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

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Editorial: The Messianic Jesus

Two significant articles on the interpretation of the ministry and achievement of Jesus form the theme for this issue. In the first, Prabo Mihindukulasuriya (Sri Lanka) offers a way of integrating the various traditional understandings of the atonement by focusing on Jesus and his inauguration of the 'Kingdom of God'. He explains that Jesus ushered in God's redemptive rule as the perfect king and perfect citizen. These multiple functions displayed by Jesus bring together the diverse images of salvation seen in the Gospel accounts and provide a comprehensive understanding of the gospel with the cross as the 'radiating centre of God's transforming rule'. Then in a lengthy article, Colin Barnes (Australia) examines the messianic motifs in Micah 2: 12-13. He shows how Jesus' messianic activity, conforming as it does to typical Jewish understandings of the day, breaks down the fence protecting Israel, and restores everything to humanity that Adam lost.

With these two comprehensive perspectives in view, we can move forward as Wendy Helleman (Nigeria and Canada) gives an extremely helpful overview of the way research, study and teaching of early Christianity has varied from the Reformation to the present time. She documents the many changes in aim, focus, content and methodology applied to Patristics as different scholarly, ecclesiastical and sociological trends have surfaced to influence perspectives on the study of this period of church life. Her article will provide students with a valuable

overview of this important topic which will assist them in assessing the host of works now available in this field.

With a broader and much more recent perspective, Gerald McDermott (USA) gives us an analysis of evangelical theology in the contemporary period. He points out the great advances that have taken place, but also reflects on flashpoints and divisions that still exist. Nevertheless, he is optimistic that evangelical theology will continue to mature as a reform movement within the broader church, especially if it can learn from its past by not being triumphalist or sectarian, and by retaining its integrity.

Our final essay is a valuable critique by Perry Shaw (Lebanon) of traditional western ways of theological education with their analytic, individualist and linear approaches; he advocates instead a more networked, holistic and experience-driven approach which will take account of the cultural and gender diversity existing in the world-church and so enhance theological education and ministry training.

So we have contributions from around the world which call us to re-examine our understanding of the Lord and source of our faith, and to understand the way in which that faith has been developed and communicated for so long. As we heed these voices, we can look forward to a much invigorated understanding and a much more effective sharing of this faith in Jesus our Messiah.

Thomas Schirmmacher, General Editor
David Parker, Executive Editor

How Jesus Inaugurated the Kingdom on the Cross: a Kingdom Perspective of the Atonement

Prabo Mihindukulasuriya

Keywords: *Kingdom of God, atonement, atonement theories, salvation, gospel*

I Introduction: Connecting Cross and Kingdom

The ongoing debates about the gospel's core message¹ and theories of atone-

ment² provide an ideal moment to explore a truly foundational issue which, I believe, lies at the intersection of many of these discussions. It concerns the relation between the kingdom of God and the cross of Christ.

While orthodox Christian faith has always affirmed *that* God's redemptive rule on earth was—in some decisive way—inaugurated by the sacrificial death of Jesus, Christian theology has not satisfactorily explained *how* this was accomplished. Theories of the atonement have certainly highlighted central aspects of the instrumentality of the cross for human salvation, but they do not relate explicitly to the kingdom of God. As a result, the conversations attempting to relate Jesus' proc-

¹ See D. A. Carson, 'What Is the Gospel?—Revisited' in Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Eds.), *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2010), 147-170; Kevin de Young and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Crossways, 2011); Justin Taylor, 'The Relationship between "the Gospel of the Kingdom", "the Gospel of the Cross"', accessible at: <<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2012/09/03/the-relationship-between-the-gospel-of-the-kingdom-and-the-gospel-of-the-cross/>>; Scott McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan, 2011); N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (NY: HarperOne, 2012).

² See James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Eds.), *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006) and Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, Justin Thacker (Gen. Eds.), *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement 2006* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

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lamation of the kingdom and Paul's expositions of the cross continue to run in entrenched—even mutually apprehensive—circles, without the desired meeting of minds.

J. I. Packer, for example, has acknowledged that

In recent years, great strides in biblical theology and contemporary canonical exegesis have brought new precision to our grasp of the Bible's overall story of how God's plan to bless Israel, and through Israel the world, came to a climax in and through Christ.³

However, Packer has located the central message of the NT in terms of Luther's quest for personal redemption, and therefore cautioned,

And to the extent that modern developments, by filling our horizon with the great metanarrative, distract us from pursuing Luther's question in personal terms, they hinder as well as help in our appreciation of the gospel.⁴

Responding to Packer's ambivalence, Christopher Wright has stated,

I simply fail to see how gaining the widest possible biblical perspective, from the whole biblical narrative, can hinder our appreciation of the gospel—unless it is accompanied by denial of the personal and substitu-

tionary nature of Christ's death...⁵

He goes on to say,

But I am disturbed that it is possible for the reverse to happen—namely, that some theologians and preachers are so obsessed with the penal substitutionary understanding of the cross that they either ignore or seem scarcely aware of the total biblical story in which it is set and the vast cosmic and creational dimensions of the cross that the New Testament itself also spells out so clearly.⁶

What we need is a clearer perception of how Jesus inaugurated the kingdom on the cross, which would enable us to understand better the gospel's integral content and the atonement's kaleidoscopic images.

The point of this essay is to propose that the Scriptures do provide us with a consistent narrative, with its own coherent logic, of how the death of Christ brings about God's acknowledged rule, which accomplishes his redemption and judgement upon his creation. We may call it a kingdom perspective of the atonement, as it holds as its basic premise that Christ's atoning work can be most meaningfully articulated in terms of the kingdom of God, as the culmination of the whole biblical narrative of Israel and the nations, in and through Christ. This I believe is the non-negotiable vantage point for understanding the atonement.

³ J. I. Packer, 'Introduction: Penal Substitution Revisited' in J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 26. Quoted in Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 156 (fn. 1).

⁴ Packer, *In My Place*, 27.

⁵ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 156, fn. 1.

⁶ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 156-7, fn. 1.

II A Kingdom Perspective of the Atonement

1. Schema

The proposed perspective may be outlined quite simply as follows:

- In covenantal terms, a kingdom (*basileia* understood as 'rule' or 'reign') is constituted by the relationship between two parties: a king and a citizenry. One without the other is not a kingdom in that sense.
- Jesus brings about God's acknowledged rule on earth by simultaneously fulfilling, in his own person, God's requirements of perfect king and perfect citizen.
- Christ becomes the God-approved king by proving his love for his subjects to the fullest extent by his self-sacrifice for their rescue and restoration. He proves his God-approved citizenship by becoming obedient to his Sovereign to the fullest extent by submitting completely to his authority and demonstrating his loyalty in the face of creaturely (satanic and human) usurpation, rebellion and compromise.
- Jesus accomplishes this supremely on the cross because it is by the kind of death he suffered that both the love (for fallen creation) and obedience (to his sovereign Lord) which he had consistently demonstrated throughout his life and ministry, reach their climactic result.
- Therefore, by fulfilling both requirements of perfect king and perfect citizen, in his own person, on the cross, to God's fullest satisfaction, Jesus inaugurates God's redemptive rule on earth, recapitulating and reconstituting a new covenant com-

munity around his own mediatory personhood. He then invites repentant sinners to enter into that new sphere of communion with the triune God for their restoration to him and the redemption of all creation.

