious riots occurred at the end of November 2008, in January-March 2010, once again in December 2010, and indeed throughout the last two years.

Although these problems have a significant ethnic and political component, the religious nature of the context cannot be ignored; Nigeria is not 'secular' in the western sense of the term, nor are the universities truly secular in nature, so the simmering crisis is an indication of the need for the respective parties to sit down together and dialogue. Leaders on both sides

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have recognized the potential role of the university, and particularly the department of Religious Studies, to act as a vital link in discussion between the respective communities, if not also beyond that sphere in the larger community.

Most universities in Nigeria are located in what are more clearly either predominantly Christian or predominantly Muslim states, and the teaching of Religious Studies at respective universities will reflect that context. The University of Jos is special because both major religious groups are well represented in the department, more or less in proportion to the religious divide in the city, with one-third Muslim and two-thirds Christians on faculty. Indeed, for many years it was the policy of the university department to encourage good relationships. Accordingly, all Muslim students are required to take some basic courses in Christianity, while all Christian students take some basic courses in Islam. The intent is to foster communication, dialogue and better relationships.

In spite of ongoing tension we recognize that, philosophically speaking, Christians have much in common with Islam. Both religions are theistic, both are 'religions of the book', both respect God's law, as the manifestation of his will for human life, and both affirm the sovereignty of God as highly exalted over creatures. Unlike other far Eastern religions, neither is pantheistic.

## II The Course in Early Christianity

Implementation of such a general policy resulted in the requirement that all students enrolled in Religious Studies

at the University of Jos take the basic course on Early Christianity. The course is taught every year to first year students in any one of the three major sections, *Religious Studies* as such, *Christian Religious Studies*, and *Islamic Studies and Arabic*. Since all students in the department take the course, enrolment invariably includes both Muslim and Christian students. The class typically has from 25 to 40 students.

Together with University of Jos colleague Professor Musa Gaiya, the author taught this course during the years spent in Nigeria (2002-2008). At present we are collaborating in writing a new textbook for the study of early Christianity by African students, and doing so with an eye to the needs of students who are taking the course at universities like that in Jos.<sup>1</sup>

In preparing this text we recognize that, even as the faculty in the department of Religious Studies is actively working toward goals of inter-religious understanding, there is room for improvement. Preconceptions on the part of both Muslim and Christian students get in the way. One can find a regrettably negative attitude among Christian students towards Muslim students because these are typically not as well prepared for university work when they have graduated from Qur'anic schools, or entered under a quota system. Muslim students also come with preconceived ideas about Christians and Christianity. Some of these ideas are rooted in the specific background which they bring to these studies, for

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<sup>1</sup> The author expresses thanks to Professor Gaiya for his reading of this paper and contribution of a number of perceptive comments.

the schools attended by these students focus on Arabic language and literature, and memorization of the Qur'an.

### III Specific Problems

#### 1 The Trinity, and Sonship of Jesus Christ

The central issues of the early centuries of Christianity introduce all the students to what is essentially foreign terrain. Yet Christian students have a distinct advantage in the course, because there are many central concepts and events in the history of salvation (like sin, the incarnation, or resurrection) which need little detailed elaboration for them. Muslim students, however, do need thorough explanation of these matters. The Qur'an explicitly rejects the trinitarian nature of God, and also the sonship of Christ, as Son of God. Just as Judaism takes the *Shema* as fundamental: 'Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one' (Deut. 4.6), Islam has the *Shahada*: 'There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet'.

Presentation of the seven ecumenical councils of early Christianity poses a specific difficulty for both Christian and Islamic students, particularly because the issues raised at these councils involve considerable use of relevant philosophical terminology current in the ancient world. This presents a specific obstacle for almost any student in Nigeria for, with the exception of a few universities like Ibadan, Lagos and Maiduguri, little philosophy is taught, aside from the training for the Catholic priesthood.

Yet these early ecumenical councils

are of considerable interest for introducing the issue of authority in the church. Furthermore, this question interests Islamic students because it is certainly also an issue in modern Islam: Who speaks for Islam? On what basis does the *imam* exercise authority over his audience? How are issues decided, and differences settled?

#### 2 Who is Jesus?

The question of the identity of Jesus, strictly speaking, does not belong in the course on Early Christianity. However, it needs considerable attention because of the specific background which students bring to the course. Discussion of the person of Jesus as both human and divine is needed for an understanding of the challenge of Gnosticism, since it tended to underestimate the reality of his humanity, and also the reality of his suffering, death and resurrection. As the fourth century bishop Ambrose expressed it in his treatise on the Incarnation:

The faith of the Church is that Christ is the Son of God, eternally from the Father, and born of the Virgin... He has a divine and a human nature, but is one in both. He is not one person from the Father, and another from the Virgin, but the same person, one way from the Father, and another way from the Virgin. ... He truly suffered in the body according to its nature, but the nature of the Word was not affected by the suffering of the body. Because our resurrection is real, the reality of Christ's suffering is preached.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Citation of Ambrose, *De incarnationis dominicae sacramento* [On the sacrament

Regarding Jesus as *prophet*, the Qur'an bestows great honour him, accepting his special birth, sinlessness, miracles, ascent to heaven, and return in judgement. Indeed, Islam acknowledges characteristics of Jesus which it does not ascribe to Muhammad. Mary too is highly respected as mother of Jesus. The birth of Jesus is recognized as miraculous, and the conception through divine inspiration 'of Our own spirit'.<sup>3</sup> The account clearly assigns a role for a 'holy spirit', breathed in at conception.

### 3 Jesus as Messiah and Saviour

Jesus is referred to as 'Word of Allah' a number of times in the Qur'an, and also a messenger from God; the term *al-Masih* is probably a derivative of the Hebrew for Messiah: *Christos*, the anointed one.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is also recognized for a mediating role, for he is described as 'close to Allah': as son of Mary, an outstanding personality in this world and in the hereafter, and one of those 'brought near'.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus was a king, but a king riding

on a donkey, and thus no direct threat to the Herods or Roman governor. His style of leadership as king differs profoundly from that of Muhammad, who was both a military and civilian ruler in Medina. However, the concept of Jesus as the *Messiah*, the anointed one, whose coming was anticipated by a long history of OT prophecy,<sup>6</sup> and is thus a fulfilment of promise, is not the real problem.

### 4 Jesus' suffering and the cross

More difficult is the nature of the crucifixion. Denying Jesus' actual suffering as a false notion, the Qur'an teaches that Jesus *appeared* to have died on the cross. The report of his death is said to reflect boasting of Jews.<sup>7</sup> Such an interpretation of Jesus' suffering was already given in the second century among Gnostics who claimed that Jesus only appeared to have a body and be human; they said he was actually a phantom and, as such, did not really suffer and die. His suffering and crucifixion were attributed to Simon the Cyrene.<sup>8</sup>

Such interpretations were anticipated by Docetists who could not accept Jesus as fully bodily and material, and thus living a human life, limited by his humanity and mortality, suffering and

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of the incarnation of our Lord] 5, from the translation of J. Kenny, at 'Muslims Query Christian Beliefs; What do the Fathers of the Church Say about them?' < [www.josephkenny.joyeurs.com/Query.htm](http://www.josephkenny.joyeurs.com/Query.htm). > accessed 20 Feb 2012.

3 The Qur'an Sura 21 (The Prophets):91; Sura 2 (The Cow):253. Citations from the Qur'an are based on *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation*, N. Uzunoglu, T. R. Topuzoglu, A. Ozek, M. Maksudoglu, trans. 6th ed. (Istanbul: Ilmi Nesriyat, 2000).

4 The Qur'an Sura 4 (The Women):170-171; Sura 2 (The Cow):253; Sura 3 (The Family of Imran):49.

5 The Qur'an Sura 3 (The Family of Imran):44.

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6 Jn. 4:24-25; Mt. 26:64.

7 The Qur'an Sura 4 (The Women):157.

8 This is the view reported by Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.24.4, for the second century Gnostic, Basileides. The quote is also given in J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius. Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*. W.H.C. Frend rev. (London: SPCK. 1987), 96-97.

dying.<sup>9</sup> If he is divine, how could he suffer? If he is truly to be worshipped as Lord (*kurios*), he should be more powerful, and immortal. These early sectors in Christianity wanted to regard Jesus as having the immaterial and incorruptible character of spirit or soul, and as such, not subject to dissolution or decay.

Christianity, on the other hand, teaches that only a divine person can accomplish what Jesus did; as true God he was pure and sinless, and was able to overcome death by the working of God's Holy Spirit in him. But the reason for his coming as a human being was precisely that he would suffer on behalf of fallen humanity. So it was important that Jesus also be truly human, and that he take on our frail humanity, our sin, and death. As Cyril of Alexandria (AD 376-444) explains in a letter:

Rather we follow the faith of the sacred Scripture and the pronouncements of the saints in maintaining that the Word became flesh, as we have explained in many places. He also laid down his life for us, since his death was to save the world. He underwent the cross, despising the shame, even though he was life itself by nature, as God.<sup>10</sup>

Denial of the cross is a denial of the impact of human sin and failure to live up to what God intended for his creation. Is it possible to truly please God

without the divine mediation of the cross? Rejection of the crucifixion ultimately reflects an unrealistically optimistic understanding of humanity.

### 5 Jesus' Sonship and the Fatherhood of God

Muslim students have great difficulty with the Christian belief that Jesus is both truly human and truly divine; how can the creature be joined to the Creator? they ask. It is like a slave becoming a lord. So they do not accept the incarnation: 'God cannot have a son'. To speak of God thus is to attribute creaturely life to the Creator, which they consider blasphemous.<sup>11</sup> This is why the course needs to pay some attention to the scriptural evidence for Jesus' Sonship; although strictly speaking this does not belong to this course, acquaintance with the New Testament cannot be assumed.

Islamic understanding of the incarnation typically assumes Jesus as God's son on a human analogy (God as father and Mary as mother). It asks, can Allah have a son without consort?<sup>12</sup> Attributing fatherhood to Allah may be thought to imply that God is incomplete without his son, since he becomes a 'father' with the birth of a son.

This is also the reason why Muslim students more readily accept the approach of 'adoptionism' (also called 'dynamic monarchianism') as a subordinationist answer to the charge of 'two Gods'; this approach depicts Jesus as 'subordinate' to the Father, as a son by adoption, not by nature. Adop-

9 See Stevenson, *A New Eusebius*, 14-15, on the letter of the Apostolic Father Ignatius asking why he is now in chains if indeed Christ only 'appeared' to have suffered?

10 Cyril's *Letter* 1, par. 10, as translated by J. Kenny, at 'Muslims Query Christian Beliefs' <[www.josephkenny.joyeurs.com/Query.htm](http://www.josephkenny.joyeurs.com/Query.htm)> accessed 20 February 2012.

11 The Qur'an Sura 19 (Mary):35.

12 The Qur'an Sura 6 (Cattle):100-101.



tionism thus affirmed divine unity by representing God as sole divine ruler (*monos archon*, the root of 'monarchianism'), and assigning an inferior role to Jesus as his Son.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Logos theology, which was also subordinationist as it focused on Jesus as 'Word' of God (*Logos* means 'word', or 'expression'),<sup>14</sup> monarchianism would be rejected by local church councils.

Adoptionism stressed the *human* character of Jesus, born miraculously of the Virgin Mary, later becoming the Son of God when the Spirit (as the 'Christ') came upon him at baptism. Throughout his earthly life Jesus learned obedience, and by suffering he overcame the sin inherited from Adam. Jesus was Son of God not by nature, but by adoption and through merit.

This position was first associated clearly with Theodotus (in Rome ca. 190 AD), who was also excommunicated for holding it (ca. 195). Seventy years later Paul of Samosata (Bishop of Antioch, 260-272) taught a similar position: the *Logos* of God dwelt in Jesus, as it dwelt in all the prophets from Moses, but in greater measure, making for closer union with the Fa-

ther God. Through a relationship of love God 'adopted' Jesus as Son after his crucifixion and resurrection, and bestowed deity on him as a reward for his efforts.<sup>15</sup> After lengthy discussion the synod of Antioch (269) also condemned and excommunicated Paul of Samosata; he nonetheless influenced numerous followers, among them Lucian of Antioch (d. 312), who in turn influenced Arius of Alexandria.<sup>16</sup>

Like Adoptionists, Arius reflects concern for the unity of God the Father, as essentially unknowable and unbegotten, far removed from all creatures; the Son had a beginning in time: 'there was a time when he was not'. God created his *Logos* in order thereby to create the world, and to mediate between himself as 'unbegotten' and the creation as 'made'. The *Logos* was therefore the first and highest of all created beings, and might even be called God, but was still a creature.

We see this from statements about the Arians in an encyclical letter of bishop Alexander of Alexandria (319 AD):

The dogmas they have invented and assert, contrary to the Scriptures, are these: That God was not always the Father, but that there was a period when he was not the Father; and that the Word of God was not from eternity, but was made out of nothing. The ever-existing God, the 'I AM', and the eternal One, made him

<sup>13</sup> On adoptionism and monarchianism, see K.S. Latourette, *History of the Expansion of Christianity*. Vol. 1. *The First Five Centuries* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode; rev. ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 143-144; also H. Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1967), 85-90, where he specifies this position as a critique of *Logos* theology.

<sup>14</sup> On Christ as *Logos* and *Logos* theology, see Latourette, *Expansion of Christianity*, 141-143; and J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 1. *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 186-190, particularly 187-188.

<sup>15</sup> On Theodotus see Stevenson, *A New Eusebius*, 144-145; and on Paul of Samosata, Stevenson, *A New Eusebius*, 261-262.

<sup>16</sup> On Arius' career and thought, see Frances W. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon. A Guide to the Literature and its Background* (London: SCM, 1983), 58-64.

who did not previously exist, out of nothing. Thus they teach that there was a time when he did not exist, inasmuch as the Son is a creature, and a work. They also teach that he is neither like the Father with regard to his essence, nor is he either the Father's true Word, or true Wisdom by nature; rather, the Son is just one of his works and creatures, being erroneously called Word and Wisdom, since he was himself made of God's own Word and the Wisdom which is in God, whereby God both made all things and him also.<sup>17</sup>

For Arius, Jesus was a special person, but not fully divine. Jesus had a human body, but not a human soul; the *Logos* took the place of the human soul. Essentially Jesus thus was neither fully God, for the *Logos* in him was created; neither was he fully human, since he lacked a human soul.

Although such an attempt to protect the unity of God may resonate with Muslim students, Arius' accent on the subordination of the Son was unacceptable for the Christian church. He was challenged by his bishop Alexander, who used the language and conceptions of Origen to insist on the unity of the divine monad, while regarding the Son as a separate person with his own nature (*phusis*) or *hupostasis* (real

existence). As *Logos*, Christ was not simply a creature, but eternal, and that equally with the Father.