2. Theological antecedents

Each component of this perspective is entirely unoriginal. They have venerable antecedents spanning the length of church history. For example, the covenantal shape of God's engagement with creation is one of the greatest recoveries of the Reformed tradition.⁷ The essentially political nature of God's mission is persuasively argued by Oliver O'Donovan.⁸ The constituent elements of a kingdom were most notably proposed by Alexander Campbell, who posited not two but five elements:

What then are the essential elements of a kingdom as existing among men? They are five, viz.: King, Constitution, Subjects, Laws, and Territory. Such are the essential parts of every political kingdom, perfect in its kind, now existing on earth... Although the constitution is first, in the order of nature, of all the elements of a kingdom, (for it makes one man a king and the rest subjects,) yet we cannot imagine a constitution in reference to a kingdom, without a king and subjects. In speaking of them in detail, we cannot then speak of any one of them:

⁷ J. I. Packer, 'On Covenant Theology', *Celebrating the Saving Work of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

⁸ Oliver O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

as existing without the others—we must regard them as correlates, and as coming into existence contemporaneously.⁹

More recently, Graeme Goldsworthy proposed a simpler model: 'There is a King who rules, a people who are ruled, and a sphere where this rule is recognized as taking place.'¹⁰ That Jesus is the perfect or ideal king has been acknowledged, of course, from NT times; but lately substantiated by such scholars as Jamie Grant¹¹ and Julien Smith.¹² That Jesus fulfilled the ideal of Israelite covenant citizenship was argued most notably by T. W. Manson.¹³ Summarizing his view of how the cross and kingdom are connected, N. T. Wright states that

God himself will come to the place of pain and horror, of suffering and even death, so that **somehow** he can take it upon himself *and thereby set up his new style theocracy at last*. The evangelists tell the story of Jesus in such a way that this combination of Israel's vocation and the divine purpose come together perfectly into

⁹ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System*, (4th ed., Cincinnati: H.S. Bosworth, 1867), 148.

¹⁰ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1981), 47.

¹¹ Jamie Grant, *The King as Exemplar: the Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta: SBL, 2004).

¹² Julien Smith, *Christ the Ideal King: Cultural Context, Rhetorical Strategy, and the Power of Divine Monarchy in Ephesians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

¹³ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus: Its Form and Content* (Cambridge: CUP, 1935), 227-28.

one.¹⁴

This proposal seeks to articulate what that undefined 'somehow' entailed.

That Jesus unifies many salvific roles in his person and work, traditionally categorized as the *munus triplex* of priest, prophet and king, was suggested by Eusebius¹⁵ and famously elaborated on by Calvin.¹⁶ That Jesus brought the kingdom into being by being the kingdom as *autobasileia* (self-kingdom) was an insight of Origen's that the church endorsed.¹⁷ More recently, Carl F. H. Henry gave fresh articulation to the idea, stating,

Jesus in his own person is the embodied sovereignty of God. He lives out that sovereignty in the flesh. He manifests the kingdom of God by enthroning the creation-will of God and demonstrating his lordship over Satan. Jesus conducts himself as Lord and true King, ruling over demons, ruling over nature at its fiercest, ruling over sickness, conquering death itself. With the coming of Jesus the kingdom is not merely immanent; it gains the larger scope of incursion and invasion.¹⁸

Hans Boersma has carefully examined the emphases of divine violence (against the evil powers) and divine hospitality (for excluded sinners) in

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, *How God Became King* (London: SPCK/ NY: HarperOne, 2012), 196 (original italics, bold type mine).

¹⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, I.3.

¹⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.15.

¹⁷ *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 14.7.

¹⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, 'Reflections on the Kingdom of God', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35:1 (March 1992), 42.

the historical theologies of the atonement, and commends the metaphor of hospitality as 'the soil in which the various models of the atonement can take root and flourish'.¹⁹ He further concludes that 'God's hospitality is like the soil in which the process of reconciliation is able to take root and flourish'.²⁰ Accordingly, God's hospitality is the distinct characteristic of his redemptive rule.

Therefore, any newness in the present schema is due entirely to the way these affirmations have been aligned.

a) Kingdom as king and citizens

As the late R.T. France helpfully reminded,

'the kingdom of God' is not making a statement about a 'thing' called 'the kingdom,' but about *God*, that he is king. Thus, 'the kingdom of God has come near' means 'God is taking over as king,' and to 'enter the kingdom of God' is to come under his rule, to accept him as king.²¹

This theocracy, though, is covenantal in nature, a pledge between king and subjects, enunciated repeatedly in Scripture by the 'covenant formula': 'I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God' (Ex 6:7; elaborated in 19:5-6; cf. Lev 26:12; Deut 29:12-

13). The other components of Israel's nationhood such as territory (eg. Lev 18: 24-28; 25:23), laws (eg. Deut 4:5-8) and institutions (eg. Deut 17:8-20), though necessary, were entirely contingent upon and derived from the primary relationship between king and subjects.

The bipartite covenant formula is evoked extensively in the prophetic tradition (eg. Jer 7:23; 11:4: 30:22; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; etc.). The promised 'new covenant' was framed in these same relational terms (Jer 31:33; cf. 24:7; 32:38), and is explicitly instituted as such by Jesus at the Last Supper (Lk 22:15-20). The bipartite formula is used also to foretell the inclusion of those formerly excluded (Hos 1:9-10 and 2:23), and appropriated in the NT in reference to the full citizenship of Gentiles in Christ's kingdom (Rom 9:25-26; 1 Pet 2:9-10).

OT historiography too assumes that a kingdom was held together by the mutual acknowledgement of king and subjects. Israel's demand for a human king (1 Sam 8:7), introduced the new factor of that human king's relationship with, and representation of, his Divine King. This was the basis of Saul's rejection (1 Sam 13:14) and David's confirmation (2 Sam 5:12). This is most plainly evident when 'Jehoiada then made a covenant between the Lord and the king and people that they would be the Lord's people. He also made a covenant between the king and the people' (2 Kgs 11:17).

The extended metaphor about Israel's shepherds and sheep (eg. Jer 23:1-4 and Ezek 34) reflects the same bipartite combination. It is encapsulated by the proverb, 'A large population is a king's glory, but without subjects

a prince is ruined' (Prov 14:28; cf. 20:8). The same assumption lies behind Jesus' rebuttal that 'If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand', which was made in response to the Pharisees' accusation that 'By the prince of the demons he casts out the demons' (Mk 3:22-24). Therefore, that a kingdom consists of a king and a citizenry is a demonstrably biblical idea.

b) Jesus as perfect king

While all the Gospels announce Jesus' kingship, the *connection* between his royal function and his death is most poignantly highlighted in John.²² Mark narrates that when Jesus saw the crowd, 'he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd' (6:34); Matthew adds the explanation, 'because they were harassed and helpless' (9:36). In John, Jesus assumes the heroic role of the 'good shepherd' (10:11a, 14) in damning contrast to the thief who 'comes only to kill and steal and destroy' (10), and the hired hand who 'runs away because [he] does not care for the sheep' (13). The self-sacrificial defence of the sheep is presented as the natural and definitive test of the role: 'The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (11b).