Although the Father may be said to be unbegotten (*agennetos*), while the Son is 'begotten' or 'generated' (*gennetos*), such statements do not imply what Arius claimed with the slogan, 'there was time when he was not', namely that Jesus, because he was begotten, was different in essence from Father, or that he was created, mutable, and liable to sin. Rather, the council affirmed that Jesus is begotten from eternity, as image and likeness of the Father: all that can be attributed to the Father, also belongs to the Son. The Nicene council was serious in its use of the term 'equal in substance' (*homoousion*), to exclude the position of Arius.<sup>18</sup>

## 6 The Triune God

Islamic students have at least as much of a problem with the 'triune' nature of God, which is the settled teaching of the Christian church after the first four ecumenical councils. Numerous passages in the Qur'an reflect the unacceptability of God as 'three in one', as an indication of polytheism, and appear to understand a role for Mary in the Triune God.<sup>19</sup> However, the Christian understanding of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) does not speak of three gods; nor does it recognize Mary as third member of the Trinity.

<sup>17</sup> The citation uses a modification of the translation of Socrates, *History of the Church* 1.6 in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF)*. Second series. H. Wace and Ph. Schaff eds. (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890-1900; Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans, 1974-1983). Also available in the 'Church Fathers' on the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, prepared at Calvin College (Grand Rapids MI) and available online.

<sup>18</sup> On the role of the term '*homoousion*' at the Nicene council, see also Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 200-210.

<sup>19</sup> The Qur'an Sura 5 (Table Spread):73 and 116; Sura 6 (Cattle)100-101; and Sura 4 (The Women):171.

It is true that by the time of the third ecumenical council (Ephesus, 431), the Christians of the Middle East paid considerable attention to Mary as 'mother of God', recognizing her as *Theotokos* (i.e. the one who gave birth to God). As patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius had aroused popular anger by applying only the title *Christotokos* (i.e. the one who gave birth to the Christ) for Mary, on the assumption that calling her *Theotokos* would fail to do justice to Christ's humanity.

According to the church historian Socrates, Nestorius was led astray by his associate Anastasius:

Preaching one day in the church, Anastasius said, 'Let no one call Mary *Theotokos*: for Mary was but a woman; and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman.' These words ... (appeared) to separate his humanity from his divinity on account of the economy of incarnation. Nestorius ... delivered several public discourses ... and totally rejected the epithet *Theotokos*. ... Thus he acquired the reputation among the masses of asserting the blasphemous dogma that the Lord is a mere man.<sup>20</sup>

The council of Ephesus condemned Nestorius, while it upheld the position of his opponent, Cyril of Alexandria, who favoured the title *Theotokos* for Mary:

For if our Lord Jesus Christ is God, how can the Holy Virgin who gave birth to him not be the Mother of God? This is the faith which the divinely inspired disciples handed

down, even though they did not use that term. ... Keeping to orthodox thinking, we do not say that God became the father of flesh, nor that the divine nature was born through a woman without the addition of humanity. Rather, we bring together in unity the Word sprung from God, and the humanity perfectly sprung from the holy Virgin, into one Christ Jesus our Lord, whom we adore. ...

So the Word of God took to himself the seed of Abraham and shared in human blood and flesh, making his own a body from a woman. In that way, he remained God, but also became man like us, in unity.... Saint Paul asks us to believe this when he says, "When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we may receive sonship [Gal. 4:4-5]."<sup>21</sup>

We note in passing that the title *Theotokos* for Mary is quite unacceptable for Muslims, while the title *Christotokos* would not be problematic, as it indicates no more than that she bore the Messiah.

It is important to recognize that the specific form of the Trinity to which the Qur'an objects is not that of orthodox Christian interpretation.<sup>22</sup> It is possi-

<sup>20</sup> Socrates, *History of the Church*, 7.32. NPNF ser. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Cyril's *Letter* 1, translated by J. Kenny, at "Muslims Query Christian Beliefs" <[www.josephkennyjoyeurs.com/Query.htm](http://www.josephkennyjoyeurs.com/Query.htm)> accessed 20 February 2012. On Nestorius, see Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 229-240; and on Cyril of Alexandria, see Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 240-265.

<sup>22</sup> See The Qur'an Sura 5 (The Table Spread):73 and 116; Sura 6 (Cattle):101.

ble that Muhammad had contact with a Christian group, something like the Maryamiyya sect who accepted a counterfeit Trinity, one which included the Father, Mary and Jesus. Adherents of this view were opposed and excommunicated by Christian authorities by the end of seventh century.

The settlement on the Trinity came with the ecumenical Christian council of Constantinople (381). Athanasius had been instrumental in clarifying the meaning of the decision of the Nicene council on the full deity of Christ.<sup>23</sup> Athanasius' work was affirmed at Constantinople, a gathering which also confirmed the full deity of the Holy Spirit. The 'generation' of Christ was determined as an 'eternal generation', not an act of God's will. Accordingly, the Son was recognized as sharing fully in the divine nature of God, yet remaining truly distinct in that he is 'begotten' and has his own role. The council affirmed one identical divine essence in three distinct and also interpenetrating consubstantial beings.

However, the issue did not go away entirely, for the bishop of Syrian Laodicea, Apollinarius (d. 390), a supporter of Athanasius, had emphasized the divine nature of Christ as crucial to human salvation (understood as human participation in divine nature). Apollinarius accepted Jesus having a human body and soul, but in the attempt to assure unity of person, claimed that Christ did not have a human mind; the *Logos*, as divine highest directing principle, replaced the reasoning spirit. This raised the question, whether Christ then was fully human.

Apollinarius' position reversed that of Arius, who taught that in Jesus the *Logos* replaced the soul (while the body is fully human); for Apollinarius, Son was fully divine because for him the *Logos* was fully divine, but he was not fully human. The second ecumenical council, that of Constantinople (381), condemned this position, confirming that Jesus was fully human, with also a human mind.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that the position of Nestorius represents the opposite extreme of that presented by Apollinarius. Nestorius wanted to preserve the distinction of the human and divine nature, both complete and real, and especially the human aspect. Rejecting Nestorius' version of the person of Christ, the council of Ephesus asked that Nestorius be exiled to the upper Nile region, where he survived for at least twenty years, and from where his understanding of the person of Jesus made a considerable impact. The issue of the divine and human aspects of Jesus' person was revisited at the council of Chalcedon, which gave a more even-handed judgement, but did not go so far as to reverse the condemnation of Nestorius. Nestorianism survived in the Persian empire, and also in Syria. By the seventh century it reached China. Even today, Nestorian churches survive in Turkey near Persia, and in India.<sup>25</sup>

## 7 Canon of Scripture

Christianity recognizes the Scriptures,

<sup>24</sup> On the decisions of this council, see Chadwick, *Early Church*, 150-151.

<sup>25</sup> On the considerable influence of Nestorian thinking in the Middle East, see Latourette, *Expansion of Christianity*, 169-170.

<sup>23</sup> On the significant role of Athanasius, see Latourette, *Expansion of Christianity*, 157-161.

including both the Old and New Testament, as the Word of God. Islam similarly has a high regard for the Qur'an as a sacred book, representing the uncreated eternal word of Allah; but it is true that Mutazilites, a medieval school of Islamic thought which used Greek philosophy in an attempt to dialogue with European philosophy, rejected an uncreated Qur'an, existing in heaven as 'mother' of the book. Even so, it is generally accepted that the Qur'an came straight from heaven by inspiration, without the intervention of any human factor.

Christian understanding of the origin of the Scriptures, on the other hand, does acknowledge the human element. The Scriptures clearly present human writers speaking to human readers, to convey the message inspired by, and coming from God.

Unlike the Qur'an, the Scriptures do not separate the words of God from those of the prophets, historians, or other writers who convey these. Nor do Christians put as much emphasis on perfect preservation throughout the centuries. Christian scholars of the Bible do study the various manuscript traditions to determine as best they can what must have been the original version, but at no points have textual variants presented a substantive challenge to the basics of the faith clearly presented in the Scriptures.

Muslim scholars, on the other hand, find it important to affirm the Qur'an as perfectly preserved from any tampering through the centuries, even though it is a matter of historical record that variant versions of the Qur'an were still circulating after Muhammad's death, and that these were gathered and burned under the third caliphate,

so that only one 'authorized' version would remain.

Islam recognizes the Christian Bible as (containing) the Word of God, the Old Testament for Jews, and New Testament for Christians;<sup>26</sup> but they assert that the Old Testament and New Testament contain human commentary which gets in the way of the 'real word' of God as it came to Moses and Jesus respectively. Accordingly, they find the Scriptures to have been passed along in a format that is inferior to that of the Qur'an as they understand Muhammad to have received it.

Thus Muslim scholars are critical of God's Word as preserved in the Bible, claiming that the real *Taurat* (the law, revealed to Moses) and *Injil* (the gospel, revealed to Jesus) are different from those we now have as Old Testament and New Testament, respectively; the originals are said to have been corrupted.<sup>27</sup> Numerous biblical stories can be found also in the Qur'an, but there they are typically given in a version which differs substantially from the biblical version; some of these variants can be traced to non-canonical second century gospels.

In early Christianity the issue of the canon of Scripture became important because of the challenge of Gnostic gospels. What were the criteria for inclusion in the 'canon' or authoritative list of books? Who decided what was authentic, and thus ought to be used

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26 The Qur'an Sura 29 (The Spider):46.

27 On such a critical approach, see my review article, "The Biblical Canon: A Response to Muhib O. Opeyoye, 'Building Bridges of Understanding between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria' (2001)", in *TCNW Research Bulletin* 41 (March 2004), 31-42.

for public worship? Most important was the criterion of 'apostolicity': the books accepted were those written by the apostles or their close associates. This became an important criterion in rejecting deuterо-canonical gospels, like the Gospel of Thomas, particularly as these reflected Gnostic teachings.

Another important criterion was the widespread acceptance in the churches, East and West, in Europe and in Africa. Indeed, inclusion of books like Hebrews, James, or Revelation was delayed over uncertainty on authorship. Books like the *Shepherd of Hermas*, though recognized as valuable for devotional reading, were finally not included in the canon because the apostolic connection was lacking.

Acceptance of the canon of Scripture as we have it was facilitated when Christianity became legal, and empire-wide ecumenical councils were held to deal with urgent issues of Christian life and teaching. For the East, Athanasius' festal letter of Easter, AD 367, lists the New Testament books just as we have them: four gospels, Acts, the general epistles, Pauline epistles, and Revelation. In the West, the council of Hippo Regius (393) and Carthage (397), where Augustine was influential, gave an official list of 27 New Testament writings to be used for church services; this list also tallies exactly with the canonical list still accepted today.

Closure of the canon in the fourth century did not reflect a new decision by the church, but culmination of a gradual consensus on the authenticity of those books representing apostolic witness to the life and work of Jesus. Certainly, the process was stimulated by the need to discern heretical teach-

ings about Jesus (Docetism and Gnosticism), forcing the church to determine authentic writings that could be traced back to eye-witness accounts. Just as Israel, from very early years, treasured the Mosaic Torah as a guide to community life, so also from the earliest decades the Christian congregations treasured the gospels and letters of Paul as the core of a New Testament canon, for life and for public worship.

Does this gradual growth in acceptance of the canon of Scripture reflect a process which is regrettable because it allowed for error in transmission? As noted above, Islamic scholars assume that this process allowed for corruption of the original *Taurat or Injil*.<sup>28</sup> They believe there are errors arising from interpolation of the words of God with those of the writers, making it difficult to discern what is truly the 'Word of God'.

In evaluating this position it must first be recognized that the Old and New Testaments were written by numerous authors, over a period of centuries, while the Qur'an reflects revelations to one author over a period of less than thirty years. Using the Qur'an as model in judging the Scriptures, Islamic scholars recognize as 'revelation' only those statements which represent the 'very words' of God, namely words known to have been 'dictated' by God to Moses or Jesus.

Christians, on the other hand, regard the Scriptures as authentic not because they *contain* such statements, but because these writings witness accurately to the full-orbed story of God's saving acts of redemption in human

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28 The Qur'an Sura 2 (The Cow):79.



history. Christians do not limit divine revelation to Bible passages introduced specifically with, 'Thus says the Lord', as we sometime find these marked in 'red-letter' Bibles.

For Muslims, translation of the Qur'an into languages other than Arabic is problematic since translation is thought, inevitably, to give rise to corruption: the word of God cannot be properly conveyed in a language different from that in which the prophets heard it spoken (Hebrew, Aramaic or Arabic). Yet, if copying or translating the Scriptures may have left room for 'errors', Christians have always regarded problems raised by such 'errors' as far outweighed by the benefits in support to the spread of the gospel.

The Christian faith is rooted in pivotal events of history; and divine revelation has actively involved human instruments. So also the central message of the Scriptures, the message of God's love and his intervention to save humankind was never threatened by minor inconsistencies of factual data; it is all the more firmly established by a multiplicity of witnesses, and by widespread acceptance as the church grew, spreading rapidly throughout the Roman Empire and beyond its borders.

#### IV Historical Encounters: Judaism, Christianity and early Islam

Muhammad initially took a positive approach to Christianity and Judaism; Mecca was familiar with Jewish tribes and Christians visiting from Abyssinia. When followers of Muhammad were persecuted in the early years, Christians protected and kept them safe in Ethiopia. Consideration of the relative

origins of parts of the Qur'an shows that earlier sections do not denounce Christians as infidels, recognizing them, rather, as monotheist.<sup>29</sup>

Muhammad recognized Jews and Christians as having valid revelations of their own as 'people of the book'. For this reason they would not be asked to convert; and the Qur'an affirms that there is to be no coercion in matters of faith.<sup>30</sup>

However, already before Muhammad died, hostility grew; the Qur'an reflects problems with the Trinity (as threat to divine unity, or in assigning God partners), and we find harsh criticism of Christians as polytheistic.

Muhammad clearly had anticipated cooperation from the Jewish tribes, for from the beginning he adopted their practice of communal prayer (on Friday), and fasting on the day of Atonement. It is also clear that friendly Jews had informed him about biblical accounts. The turning point in the relationship came when Muhammad recognized the theological divide between Jews and Christians, and realized that Jews did not accept him as their prophet.

Hostility intensified after the battle of 627, when Muslims routed Meccans with a ditch around Medina. Because Muhammad felt that Jewish tribes had formed alliances with Mecca against him, he punished the Jews for deceit, betraying him to the Meccan clans. As traitors the Jews were expelled from Medina and massacred without mercy. During *salat* Muhammad now directed

<sup>29</sup> The Qur'an Sura 3 (The Family of Imran):113-114; Sura 29 (Spider):46.

<sup>30</sup> The Qur'an Sura 2 (The Cow):256.

prayers to Mecca, no longer facing Jerusalem (by which he had showing an intent to revert to the monotheism of Abraham).<sup>31</sup> From this time a polemical note characterizes reference to Jews in the Qur'an.<sup>32</sup> Jews, in turn, ridiculed Muhammad's version of stories of Noah and Moses.

We must also consider briefly which branch of Christianity Muhammad might have encountered. Would he have known the Monophysites as the sector of Christianity in the East at the time of Emperor Justinian (who died AD 565), as those who did not fully accept the human nature of Christ, insisting on 'one nature' (*monos phusis*), fully divine, with the divine encompassing the human, and the human fully united with the *Logos*? During that time, Monophysites dominated Ethiopia, Egypt, and Syria. Monophysite groups falling out politically with Constantinople (not appeased by fifth ecumenical council of 553) was clearly a factor in the rapidity with which Arabs were able to take Antioch in 611, and again in 638, with Jerusalem; Alexandria in 618/619, and again in 742; and Damascus in 635.