The voluntary nature of Jesus' self-sacrifice in loving obedience to the Father is obviously important for the narrator. The point is repeatedly made:

And I lay down my life for the sheep... For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father (15, 17-18).

The OT background of Yahweh's promised judgement against Israel's cruel and self-serving 'shepherds' and his intervention through the provision of a Davidic 'shepherd' (Jer 23:1-6; Ezek 34; 37:24-28; Zech 9-14) constitute the unmistakable and directly relevant context of Jesus' explanation of his ministry to 'seek and save the lost' who have drifted away from covenant faithfulness (Lk 19:10; cf. 5:31-32; 15:4-7 and parallels). More relevantly, the 'shepherd of Yahweh' texts informed Jesus' understanding of the *extent* to which this contrastive way of ruling will be required of him:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, *even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Mt 20:25-28 = Mk 10:42-45).

At the beginning of the Passover narrative, John connects Jesus' love for the disciples and his impending death when we are told that 'Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end' (13:1). Finally, in the Upper Room Discourse, the test of love in death is most clearly stated: 'No one

¹⁹ Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 18.

²⁰ Boersma, *Violence*, 112.

²¹ R. T. France, 'Kingdom of God', in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, et al (eds.), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic/London, SPCK), 420 (original emphasis).

²² For a recent treatment of this nexus see Mavis M. Leung, *The Kingship-Cross Interplay in the Gospel of John: Jesus' Death as Corroboration of His Royal Messiahship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (15:13).

The counter-intuitive manifestation of God's/Christ's love for, and redemption of, sinners is expressed in the Pauline epistles. The efficacy of Christ's sacrificial love is described collectively as

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5:6-8).

It is also described personally as, 'And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20; cf. 1:4). Christ's death is also described as an act of love for humanity as well as devotion to God: 'as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Eph 5:2).

The Revelation begins with the assurance that Christ 'loves us and... has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen' (1:5a-6). It goes on to acclaim the Lamb's universal authority as achieved by his self-sacrifice:

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.
... Worthy is the Lamb who was

slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing! (5:9-10, 12).

Jesus' amalgamation of the exalted 'Son of Man' of Daniel 7 and the suffering-and-vindicated 'Servant' of Isaiah in his prediction that 'the son of man must suffer many things...' (Lk 9:22; cf. 24:7; Mk 9:12) reveals his self-understanding of this complex role. The enthronement of 'the one like a son of man' to whom is given 'dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him' (Dan 7:13-14, 27) is an entirely triumphant vision, with no hint of suffering. Such claims as, 'All things have been handed over to me by the Father' (Mt 11:27; cf. Jn 3:35; 13:3; 17:2), 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Mt 28:18), and 'He has given him authority to execute judgement because he is the Son of Man' (Jn 5:27), all go back to Daniel 7, and perhaps to certain Royal Psalms (2, 110, 118, etc.).

As evident in his prayer in John 17:4-5, Jesus appears to have fully understood that serving his appointed mission to bring God glory on earth will necessarily entail humiliation and death but will, with equal certainty, lead to his own glorification. Philippians 2:6-11 is a remarkable synthesis of this *anabasis-katabasis* (descent and ascent) movement, whereby Jesus becomes the perfect king by being the self-emptying servant.

c) Jesus as perfect citizen

The OT presents several virtue lists and character vignettes that illustrate God's expectations of an 'ideal Israelite' (eg. Deut 10:12-19; 1 Sam 2:26;

Job 29, 31; Ps 1, 15, 24, 112; Is 66:2; Jer 22:3; Ezek 18:5-9; Mich 6:8, Zech 7: 9-10, etc.). Such godly dispositions as righteousness (*tsēdāqā*), justice (*mišpāt*), mercy (*hesed*), love (*ahabāh*), faithfulness (*emunah*), and the 'fear of the Lord' (*yir'at YHWH*) are upheld in every genre of OT writing. The ideal covenant citizen was one who demonstrated these qualities in ordinary and extraordinary situations out of wholehearted loyalty to *Yahweh* and the community. Therefore, to love *Yahweh* with one's entire being (Deut 6:4-5) and one's neighbour as oneself (Lev 19:18b) became the epitome of *torah*-obedience, transcending even the sacrificial cult.²³

When a scribe once agreed with Jesus that 'to love [God] with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices', Mark witnesses that 'Jesus saw that he answered wisely, [and] said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God"' (12:28-34). It is also remarkable that Nathaniel, whom Jesus recognized as 'an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit' (John 1:47) is the very first disciple to declare his recognition of Jesus as '... the King of Israel!' (49).

The first petition of the 'Lord's Prayer' is arguably the simplest and clearest NT definition of the kingdom of God: '...Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Mt 6:10). Jesus repeatedly stated that doing God's will

was the all-embracing purpose of his life and mission. 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work' (Jn 4:34; see also 5:30; 6:38; 8:26; 9:4; 10:37-38; 12:49-50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4). At the beginning of his public ministry, when Satan 'showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory', this was the very thing that Jesus had come to accomplish. The critical factor was how and for whom he would accomplish it.

Therefore, to Satan's conditional offer, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me', Jesus is resolute in his response: 'Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve"' (Mt 4:8-10; para. Lk 4:5-8; citing Deut 6:13). At the end, the same resolve carried him through the most agonizing decision of his incarnate life: 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will... My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done' (Mt 26:39,42 para. Lk 22:42).

Therefore, when NT writers explain the instrumentality of Jesus' death (from the perspective of his human participation), they consistently identify his creaturely obedience as the turning point.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's *obedience* the many will be made righteous (Rom 5:18-19)

...but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born

²³ For citations in Intertestamental Jewish literature see 'Mark 12:29-31' in *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 219.

in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming *obedient to the point of death*, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name... (Phil 2:7-9).

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned *obedience* through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:7-10).

When pressed to explain the instrumentality of the cross, John Calvin stated,

Now someone asks, how has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God, and acquired righteousness to render God favorable and kindly toward us. To this we can in general reply that he has achieved this for us by *the whole course of his obedience*.²⁴

Christ's perfect compassion was the decisive factor of his kingly intervention. His perfect obedience was the decisive factor of his submission to God's rule as the true citizen. The kingdom is established by the unique combination of these two critical factors embodied and enacted by Christ, and climacti-

cally manifested on the cross.

Yet there is much *communicatio idiomatum* between the categories of king and citizen. According to the Deuteronomic ideal, the king is the ideal citizen, diligently studying the *torah* for the sake of his fellow Israelites (Deut 17:14-20). In performing his kingly role Jesus was ever conscious of his subordination to the Father and his royal mission being one of obediently carrying out the Father's mandate (Jn 5:19; 14:10b, 31; 12:49-50; 15:10, etc.). On the other hand, as we shall see, the Israelite citizen was ethically inculcated *inter alia* in the royal paradigm. To be of Adamic descent, bearing the image of God, was to participate in the rule over creation (Ps 8). Therefore, although the proposed schema is easily comprehensible, it preserves the mystery of the atonement. If anything, it takes us deeper into it.

III Implications of the Kingdom Perspective

So how does a kingdom perspective of the cross account for the diversity of salvation images in the NT? How does it relate to traditional theories of atonement? How does it define the core message of the gospel?