After the rise of the Monophysites, a parallel problem arose with Monothelites (from ca. 638) who affirmed 'one will' in Christ: the divine encompassing the human. Monothelites (today known as Maronites) lived in Lebanon into the 12th century. Monophysites and Nestorians also lived independently in the Arab world for many centuries. It is difficult to think of such groups being represented in the Chris-

tian views known to Muhammad (who died 632), for he would certainly have been more critical of their high view of the divinity of Christ.

Did Muhammad encounter a sect, or a group of Judaized Christians? Scholars are not agreed on the matter. Joseph Kenny does not believe that the Judaeo-Christians he met were a heretical group.<sup>33</sup> It is possible that Islamic emphasis on Mary as 'mother of Jesus' reflects Nestorian disdain for 'Cyrillian' recognition of Mary as 'mother of God'. An inclination to a docetic approach, and the evidence of Gnostic dualism, has also remained a factor in Islamic thought throughout its history. The precise origins of these trends cannot easily be traced.

## V Other Aspects

### 1 Music and mystical themes

When Muslim students encounter Christian positions flatly at odds with their own, whether it be the Christian view of the deity of Christ, or the Trine God, they typically tune out the lecturer, and their eyes glaze over. No matter what efforts are made, it makes no difference. Taught to regard their religion as the superior, final revelation, Muslims are protective of their own core teachings, and resistant to any arguments to the contrary; paying attention to the claims of Christianity could be regarded as the first step on the road to conversion.

31 The Qur'an Sura 6 (Cattle):159 and 161.

32 The Qur'an Sura 5 (The Table Spread):82.

33 See Joseph Kenny, "Early Islam" at <[www.josephkenny.joyeurs.com/earlyislam/E06.htm](http://www.josephkenny.joyeurs.com/earlyislam/E06.htm)> and <<http://www.josephkenny.joyeurs.com/earlyislam/E13.htm>> (chapters 6.2 and 13.11), accessed 20 February 2012.

Even so, there are some aspects of the course to which students do pay attention. The author stumbled on one of these when speaking of Ambrose of Milan and his significance for hymnology. I used the story of Ambrose protecting the church building against Arian designs with an all-night vigil and singing of hymns to maintain morale.<sup>34</sup> When students asked what kind of hymns these might have been, I introduced them to the 'Te Deum', the fourth century hymn whose history can be traced to Ambrose, 'Holy God, we praise your name', especially the fourth stanza in the hymnal at our disposal:

Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit,  
three we name you,  
Though in essence only one;  
undivided God we claim you,  
And adoring bend the knee, while  
we own the mystery.

I did not mention that the melody is probably not fourth century, nor did I spend much time on the strong trinitarian wording, as a response to the Arian dispute. What struck me was the *rapit attention* of the students for the singing of this hymn, certainly not due to my own musical ability. It struck me that their fascination probably reflects interest in the role of music in religion, a factor deeply embedded in the history of Christianity, largely missing in Islam.

I found a similar response to reading from Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine represents the last major figure studied in the course, and I like to

end on a high note, by reading some of my favourite passages from the *Confessions*. The first is that found in Book 10. 6.8-9:

8. ... But *what do I love when I love You?* Not physical beauty, or the splendour of our existence in time, or the radiance of the light which is so pleasant to our eyes, or the sweet melodies of familiar songs, or the flagrant smell of flowers, and ointments, and spices; nor is it the taste of manna and honey, or the arms with which we like to embrace one another.

*These are not the things I love when I love my God;* and yet there is a certain kind of light, and sound, and fragrance, and food, and embracement which I love when loving my God..

9. *And what is this, my God?* I asked the earth; and it answered, 'I am not He;' and everything in it made the same reply. I asked the sea and its depth, and the creeping things that live in it, and they replied, 'We are not your God, seek higher than us.' I asked the gentle breezes, and the air with all its inhabitants answered me, 'Anaximenes<sup>35</sup> was deceived; I am not God.' I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon, and stars: 'Neither,' they said, 'are we the God whom you seek.' And I spoke to all these things which crowd about my bodily existence, 'You have told me about my God,

<sup>34</sup> On Ambrose and his use of hymns, see Latourette, *Expansion of Christianity*, 206-208; and Augustine's *Confessions* 9.7 (15), and 9.12 (32).

<sup>35</sup> He refers to the 6th century BC philosopher Anaximenes, who considered air to be the chief component of reality.

that you are not He; then tell me something about Him.' And with a loud voice they all cried out, 'He made us.' I questioned them further by fixing my attention on them; and their beauty was their reply.

.... I asked all the vast bulk of the earth about my God, and it answered me, 'I am not He, but He made me.'

The theme of love for God is continued in sections 27.38 and 29.40:

38. *Too late I came to love You, O Beauty, so ancient, and yet so new!* Too late I came to love You. For You were within me, and I remained outside, and tried to seek You there; I, unlovely, rushed about wildly among the things of beauty which You made. You were with me, but I was not with You. ...

40. *All my hopes are in Your great mercy alone.* So give what You command, and command what You will.

## 2 Role of Sufism

Such reactions of the students have led me to recognize the deep influence of *Sufism*, the mystical branch of Sunni Islam in West Africa. Today with the strong influence of Saudi Arabia, Sunni Islam predominates. But Sufism was politically influential in Nigeria until the 1970s, and continues to hold attraction.

Arising in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Sufism represents a mystic protest against the intellectualism of Islamic thought (like that of the Mutazilites), a desire for closer contact with

God, with a focus on trust and love. Sufi leaders developed their own liturgy in recitation, repeating the name of God, with physical exercises and postures, to encourage a religious experience of enlightenment: *gnosis* or religious mystical knowledge.

From the twelfth century Sufi orders developed, each with their own liturgy and esoteric practices, often with distinctive robes. These orders spread, especially when a strong personality assumed leadership, teaching the way of union with God. Some of the most famous Islamic poets, al-Farid (1182-1235) and Rumi (1207-1273), were Sufi mystics, teaching the way of prayer, and modelling lives of service and love.

Along with some unorthodox practices and ideas, Sufism opened the way to a more personal experience in religion. While many great figures in Islamic history have been affected by Sufism, the concepts and practices connected with the mystical approach have not received universal Muslim acceptance.

## VI The Relevance of the Nigerian Experience

Our interest in presenting these issues is motivated by the fact that, together with colleague Musa Gaiya, who specializes in (African) church history, we are writing an introductory text to meet the needs of these students. Available textbooks assume too much acquaintance with Christian issues and terminology. There is also a lack of sensitivity to the peculiar difficulties of Muslim students in their study of this period of history.

In terms of the contribution of this

course for dialogue and the resolution of misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims, we note that the important decisions of the great ecumenical councils on the two natures of Christ and the triune character of God, were achieved before Islam came on the scene. Only discussion of icons at the seventh (and last) ecumenical council (AD 787) was affected by the Islamic ban on human representation, although Judaism had also banned representation of God as idolatry (with the second commandment).

This factor needs to be recognized for its implications for future discussion. We realize that for meaningful discussion between the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant branches of Christianity the period of early Christianity is crucial. This explains the origin of the Oxford conferences in Patristics held every four years.

The present paper would suggest that we expand the context of dialogue, recognizing that important decisions for the three major religious groups (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) which have a clear family relation in Abraham as common ancestor, have their roots in the period before the

seventh century. Even contemporary reading of the Torah in Judaism was determined in crucial ways in the early centuries of the Christian era, through the important decisions of the council of Jamnia.<sup>36</sup> And it should be clear from the above discussion that scholars of Islamic history would do well to take an interest in early rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity for better understanding of early Islamic thought.