1. The kingdom and salvation images

A kingdom perspective of the atonement is able to account for the variety of salvation metaphors employed by Jesus himself as recorded by the Evangelists and by the other NT writers. This is because these images reflect the multiplicity of functions inherent in Christ's roles as king and citizen.

As the late Waldemar Janzen convincingly demonstrated, the OT offered ethical 'paradigms' modelled on identifiable community functions such as priest (priestly), sage (sapiential), king (royal), prophet (prophetic), and kinsman-redeemer (familial), for the moral formation of ordinary Israelites.²⁵ A covenant citizen was thereby oriented to act instinctively in the spirit of the *torah* in any given situation. Jesus' perfect covenant citizenship was demonstrated in his unique excellence of fulfilling these ethical paradigms.

Here the 'offices' traditionally assigned to Jesus must be expanded to include the fuller range of community functions in scripture. To the *munus triplex* of priest, prophet and king (which includes the functions of 'judge' and 'warrior') need to be added the categories of wisdom-teacher²⁶ and kinsman-redeemer.²⁷ Others such as exorcist and charismatic miracle-worker, could be understood as belonging to a particular prophetic tradition (i.e. of Elijah and Elisha).²⁸

²⁵ Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994). I am grateful to Dr. Chris Wright for introducing me to this book.

²⁶ See Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2000).

²⁷ See D. A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Go'el Institutions in the Old Testament with Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1974); Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., 'The Go'el in Ancient Israel: Theological Reflections on an Israelite Institution', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991), 3-19.

²⁸ See for example, Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1973); Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Histori-*

Jesus uniquely exemplified the priestly paradigm of holiness and mediation towards God.²⁹ His incarnation of God's holy presence among his suffering people transcended the holiness of both Temple and priesthood (Mt 12:1-8). The most explicit identification in the NT to Jesus' priestly function is his High Priesthood in the Order of Melchizedek as expounded in Hebrews 5:6 and 7:1-17 (citing Ps 110:4). Jesus is upheld as superior to the Levitical high priesthood because he is empathetic yet sinless (Heb 4:15), made perfect in obedience (5:8-10), and forever accessible (7:23-25). But most supremely Jesus transcends the priestly paradigm by becoming the perfect atoning sacrifice *himself* (9:11-14, 26; 10:19-31; 12:14-17; 13:1-17).

While it was always understood that obedience *is* the perfect sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22; Ps 40:6-8 (quoted and expounded in Heb 10:4-10); 50:9-15; 51:16-17; Prov 21:3; Ecc 5:1; Is 1:11-17; Jer 7:21-24; Hos 6:6 (quoted in Mt 9:13 and 12:7); Mich 6:6-8; Mk 12:33; Rom 12:1) only Jesus was capable of perfect obedience, and therefore, offer in himself *the* perfect sacrifice. The connection between Jesus' sacrifice of perfect obedience and the receiving of kingship is clearly made in Hebrews:

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,

cal and Theological Study (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), and *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), etc.

²⁹ See Gerald O'Collins SJ and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

²⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.xvi.5 (emphasis mine).

waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (10:12-14).

The prophetic paradigm was more overtly part of Jesus' self-understanding (eg. Mk 6:4 para; Mt 23:37-39, para.; Lk 13:33). That Jesus was the 'prophet like Moses' predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15-18 is affirmed in John 6:14; 7:52; Acts 3:22 and 7:37. The prophets were ideal Israelites because they not only kept covenant themselves, but called their fellow citizens back to repentant reconciliation with God and righteous responsibility towards their weaker neighbours. Their loyalty to God, demonstrated in subversive words and actions, often ran the gauntlet of public scorn and state retribution.

However, Jesus saw his own impending suffering as more than that of an exemplary prophetic martyr. He repeatedly claims for himself the enigmatic role of the Isaianic suffering servant, whose faithfulness not only leads to suffering (all too familiar), but whose suffering is substitutionary and leads to the restoration of the unfaithful (utterly astonishing!). Isaiah 52:13-53:12 reports how the one whom God calls 'my servant' bears the punishment of sins upon himself in suffering and death, and in his 'resurrection' bringing forth the forgiveness and restoration of the guilty. What the Good Shepherd is to the royal paradigm, the Suffering Servant is to the prophetic.

In the category of wisdom-teacher, Jesus' public ministry provides ample examples of his creative and didactic efforts to alert ordinary people to God's

decisive new initiative of grace.³⁰ His own experience was something like that of Job, facing the incredulity and accusations of those who should have known better. His 'fear of the Lord' was tested in the Qoheleth-like crucible of seeming futility, and the Job-like crucible of seeming abandonment.

Psalms 22 with its cry, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' (1) is not technically a 'wisdom psalm', but it voiced the existential anguish of the righteous in a cynical world well enough to become the most quoted psalm in the Gospels. In it the faithful sufferer complains, 'All who see me mock me... "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"' (6-8). The psalm concludes with a hopeful declaration of God's rule over the nations (25-31).

Elsewhere, salvation itself is linked to the faithfulness of the wise: 'By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil' (Prov 16:6; cf. Is 52:13). In this Jesus was not only 'something greater than Solomon' (Mt 12:42, para.) in the extent of his wisdom but the very manifestation of God's wisdom. As Paul proclaims, 'Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God' (1 Cor 1:30; cf. 28; Jn 1:1-5f.; Col 2:3). By acting wisely Jesus confronts and confounds the conniving powers of evil and undoes their arrogance and rebellion.

Although the term 'redeemer' is hardly thought of in connection with its original OT clan function of *go'el*, the kinsman redeemer, that is exactly what it means. The *go'el* epitomized heroic

³⁰ See Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*.

familial duty and sacrificial hospitality in the Israelite socio-economy, stepping in, often at risk to his own well-being, to rescue distressed family members from debt and slavery. 'Redemption' is primarily an economic metaphor and the 'redeemer' is often portrayed as liberating the debtors, slaves and captives of sin requiring a ransom for their release (eg. 1 Cor 6:20; 1 Pet 1:18-19; 1 Tim 2:6; Tit 2:14).

Once again, Jesus perfectly embodied the ideal Israelite. The psalmist humbly acknowledged that 'Truly no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit' (Ps 49:7-8). Therefore, he trusted that '...God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me' (15). Jesus not only paid the ransom for indebted and enslaved sinners; he did so by becoming the ransom *himself* (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; 1 Tim 2:6).

As Janzen summarizes,

Obedience to God's word and suffering on account of the inevitable opposition to it became central to this prophetic paradigm. It became foundational for the suffering yet vindicated Servant Jesus Christ and the suffering yet redeemed servant community founded by him. Though Jesus Christ also embraced paradigmatically the offices of king, priest, and sage, these were qualitatively transformed by the attributes of the suffering and redeemed servant. He was the lowly king; the self-sacrificing priest; the bringer of wisdom not of this world. Above all, he was the Son of God, as Israel had been God's son. In that role he was the em-

bodiment of Israel. ...[T]hese components of the paradigm of Jesus Christ were not abruptly innovative, but deeply rooted in the Old Testament's paradigmatic pattern...

Therefore, when Jesus and his apostolic witnesses needed to expound the fullness of his saving work on the cross in specific contexts of proclamation, worship and teaching they did so by drawing on these very categories of loving king and obedient subject. Images of victory, judgement, liberation, rule and reward proceed from the royal paradigm. The law-suit idiom of justification and the familial image of reconciliation are recognizably prophetic concerns. Purification, sanctification, expiation and propitiation are priestly functions. Making the foolish wise and bringing the immature to maturity are sapiential goals. Redemption, release, restoration, hospitality, adoption and inheritance are facilitated by the kinsman-redeemer.

Therefore, the variety of salvation images freely employed by Jesus and NT writers makes sense within the two broad categories of perfect king and perfect citizen, both of which Christ fulfilled uniquely, supremely and with finality.

2. The Kingdom and Atonement Theories

Michael McNichols makes a very pertinent observation about the current debate on the atonement when he states that

...the atonement is best viewed through the lens of the kingdom of God rather than through any one theological theory. In the atonement—the full expanse of Jesus'

life, death, and post-resurrection existence—the kingdom is launched into human history, the people of God are reborn and redefined, and the mission of God is made evident to the world. Viewing the atonement within the context of the kingdom of God expands the understanding of salvation to include the destiny of individuals without ignoring the biblical narrative's inclusion of the whole of creation in God's eschatological intentions.³¹

While usefully highlighting vital theological truths about the cross, atonement theories cannot offer a comprehensive historical-theological account of Christ's death. Even the ablest defenders of the centrality of penal substitution humbly concede that other images of the atonement are necessary to make up the fuller picture of what Christ accomplished.³² The development of atonement theories within historical theology has been a more complex process than has sometimes been portrayed. They neither fall into neat chronological epochs, nor can they be uniformly attributed to particular cultural incubations.

While cultural factors were more influential in the origin of some theories such as Anselm's satisfaction theory, notions of penal substitution appear

across the span of church history.³³ The metaphorical nature of atonement language is essential for theological construction and yet requires a foundation of historical actuality to reflect upon.³⁴ Romans 5 illustrates the point excellently. This text is arguably the most paradigmatic delineation of the atonement in the NT (other examples would include Phil 2:5-11; Gal 3:10-14; Col 1:13-23; 2:9-15).

In the first half of the chapter, Paul enumerates the many—present and future—*benefits* of Christ's saving act (Rom 5:1-11): 'justified by faith... peace with God' (1), 'access by faith into this grace in which we stand... [the] hope of the glory of God' (2), '[ability to] rejoice in our sufferings... and hope [that] does not put us to shame... God's love [...] poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (3-5), 'justified by his blood... saved [...] from the wrath of God' (9), 'reconciled to God... [we shall be] saved by his life' (10), 'now received reconciliation' (11).

The fact that neither Jesus nor Paul nor any other NT writer provides an elaborate delineation of an 'atonement theory' but instead drew on familiar biblical motifs which were readily understood (if not believed) by their Jewish and Gentile contemporaries

31 Michael McNichols, *Atonement as Kingdom Reality* (paper presented to the Society of Vineyard Scholars, October 2010), 12-13. Accessible at <http://www.academia.edu/470976/Atonement_as_Kingdom_Reality>.

32 See Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Nottingham: IVP/Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2007), 210.

33 Jeffery, et al., *Pierced*, 161-204.

34 See Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 1988), esp. 64, 88; and Henri Blocher's defence of metaphors in understanding the atonement in 'Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:4 (Dec 2004), 629-45.

indicates that the presentation of the atonement in the NT as a whole corresponded plausibly with the narrative, ethical and institutional framework of the OT. If later interpreters unfamiliar with that thought-world would see instead clues suggestive of transactional mechanisms that were plausible to their own socio-intellectual milieu, they would be missing the atonement's richer theological context.

'Justified by faith' and 'saved from the wrath of God' would naturally resonate with minds shaped by Roman and Teutonic legal concepts. 'Hope of the glory of God' could likewise be comprehended as deification to intellects attuned to Greek mysticism. 'Peace with God' and 'reconciliation' would similarly resonate with feudal notions of fealty and the restoration of honour. The point, of course, is to keep going back to the whole story of God's mission in the Bible.

Notice that Paul does not simply leave us with a multiplicity of images. He goes beyond the metaphors to locate the atoning act itself. This act embodies, and is therefore expressible by, the range of atonement images employed. Paul identifies the crux of the atonement in the second part of the chapter, revealing the *basis* of the salvation blessings he has just described.³⁵

He does this by contrasting Adam's act of sin and incurred death with Christ's reversal of that penalty by his act of salvation (Rom 5:12-21): Adam's act is described as 'one man's trespass' while Christ's is 'the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ'

(15). Whereas 'the judgement following [Adam's] one trespass brought condemnation,...the free gift following many trespasses brought justification' (16). Because of Adam's trespass 'death reigned' but 'the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life' through Christ (17; also 21). What constituted this 'free gift by the grace of one man' is then very clearly described:

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men,

so *one act of righteousness* leads to justification and life for all men.

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners,

so by the *one man's obedience* the many will be made righteous (18-19).

Irenaeus' idea of 'recapitulation' (based on Rom 5:12-21)³⁶ did not go far enough to understand that Christ's redeeming obedience not only undid Adam's sin to bring humankind out of Satan's power, but that Christ's obedience re-established God's acknowledged rule over creation which Adam was excluded from because of his act of betrayal.³⁷ Paul's plain prose identifies the veritable 'baseline' of the atonement from the angle of Christ's humanity: Christ's righteousness which consisted in his obedience reversed the effect of Adam's disobedience which

36 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7; 3.21.9-10; 3.22.3; 5.21.1.

37 Irenaeus believed that the kingdom of God would be inaugurated only at the second coming of Christ. See Denis Minns OP, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 140-148.

35 Douglas J. Moo, *NICNT Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 317.

was his trespass, thereby enabling condemned sinners to become righteous and live. The one act of atonement is the wellspring of a multiplicity of metaphorical images.

Therefore, a kingdom perspective of the atonement can account for the diversity of the Bible's salvation images. It spares us the Procrustean alternative of privileging one atonement theory over others, while constituting a common point of reference by which all the kaleidoscopic images are held together.

Finally, a kingdom perspective of the atonement fulfils two criteria that a successful atonement theory ought to do. First, it explains how the cross *simultaneously* addresses all the constituents of the atonement: a justly angered yet loving God, a sinful and lost humanity, a creation subjected to futility, and an incorrigibly evil adversary.

Second, it is both objective and subjective. In Christ's kingdom-inauguration, we not only receive atonement by Christ's kingly love and citizenly obedience which, *objectively*, wins God's approval. We are also taught, *subjectively* (by the transformation of the whole orientation of our lives) how to live lives of serving love and filial obedience worthy of the kingdom. For we are not invited merely to be citizens of Christ's kingdom, but to be co-heirs and co-regents with him. We receive that reward only by persevering through the same trials and seizing the same opportunities of service that he demonstrated.