In a time when we lurch from crisis to crisis in the Middle East and on the international scene, and these crises are all too readily identified with the major groups of religion, it is time to go back to the roots—too easily forgotten in the stress and tension of the modern world, with an agenda all too often set by terrorists or fundamentalists with little interest in historical precedent. In such a context, this paper would propose a new role for the study of early Christianity, one that seeks to foster constructive discussion with Muslim colleagues and neighbours.

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<sup>36</sup> On Jamnia as a significant turning point in Judaism, see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 423-425.

## **Mission to the World: Communicating the Gospel in the 21st Century**

### **Essays in Honour of Knud Jørgensen**

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**Tormod Engelsen** is Professor of Missiology at MF Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology.

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## Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird

Andrey P. Puzynin

*The Tradition of the Gospel Christians:  
A Study of Their Identity and Theology  
during the Russian, Soviet, and Post-  
Soviet Periods*

Reviewed by Anthony G. Siegrist

Eugene H. Peterson

*The Pastor: A Memoir*

Reviewed by Paul Mohan Raj

Ken Gnanakan

*Integrated Learning*

Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird

Chris Woodall

*Covenant: The Basis of God's Self-  
Disclosure*

Reviewed by Robert K. Johnston

Tom Greggs (Ed.)

*New Perspectives for Evangelical  
Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture  
and the World*

## Book Reviews

ERT (2012) 36:4, 372-373

**The Tradition of the Gospel  
Christians:  
A Study of Their Identity and  
Theology during the Russian,  
Soviet, and Post-Soviet Periods**

**Andrey P. Puzynin**

Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Pickwick  
Publications, 2011

ISBN 978-1-60608-999-6

Pb., pp 314, bibliog., gloss.

*Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird, Centre for  
Early Christian Studies, A.C.U., Australia.*

This is an impressive study of one stream of evangelicalism in Russia from its inception in the latter part of the nineteenth century up until the present time. The material of this book is the substance of a doctoral dissertation at the University of Wales, Trinity St David, in 2011 by Dr. Andrey Puzynin, an Adjunct Lecturer at Nyack College

Theological Seminary at its extension site in Kiev, Ukraine. The aim of this study is 'to construct the contours of a new historical identity and theological framework' of the Gospel Christians in the changing socio-political and theological contexts of the past one hundred and thirty years. The purpose of this is to clear the way to develop a contextual Ukrainian evangelical theology for the current era, with theological education especially in view. Hence, the study focuses not only upon the historical self-identity of the successive phases of the life of the Gospel Christians, but also upon the theological frameworks of those phases, and the shape of their respective approaches to Biblical interpretation.

Puzynin traces the roots of 'non-denominational' evangelicalism in Russia to the ministry of the Englishman, Lord Radstock, who visited St Petersburg in 1873. Radstock, although an Anglican, came to the Russian capital from the



background of the Anglo-American holiness movement as expressed in various forms in the English Open Brethren, the Keswick movement, and the Evangelical Alliance. He planted this understanding of the Christian faith among members of St Petersburg's aristocracy. The resultant revival among the Russian nobility quickly spread to the lower classes, mainly through the work of Colonel Vasili Pashkov, who became leader of the movement after Radstock left Russia in 1878.

Puzynin labels as 'Gospel Christians' the gatherings of these Evangelicals who followed Radstock's and Pashkov's open stance to the sacraments, especially baptism, to distinguish them from the Baptists who had their origins from the German Brethren. Not much is said about the first Russian converts, the focus being upon placing Radstock on the theological spectrum of the time, a task Puzynin accomplishes quite fully and convincingly. This is vital for the rest of the book as it distinguishes the Gospel Christians clearly, not only from the Orthodox, but also from other evangelical churches already existing at the time. The modifications to that theological framework which were made in response to various cultural, personal, western evangelical, and socio-political influences over time are discussed in subsequent chapters.

A special feature of this study is the use of paradigms, derived from T.S. Kuhn via Hans Küng, as heuristic or interpretive tools to understand the identifying narrative and theology of the Gospel Christians in relation to other traditions. Puzynin also applies these tools in combination with Nancey Murphy's revision of Alasdair MacIntyre's realist epistemology based on pre-modern tradition-based rationality, which preserves the social and historical aspects of a

tradition by a diachronic approach. In keeping with this diachronic approach to the issue of self-identity, Puzynin builds this study around successive leaders of the Gospel Christians: Lord Radstock 1873-1881, Colonel Vasili Pashkov 1881-1902, Ivan Prokhanov 1905-1939, and Alexander Karev 1944-1971.

His analysis leads to a critical reconstruction of the community's self-identifying narrative. Consequently, previous historians published in the field of Russian-Ukrainian post-Soviet evangelical historiography come in for some heavy criticism and correction. Puzynin perceives a weakness in much of the published work of this era. Of particular concern is his perception of the failure of both Western and Eastern evangelical historians to discern the independent origins and development of the various expressions of evangelicalism in Russia and the Ukraine. He questions the general tendency to lump them all under a common Baptist tradition as 'the eschatological restoration of primitive Apostolic Christianity'. He addresses this weakness in his focus on the Gospel Christians by displaying the interactions between them and other evangelical churches as well as their relationship with the Orthodox Church.

Technically, the book is well laid out in sections that aid in locating specific material. On the other hand, the lack of an index is a sad lapse for a book that is a serious source for researchers in evangelical history, not only in Russia, but for the movement in general worldwide. There is a comprehensive twenty-five page bibliography of resources inclusive of printed, internet, archival and electronic items, a goldmine indeed. This is an instructive work that addresses a serious gap in post-Soviet evangelicalism. It is worthy of careful consideration.

ERT (2012) 36:4, 374-375

## The Pastor: A Memoir

Eugene H. Peterson

New York: HarperCollins, 2011

ASIN B004HD630C

E-Book, pp. 336

*Reviewed by Anthony G. Siegrist, Assistant  
Professor of Christian Theology, Prairie  
Bible College, Alberta, Canada.*

Peterson's latest book, a memoir of his life as a pastor, is written with characteristic grace and depth. Being a pastor, for Peterson, is more than having the job of a religious expert—it is a vocation. He sees the lives of pastors more like those of artists than those commonly known as 'professionals'. The passion and sense of calling knit the artist's identity to her work. The Pastor is of course a book about one person's journey into and through a pastoral vocation, but it is almost as much a book about the state of the church in the USA and the constantly swirling self-perception of pastors in that country.

Peterson grew up in western Montana, a part of North America as beautiful as it is spare. He pursued a first post-secondary degree in Seattle, then a seminary degree in New York City and, finally, he began, but did not complete, a doctoral program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Alongside his formal education, Peterson explored the possibility of a life's work through aborted stints as a church planter, international teacher, and professor. It was during his residence at Johns Hopkins that he met the woman whom he would marry. After surmounting the initial challenges of getting Jan's contact information and eventually meeting her, he was faced with the profound problem of her assumption that she would be a pastor's wife.

Peterson had not been raised in a church where pastors were particularly admirable creatures, and he had his sights set on the professorate. Through exposure to better role models, two related jobs, and a deeper understanding of his own makeup, Peterson's sense of vocation was born. He took on the assignment of planting a Reformed church in Maryland. He and Jan stayed there for twenty-nine years. The challenges Peterson narrates are varied: the pressures of a therapeutic approach to ministry, the influence of business models on ecclesial expectations, the displacement and transience of modern culture, as well as the mundane tasks of 'running' the church.

Crucial to Peterson's pastoral life was his participation in a group of ministers, who called themselves the 'Company of Pastors'. It was in this community that Peterson's theology of pastoral ministry was worked out; here his vision for pastoral ministry not bound by the strictures of secularized job identity or market-driven techniques was nurtured. A poignant example comes from the period when Peterson began to sense that the church he pastored was losing the energy and vitality it possessed as a start-up. In order to combat the malaise an advisor told Peterson to begin a new building program. The rationale was that congregants need a tangible goal to energize their participation in the community.