3. The Kingdom and the Gospel

The proposed kingdom perspective of the cross resolves the needless tension between the so-called 'salvation

gospel' and 'kingdom gospel', because it establishes the inauguration of the kingdom as the necessary precondition for salvation of individuals and nations. This is the significance of references to the 'now' (in distinction to references to 'the past') in the earliest apostolic preaching, that God has begun to reclaim his world by exalting Jesus as Lord through the victory of his life, death and resurrection to save both Jews and Gentiles who repent and submit to his rule from judgement (Acts 2: 14-40; 3: 17-21; 10:34-43; 17:30-31). It is not merely what he *did* on the cross (inaugurating God's redemptive rule), but what he *became* for us (our exalted Saviour and Lord), as manifested by the resurrection, that makes Jesus the protagonist of God's kingdom.

Don Carson and others have expressed legitimate concern that the definition of the gospel in primarily kingdom terms tends to reduce its message to a nebulous and moralistic 'social gospel' as witnessed in early 20th century liberal Christianity.³⁸ The reason, however, for that flawed conceptualization of both the gospel and kingdom was precisely the denial that the cross of Christ had actually introduced a new *status quo* that altered the relationship between God and humankind. But an understanding of the kingdom that is ontologically dependent upon the cross of Christ cannot be sundered from the forgiveness and salvation it makes uniquely possible.

The kingdom and cross are inextricably linked. The reign that God begins on the cross of Christ is indeed about

³⁸ Carson, 'What Is the Gospel?—Revisited', 160-161.

the conversion of sin-ridden creatures and the renewing of our evil-riddled creation with judgement and re-creation. We are called to repent because God is already bringing humanity to account for our offensive ways of being, and called to believe because God is introducing a future existence already discernible within our present experience. We are embraced into the convicting and sanctifying communion of the triune God for the very purpose of devoting our energies to his mission in and for creation.

The kingdom perspective of the cross recognizes the critical instrumentality of Jesus' death for the realization of God's redemptive rule. It makes the cross central for the kingdom, and the kingdom central for the cross. By clarifying for us that the basis of salvation is the inauguration of the kingdom, and that the purpose of salvation is the life of the kingdom, we are kept from the heretical tendency of choosing between the 'salvation gospel' and the 'kingdom gospel'.

Furthermore, a kingdom perspective of the atonement brings greater clarity to the interconnection between Jesus' lordship and saviourship. From this perspective we understand better why Jesus prays, '...glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, *since you have given him authority over all flesh* [i.e. lordship], *to give eternal life to all whom you have given him* [i.e. saviourship]' (Jn 17:1-2). For it is by first establishing the reality of God's redemptive rule that Jesus brings people into it.

The same kingdom authority is the *raison d'être* of the apostles' disciplining mission: '*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go*

therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...' (Mt 28:18-20). It is also Paul's all-compassing orientation for Christian ethics: '...So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, *that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living*' (Rom 14:8-9).

A kingdom perspective of the atonement also draws us more naturally to missional discipleship, as it calls us to imitate the sacrificial love and loyal obedience of Christ. As became evident in the so-called 'lordship salvation' debate, for some at least whose Christian initiation was based on a deficient exposition of penal substitution, the realization that discipleship invariably demanded costly obedience apparently came as a subsequent realization.³⁹

The point is that Jesus does not simply die on the cross in our place, so that we do not have to die ourselves ('exclusive substitution'); nor even that in his death we have already died ('inclusive substitution'); but, more accurately, that Christ calls us to die on the cross with him, daily (Lk 9:23). The NT resounds with the conviction that by the atonement Christ's disciples do not by any means escape the cross, but rather, are inexorably crucified to it (Mt 10:38; 16:24-26; Mk 8:34-35; Lk 9:23; 14:25-33; Jn 12:24; Rom 6:1-7, 11, 14; 7:4-6; 8:12-13; 12:1-2; 2 Cor 5:15, 17; Eph 4:22-25; Gal 2:19-20; 5:24; 6:14; Col 2:12-20; 3:1, 3-7; 2 Tim

³⁹ See Michael S. Horton (ed.), *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Wipf & Stock, 2009).

2:11; Tit 2:11; 1 Pet 2:24; Rev 2:10b; 26-28, etc.).

Must the gospel then necessarily be articulated in explicitly 'kingdom' language? Yes and no. No, because we understand from the NT itself that there is flexibility here. While the Synoptics speak of experiencing atonement as 'entering' (eg. Jn 3:5), 'seeing' (3:3), 'inheriting' (Mt 25:34), and 'receiving' (Mk 10:15) God's kingdom, John mostly prefers the corresponding expressions of 'life', 'eternal life', 'in God', 'in truth', and so on.

Paul's use of 'in Christ', 'in the Lord' or 'in the Spirit' also communicates a comparable sense. However, the underlying basis of all these expressions is the same: God's new initiative in Christ to include within his transforming sovereignty a creation otherwise lost.⁴⁰ As John Stott argued,

Of course the announcement of God's kingdom was the very heart of the message of Jesus, and to Jewish audiences steeped in the messianic expectation the apostles continued to proclaim it. But already in the New Testament the good news was expressed in other terms. In John's Gospel the emphasis is on eternal life rather than on the kingdom, and to Gentiles Paul preferred to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior. Yet all these are different ways of

saying the same thing. If we are to preach the gospel faithfully, we must declare that through the death and resurrection of Jesus a new era dawned and a new life became possible. But we may speak of this new life in terms of God's kingdom or Christ's lordship or salvation or eternal life or in other ways. It is certainly not essential to refer explicitly to the kingdom; indeed in countries which are not monarchies but republics kingdom language sounds distinctly odd.⁴¹

Similarly, Lesslie Newbigin made the following observations:

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God and sent out his disciples to do the same. But that is not all. His mission was not only a matter of words, and neither is ours. If the New Testament spoke only of the proclamation of the kingdom there could be nothing to justify the adjective 'new.' The prophets and John the Baptist also proclaimed the kingdom. What is new is that in Jesus the kingdom is present. That is why the first generation of Christian preachers used a different language from the language of Jesus: he spoke about the kingdom, they spoke about Jesus. They were bound to make this shift of language if they were to be faithful to the facts. It was not only that the phrase 'kingdom of God' in the ears of a pagan Greek would be

almost meaningless, having none of the deep reverberations that it evoked for someone nourished on the Old Testament. It was that the kingdom, or kingship, of God was no longer a distant hope or a faceless concept. It had now a name and a face—the name and face of the man from Nazareth. In the New Testament we are dealing not just with the proclamation of the kingdom but also with the presence of the kingdom.⁴²

Therefore, although 'kingdom' phraseology is not essential in evangelistic preaching the all-encompassing new reality of God's redemptive rule must necessarily be communicated. The appeal to each individual to repent and believe ('salvation gospel') is the necessary *response* to the reality of God re-taking charge of his creation through Christ ('kingdom gospel').

The first apostolic gospel proclamation at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40) is surely paradigmatic here. First, Peter concluded his message with the resounding declaration: 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:36). To this, a response was inexorable. 'Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"' (37).

Second, the appropriate response was urged: 'And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for

the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself'" (38-39). Interestingly, the earliest evidence of Paul's evangelization attests to the same gospel content. In 1 Thessalonians (written in the early AD 50s), Paul writes, 'For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory' (2:11-12).

The gospel consists of these two inseparable parts: (a) the proclamation that the *kingdom of God* was inaugurated by the *cross of Christ* and, (b) the appeal to repent and align oneself personally and corporately with that new reality.