Peterson reflects on the experience as an example of the challenge American churches face. Dreams of quantifiable growth and influence, the rush of competition—all drive congregations as well as their leaders. It is not hard to see the roots of Peterson's spiritual theology nurtured by this decay. Yet this is a commentary on more than one individual's experience. It is a commentary on actual, operative ecclesiology,

particularly that found in North America. As much as church leaders have found the tools of the marketplace and the helping professions useful, these very instruments have contributed to the churn of ecclesial identity.

As a commentary on the church in the USA, Peterson's memoir reveals an institution profoundly out of touch with locality. This epically clashes with Peterson's understanding of his own life, which is steeped in descriptions of place. His boyhood in Montana's Flathead Valley, pastoral ministry in suburban Maryland, sojourns to urban Pittsburgh and Vancouver are all described with an eye toward geography. Peterson's life's work has swung out and back cartographically; he currently resides once more near Flathead Lake in the American west.

His institutional trajectory is less clear. Peterson describes the way his faith and ministry were aided by the immediacy of Pentecostalism and the historical consciousness of the Reformed tradition. Yet the author revealed to readers is, oddly enough, an individual ecclesially aloof. At points his story is deeply attached to particular congregations; yet in the larger narrative he seems to be without a clear sense of theological place.

A whole raft of Christian traditions and writers were beneficial for Peterson—from John Calvin to John of the Cross, Friedrich Nietzsche to Annie Dillard. One cannot but be impressed by the breadth of his reading. Concretely though, denominational identity seems to have been something of an irritant for Peterson. One senses a sort of artistic independence. This may well have been necessary to realize a coherent identity as pastor and writer, as a communicator capable of developing *The Message*. But it also evidences a certain individualistic flair. Finding this at the heart of a

leading American spiritual writer seems indicative of the growing ambiguity of denominationalism in this post-Christendom society. Peterson's individualism, or more sympathetically put, 'independence', is difficult to avoid at the buffet of American Christianity.

Readers should remember that *The Pastor* is a memoir. It does not proceed in the strict chronological fashion of an autobiography. This is welcome because it allows Peterson's reflections to connect more organically. Readers get a sense of what the man cares about and how he understands his pastoral self to be knit together. The book is highly recommended, particularly for those who are interested in either Peterson's work or the pastoral vocation more generally. *The Pastor* accomplishes what Peterson believes is the purpose of 'true language'. True language, he suggests, does not merely add to the catalogue of knowledge. Instead, it establishes relationship—communication as communion (page 243). In reading this book pastors, or those contemplating pastoral ministry, will find a friend and mentor.

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### Integrated Learning

Ken Gnanakan

Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011

ISBN 9780198074366

Hb pp 200

*Reviewed by Paul Mohan Raj, William Carey University, Shillong, India*

The concept of Integrated Learning is based on certain critical observations, insights and dissatisfaction of the present education scenario. Education, in most cases, is seen merely as transference of knowledge from head to head, a

mere cerebral activity. This, as simplistic as it sounds, is an unfortunate reality even today despite all our education reforms and policies.

Education has become a commodity to buy and sell rather than a means of reforming and transforming individuals and societies. Education has also become compartmentalized. Subjects are taught separately in water tight compartments with no relation one to another or to life that one lives in this world. But life is not lived in fragmented bits. The real world is not compartmentalized. Life is lived as a whole. Addressing these concerns Ken Gnanakan's *Integrated Learning* is an attempt to redefine education. Integrated learning, he says, cuts across rigid compartments and brings meaningful association of various aspects of learning.

Gnanakan describes the current status of education, reiterating that education should move far beyond the institutional framework, i.e., from the classroom settings dominated by 'banking system of education' where knowledge is transferred from the teachers to the students, where students are considered as passive recipients. To answer the question, 'what constitutes the essence of good education', he reminds us of the contribution of some of the most outstanding philosophers of education who integrated the social, natural and physical spaces and saw the world as one integrated whole.

Pestalozzi and Montessori proposed 'educating Children in an Integrated Environment'. Pestalozzi, the Swiss social reformer and educator, 'is often remembered as the one who stressed that education should develop the powers of "Head", "Heart", and "Hands"' (40). 'The Swiss social reformer and educator adopted this holistic approach

to learning, which made him believe that thought began with the senses and, therefore, teachers should use the sense of children for true learning.' (40. Maria Montessori 'believed that each child is born with a unique potential to be revealed, rather than a "blank slate" waiting to be written upon' (50-51). John Dewey, placed 'education strongly within the community setting and believed that learning was an intensely social process involving people and their customs, institutions, beliefs, victories and defeats, recreations and occupations'. Dewey argued that 'Education and Experience' should go together.

Alfred North Whitehead, the outstanding philosopher, stated that 'Education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of Knowledge. This is an art very difficult to impart.' For Whitehead, 'Education is nothing but a Dynamic, Integrated System'. Reflecting on Whitehead, Gnanakan says that '... this "art" was acquired through a process with a rhythm that orients it towards the progress of individuals in the world. The term "rhythm" is apt as everything in natural life moves in harmony and education must become part of this flow.' (5-6).

Gnanakan refers to two outstanding Indian personalities, Rabindranath Tagore who believed in 'Educating the Whole Human Personality', and Mahatma Gandhi whose concept was rooted in 'Education for Self-reliance' and 'total liberation of individual'. For Gandhiji, 'Knowledge includes all training that is useful for the service of mankind and liberation means freedom from all manner of servitude even in the present life.'

Gnanakan refers to Howard Earl Gardner's theory of 'Multiple Intelligences' and highlights its educational value because 'not all children are gifted in

literary or mathematical intelligences', but in our formal educational systems all children are graded the same. He argues that children endowed with other intelligences should be integrated into the mainstream the moment their competences and potentials are identified. It should be done at an early stage, so that they be given more attention where they will excel (56).

Dr. Gnanakan's *Integrated Learning* can be summarized as follows: First, it is the maximization of the learner's experience in real life rather than in artificial academic settings. Second, it is to integrate academic knowledge or theoretical concepts in real life. Third, it is to make sure that learning is related to the particular gift of the learner. Fourth, it is the integration of one area of learning with another, to break down the artificial walls. Lastly, it is to employ various modes of delivering education, even those transcending the classroom.

Ken Gnanakan comes to the conclusion that 'Integrated learning is infectious and can become an exciting environment for lifelong learning. It is about learning within life, as we seek to integrate education into life. But life itself is learning and, here, it becomes a series of learning experiences. Such is the result when educational institutions provide the tools for acquiring knowledge and enable students to set out to have an integrated real-life learning experience' (159).

Ken Gnanakan offers a brilliant and scholarly work for education in general, but one that applies also to Bible college and seminary education. The book gives us all a hope that we could still recover the essence and essentials of good education. Our institutions will do well to seriously consider *Integrated Learning* as the way forward for a better society and for a better future for our nation.

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### Covenant: The Basis of God's Self-Disclosure

Chris Woodall

Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011

ISBN 978-1-61097-358-8

Pb., pp197, bibliog.

*Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird, Centre for Early Christian Studies, A.C.U., Australia.*

This work is a timely treatment of a great biblical theme about which a large section of evangelical Christianity hears little. Apart from a fear engendered among many significant evangelical leaders by the Puritan revival of the twentieth century, why there should be such a silence from many teachers and preachers is a mystery indeed. After all, for those not disposed to accept a rigid Calvinistic theology for whatever reason, it is not necessary to accept the total Reformed package in order to appreciate the vital place that Covenant has in the economy (oikonomia) of God. It is refreshing, then, to find something of this quality from a scholar who appears to have had a varied ecclesial background, but draws heavily, but by no means exclusively, on Reformed sources for support.

Chris Woodall commences this work by positing the concept of 'covenant' as the basis of all God's dealings with humankind. He opens with a discussion of what he calls 'the Old Covenants', naming six in number, Adamic: the Covenant of Sonship; Noahic: of Favour; Abrahamic: of Promise; Mosaic: of Law; Phineatic: of Priesthood; and Davidic: of Kingdom. These are explained as facets of the grace of God. A detailed discussion of the New Covenant then shows how the various aspects of the Old are gathered up in the New by fulfilment in

Christ. Each of the Old covenants reflects some office or ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ: Son, Prophet, priest, King, progenitor of the faithful, or Lawgiver.

What follows from the above is an extensive discussion focusing on the vexed question of the relationship between law and grace under the caption "Covenant Law, Covenant Grace". This is possibly the best chapter in the book. Woodall works carefully through numerous issues that apply, demonstrating the positive roles of the Law, but also its impotence to produce righteousness in humankind crippled by sin. The Covenant of grace, he asserts, does not annul the Law, but rather supplies, in the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, the motivation and power to enable us to perform the righteous demands of the Law. In this way Woodall is consistent in bringing all divine-human relations and requirements back to the unmerited favour of God.

He sees the perfect obedience of Christ in meeting the demands of the Law, for himself and on our behalf, as intrinsic to the New Covenant and its fulfilment. As that obedience included not only the preceptive requirements of the Law but also the penal, the substitutionary atonement must include both propitiation and expiation. Some examples of grace at work in Old Testament figures, Elijah, Jonah, and Nehemiah, are used to underline the result of the disobedience of Israel in the face of the grace of God, and the aftermath of restoration by an obedient response to God's grace. Woodall uses this to make the point of the importance human free will.

It is interesting to find a quote here from Bernard of Clairvaux emphasising the necessity of both God's grace and human cooperation. His point about grace is that it makes us free to be governed,

and empowers us to be able to live in a framework of law and choose to be slaves of righteousness.

A substantial discussion of the Covenant meal, Holy Communion, examines its roots in the Passover, its initiation in the New Testament setting, and various aspects of its significance. In this vein, the covenant themes of grace, obedience, and the centrality of divine and human relationships in covenant fellowship are noted. In light of all this, Woodall stresses that something more than symbol is involved. At the Table, living relationships are concerned. It is hard not to say 'amen' to this.

A final chapter is given on the expression of the Covenant. This is practical, something akin to the application in a sermon. Some readers will delight in this. I am not sure that it is needed, for there is a lot of repetition of previously addressed points, and some material seems superfluous. A section deals with practical issues arising from covenant loyalty. This could be helpful, but some of it seems idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, some readers may find wisdom here for their particular circumstances.

The bibliography is a little dated, but contains some of the leading evangelical writers of the twentieth century. Quite a number of classics are listed. Sadly, the book lacks an index. A useful feature is the profuse use of summaries of chapters and sections and in brief paragraphs or a collection of bulleted points. The book would be suited to church small group studies. The seminary student could find it beneficial. Even the advanced scholar would find it refreshing, perhaps even to the extent of disturbing some fixed idea.



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**New Perspectives for Evangelical  
Theology: Engaging with God,  
Scripture and the World**

Edited by Tom Greggs

London: Routledge, 2010  
ISBN 978-0-415-56062-7

Pb pp 223

*Reviewed by Robert K. Johnston, Fuller  
Theological Seminary, CA, USA.*

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The need in both Protestant theology and the Protestant church to move beyond old binary models has been recognized for some time. In/out, liberal/evangelical, particular/inclusive - the discussion is increasingly being recognized for what it is, tired and too often counter-productive. In its place, a growing number of evangelicals and mainline Protestants have proposed the need for a generous orthodoxy, one that does not divide; and one that takes Scripture and tradition seriously.

*New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology* moves this important discussion forward, as a group of younger evangelical scholars explore what a progressive evangelical theology might look like. The stated goal of its editor is 'to open our theology up to a generous particularism which recognizes the complexities of Scripture and of human life' (p. 216). Seeking new openings for doing theology, taking seriously current critiques of evangelicalism, pointing outward to the future while mining the past, accepting ambiguity and complexity as inherent in both biblical text and in life itself, the book's contributors seek through their chapters to be 'formative for evangelical theology' (p. 9).

There are fourteen chapters in the volume, together with a helpful forward by David Ford and a suggestive postscript by Richard Hays. Following Greggs' useful introduction, chapters explore aspects of scripture (Richard Briggs), election (Paul Nimmo), the atonement (Paul Dafydd Jones), entire sanctification (George Bailey), pneumatology (Simeon Zahl), the sacraments (Ben Fulford), the human as bodily (Elizabeth Kent), ecclesiology (Donald McFadyen), God's glory (Jason Faut), and eschatology (Tom Greggs), as well as an evangelical perspective on the political (Andi Smith), Muslims and the Word (Sarah Snyder), and a theology of Israel (Glenn Chesnutt).

The volume makes no attempt at a systematic theology. Rather each chapter takes up an aspect of its larger theme, enters into a creative discussion with theologians of the past, points out present limitations or criticisms, and provides perspectives and questions for future theological reflection. The essays as a whole plumb their topics with theological depth and range, while being lively and creative.

Instructive are the resources that these young theologians choose to use. There is a fresh and rigorous engagement with the biblical text. Many of the essayists anchor themselves in a theological tradition—Calvin/Barth, Luther, Wesley, Pietism - while also being self-critical of that tradition and seeking new formulations of it. Ford, Frei, Hardy, Hauerwas, Yoder, Maddox, Childs, Coakley, Bockmuehl, Peterson, and Dyrness - the list of contemporary, theological interlocutors is also instructive of where evangelicalism is finding vibrancy today.

This volume is a splendid exercise in 'constructive' theology, though Greggs himself demurs from using the term.

Fearing, perhaps, that 'constructive' signals an unwillingness to take church, Bible, and evangelical theology seriously (as would be true in the 'old' binary split), Gregg uses the term 'formative' to describe the theology of his contributors. Perhaps what Gregg's hesitancy also suggests is a somewhat cautious approach to the use of culture and experience as theological resources. These are present - the complexity of human life is revealed, particularly in the chapters mining the Methodist tradition with its interest in experience and in the final section of the book where politics and other religions become the focus. But the concentration in this book is chiefly upon Bible and tradition.

Drawing largely from Reformed and Wesleyan scholars, the book takes Scripture as authoritative while both respecting (yet questioning) past theological formulations and pointing beyond critical impasses. There are chapters in dialogue with the Reformed tradition that explore new theological formulations of election and the atonement, of the Lord's Supper and of a theological understanding of Israel. There are also chapters that mine the Wesleyan tradition's understanding of entire sanctifica-

tion and of corporate embodiment.

In a short postscript by Richard Hays, the present dean at Duke University references the missiologist Paul Hiebert's helpful distinction between centered-set groups and bounded-set groups. He rightly characterizes the essays as centered in their orientation. They are much less concerned with who is 'in' and who is 'out,' but instead seek to keep readers pointed toward God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, who is present in the church and Lord of all the earth.

Several of the essayists are still working or their Ph.D., but most are young theologians with re-appointments as Assistant Professors, Lecturers, Tutors, or Research Assistants. Given the provocative nature of the essays and the robust interlacing of Scripture, tradition(s), culture and experience, evangelical theology would seem on the threshold of a new era of grounded creativity. This volume is a first rate collection that raises helpful questions repeatedly, is willing to be self-critical, and points readers in useful and often surprising directions. Here is a book that will challenge your assumptions concerning evangelicals even while it also works comfortably within that tradition.

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