IV Conclusion

A kingdom perspective of the atonement is able to hold together the many emphases that models of atonement attempt to convey. It shows how the covenantal expectations of the Hebrew Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ, indicating the significance of his life and ministry, as well as his death and resurrection, and links seamlessly the themes of the kingdom of God and the cross. Through it we see how the messages of personal salvation and cosmic renewal cohere. Consequently, a kingdom perspective of the atonement offers fresh insight for our ever-reforming understandings of the gospel, conversion, discipleship, church and mission.

⁴⁰ G. E. Ladd explored these terms in *A Theology of the New Testament* (rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993). For kingdom language in the Synoptics see (54-67); for Johannine expressions (290-305); for characteristically Pauline idioms (521-537). See also Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds.), *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2012).

⁴¹ John R. W. Stott, *Culture and the Bible* (Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; originally, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979), 16. And yet, republics are based on the notion of sovereignty too (that sovereignty rests with the citizens).

⁴² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978, rev. 1995), 40.

In What Sense was the First Coming of Jesus Messianic?

An Examination of Micah 2:12-13

Colin Barnes

Keywords: *Prophecy, eschatology, rabbinic literature, David, law, sacrifice, the breaker, fence, temple*

I Introduction

Messianic hopes were varied but high in first century Judaism. Whatever the details, however, the universal expectation was that the Messiah would 'be good for the Jews'. A moderate, pious and inspired example of these hopes is found in Luke 1:74-75. The coming of their Messiah, however, did not usher in an age of peace and righteousness, but was followed by war, the destruction of the Temple, and the dispersal of the people. How do we reconcile this reality with the words of Mary, in Luke 1:54-55?

While many Christians criticize the Jewish people for wanting the deliverance that the OT promised, and Premillennialists generally confine such deliverance to the second coming, either way we are left with the question: 'In what way was Jesus the Messiah for the Jewish people at his first advent?'

That is, in what sense *was* Jesus messianic? This question is important both in its own right, and also because the first response of many Jewish people to the message of the gospel is: 'The Messiah will bring in universal peace and godliness, and rescue Israel. Jesus did not do this, therefore he is not the Messiah.'

This paper will therefore seek to understand the consequences of the first coming of Jesus for the Jewish people. Its approach will be to examine a messianic prophecy in the OT in the light of the NT and Rabbinic literature, to see how it predicts/explains the first advent of our Lord, and the subsequent history of Israel (i.e., to see in what sense they fulfilled messianic prophecy). The NT will be looked at to see if the prophecies are confirmed as messianic within it, and to see how their concepts are developed here. Rabbinic literature will also be consulted along the same lines. The prophecy, Micah 2:12-13, has been chosen for this study because it seems to contain ambiguities that bear directly on the question in focus.

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II Context

Most commentators¹ place the immediate application of this prophecy to the events surrounding the Assyrian invasion of Judah under Sennacherib. Verse 12 has the people being gathered to Jerusalem for safety, yet still frightened by the besieging Assyrian army. Sennacherib would later write how he had 'shut up Hezekiah inside Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage'.² In verse 13, the threat is over (as per Isa 37:32), and their king breaks out of their enclosure, leading the remnant into the wider land. God breaks 'through the gate of the city of Jerusalem that had protected them, but now confines them'.³

Wolff⁴ finds the expression 'the king will go up (*ya'ābōr*) before them' as ruling out Jerusalem as the setting, as one goes down from Jerusalem, but the term can also be used in military sense, e.g. Joshua 1:1; 1 Samuel 7:7. Young describes the original simile as follows;

After the sheep had been confined all night in the makeshift sheepfold, the animals are anxious to break out. In the morning the shepherd will knock down a section of the piled up stones. He will break open

the barricade wall which penned up the sheep all night in a protective enclosure. Anxious to be released from the holding pen, the sheep will rush [note the LXX translation, 'they shall rush forth from among men through the breach made before them'] out as quickly as possible, knocking down more stones from the makeshift fence in order to break outside.⁵

This irresistible force, this bursting through, is seen also in 2 Samuel 5:20.

III Messianic Content

The pairing of the name of God with 'their king' at the end of verse 13 agrees with similar expressions in Isaiah (41:21; 43:15; 44:6 etc.). More importantly for this study is the name *happōrēs* 'the breaker.' The root of this word is *prš* and means to burst through, or make a breach in. It is the name given to Judah's first born (Gen 38:29; Mt 1:3). Perez was an ancestor of David, and 'son of Perez' is a messianic title in Rabbinic literature, and even to this day *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book* contains the phrase, 'Through the offspring of Perez we also shall rejoice and be glad'.⁶ In both *Genesis Rabbah* (8:6), and *Leviticus Rabbah* (30) this is due to the 'generations (*toledoth*) of Perez' (Ruth 4:18) being spelt 'complete', with the initial *vav*.

The word generations (*toledoth*) whenever it occurs in the Bible, is

1 E.g. Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976). Ralph L. Smith. *Word Biblical Commentary: Micah—Malachi* (ed. J. Watts; Waco: Word Books, 1984); David W. Baker, Desmond Alexander and Bruce Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (UK: IVP, 1988).

2 Allen, *The Books*, 302.

3 Smith, *Micah*, 29.

4 Hans W. Wolff. *Micah, a Commentary*, trans. Gary Stansell (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1990), 85.

5 Brad H. Young. *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 53.

6 *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, trans. S. Singer (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962), 156.

spelt defectively [i.e., without the *vav*], and for a very significant reason. Thus the word is spelt fully [with a *vav*] in the case of 'these are the generations of the heaven and of the earth', because when God created His world, there was no Angel of Death in the world, and on this account it is fully spelt; but as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, God made defective all the generations mentioned in the Bible. But when Perez arose, his generations were spelt fully again, because from him the Messiah would arise, and in his days God would cause death to be swallowed up, as it says, 'He will swallow up death forever.'⁷

Genesis Rabbah 12:6 adds that the *vav* corresponds to the six things (the numeric value of *vav*) that Adam was created with, yet through his sin were lost or spoiled, i.e., his lustre, his immortality, his height, the fruit of the earth, the fruit of trees and the luminaries. Verses are quoted to show

- a) that Adam originally had these in full,
- b) that as a result of the fall he lost them, and
- c) that the Messiah will restore them.

The root meaning of the name, to burst/break through or breach, always remains in focus, highlighting this dynamic aspect of the Messiah's mission. The Rabbinic expository work, *The Priestly Gift*, says; 'The last saviour is the Messiah, the son of David, who is descended from Judah's son Perez...

This is the Messiah who will soon appear, because it is written of him that, One who breaks open the way will go up before them.'⁸ As will also be seen later, there is thus a strong resonance between 'the Perez' of Micah 2:13, and the Messiah, the 'son of Perez'. To what extent, and in what ways is this messianic prophecy picked up on in the NT?

1. Direct references

The most direct reference to this passage is one that has only recently been identified. It occurs in Matthew 11:12. As Blomberg notes; 'Verse 12 forms an amazingly difficult interpretative crux.'⁹ A number of scholars have suggested the value of seeing the Matthew passage in terms of Micah, and with reference to a Rabbinic interpretation of it.

Concerning these, David Kimchi (the Radak) wrote, 'In the words of our teachers of blessed memory and in the Midrash, it is taught that "the breaker" is Elijah and "their king" is the branch, the Son of David.'¹⁰ In his commentary on Micah 2:12-13, the Radak also wrote that it concerned

the prophet Elijah, who will come before the time of deliverance to extend the hearts of the Israelites to their heavenly father in order to be a herald of redemption to them... but their king is the Messiah king, and

the Lord will go before them for at that time he will send back his Holy Spirit to Zion.'¹¹

In the early Jewish midrash, the *Pesikta Rabbati*, it is also written,

When the Holy One, blessed be He, redeems Israel, three days before the Messiah comes, Elijah will come and stand upon the mountains of Israel... in that hour... He will redeem Israel, and He will appear at the head of them, as it is said, he who opens the breach will go up before them.'¹²

In Matthew 11:12, John the Baptist is the Elijah of Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6, who goes before the Lord to prepare his way, the last and greatest of the old order, heralding in the new. As in the midrash, Jesus, the king, follows John. Note however, that John does not make the breach, and the least in the kingdom is greater than him. It is Jesus, the Lord himself, who, as in the original prophecy, both makes the breach and leads the sheep through the gate.

As the Matthew passage is dealing with the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, and contains reference both to the kingdom bursting forth, and of others bursting forth with it, the tie in to Micah 2:12-13 seems both clear and helpful. It is the dynamism of the kingdom, breaking in, and the action of those following him that is in focus. Young's rendering of the verse tries to capture this: 'The kingdom of heaven is breaking forth, and

everyone breaks forth with it.'¹³

The big drawback to this is Matthew's use of the word *biazetai*. Arndt and Gingrich, while noting its usually passive sense, also give the option of 'makes its way with triumphant force'.¹⁴ Note also that *pr̥s* itself, like the Greek term, is most often used in a passive sense. Of equal concern, G. Schrenk¹⁵ opts for a passive meaning. He does state however, that 'A first possibility... is to take *biazetai* in the sense of an intr. mid.: "the rule of God breaks in with power, with force and impetus"'.¹⁶

Of the commentators, Blomberg¹⁶ opts for a negative, passive meaning. W. Davies¹⁷ gives a good summary of translations to date, and following Schrenk, goes for the passive, as do Grundy,¹⁸ Hagner¹⁹ ('An infamous crux in the exegesis of Matthew'), and Morris.²⁰ None of these relates it to the

¹³ Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 71.

¹⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. '*biazō*'.

¹⁵ Gottlob Schrenk, *Biazoēai Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1964), 1.609-14.

¹⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 186.

¹⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew*, ICC, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

¹⁸ Robert Grundy, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 209.

¹⁹ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Bible Commentary, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 303.

²⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 281.

⁷ *Soncino Midrash Rabbah* (trans. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman; Judaic Classics Library CD ROM; Davka: Chicago, 1995). *Leviticus Rabbah* 30.

⁸ Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings*, trans. William Kinnard (Jerusalem: Keren Ahavah Meshihit, 1992), 44.

⁹ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 187.

¹⁰ Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 64.

¹¹ Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the New Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings*, trans. William Kinnard (Jerusalem: Keren Ahavah Meshihit, 1992), 59.

¹² Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 63.

prophecy in Micah. Young²¹ lists several occasions where *biazetai* is used in the LXX to translate *pr̥s*. It is the generally negative usage of *biazetai* which sways the commentators.

2. More general usage

The concept of Jesus as 'the breaker' is certainly present in the NT. In Mark 3:27 he compares himself to a thief, breaking in. He is God, breaking in to our world. He has broken down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:14) and he has burst the gates of death, leading out a host of captives. And finally, he will return, bursting in on our unsuspecting world (Lu 12:39).

IV Discussion

Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (the Ramban) described the birth of Perez as follows,

He was encircled by a hedge, and he was enclosed within it. That is why it was said 'so this is how you have broken through the hedge and come out from within it.' Perez was the first-born, 'the first-born through the power of the Most High, as it is written, 'I will give to him a first-born son.' This was written about the holy person who is to come, David, the king of Israel—long may he live. Those who are wise will understand.²²

With this profound statement, the Ramban describes the role of the Mes-

siah in terms that directly challenge the central tenet of Rabbinic Judaism, as expressed in the dictum of the Mishna: 'Be patient in justice, rear many disciples and make a fence²³ around the Torah.'²⁴ The Soncino footnote explains;

The Torah is conceived as a garden and its precepts as precious plants. Such a garden is fenced round for the purpose of obviating wilful or even unintended damage. Likewise, the precepts of the Torah were to be 'fenced' round with additional inhibitions that should have the effect of preserving the original commandments from trespass.

Thus the man-made hedge was to protect the Torah, and to help Israel not to break it. For a NT example, see 2 Corinthians 11:24 and Deuteronomy 25:1-3. In *Ruth Rabbah* 25 we likewise read; 'these are the Sanhedrin who... make a hedge round the words of the Torah'. That the Messiah would break through the hedge and come out from within it is a radical thought.

The Sages derived their concept of the fence from the Torah itself, where they found examples of fences. For example;

Hence it is written, *He shall abstain from wine and strong drink*. (And vinegar too is forbidden) on account of drunkenness. Why did the Torah forbid *any infusion of grapes*, seeing

that one does not get drunk thereby, and it likewise prohibited the eating of anything that proceeds from the vine, even such things as do not intoxicate? Why so? From this you can infer that it is a man's duty to keep away from unseemliness, from what resembles unseemliness and even from the semblance of a semblance. From this you can infer that the Torah has put a fence about its ordinances...Thou shalt not approach. This indicates that you must not even approach a thing that leads to transgression. Keep away from unseemliness and from what resembles unseemliness! For thus have the Sages said: Keep away from a small sin lest it lead you to a grievous one; run to fulfil a small commandment, for it will lead you to an important one.²⁵

Also,

R. Judah b. Pazzi asked: Why was the section dealing with consanguineous relationships placed next to the section dealing with holiness? Only to teach you that in every case where you find [regulations serving as] a fence against immorality you also find sanctity; and this agrees with the opinion expressed by R. Judah b. Pazzi elsewhere, namely, that who so fences himself against [the temptation to] sexual immorality is called Holy.²⁶

The concept of a fence developed to include Rabbinic authority²⁷ and even the death penalty;

Come and hear: R. Eleazar b. Jacob stated, 'I heard that even without any Pentateuchal [authority for their rulings]. Beth din may administer flogging and [death] penalties; not, however, for the purpose of transgressing the words of the Torah but in order to make a fence for the Torah.'²⁸

There is some indication that the Sages were uncomfortable with the breadth of licence they had granted themselves, and tried to set limits to it. For example;

Neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die (III, 3). Thus it is written, Add not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar (Prov. XXX, 6). R. Hiyya taught: That means that you must not make the fence more than the principal thing, lest it fall and destroy the plants. Thus, the Holy One, be He, had said, For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. II,17); whereas she did not say thus, but, *God hath said: ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it* [the Rabbis believing that Adam had given her the additional prohibition, thereby adding a fence to it]; when he [the serpent] saw her thus lying [for the fence was Adam's, not God's], he took and thrust her against it. 'Have you then died?' he said to her; 'just as you were not stricken through touching it, so will you not die when you eat it, but For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof,' etc.²⁹

It should be remembered that the Sages were living in Post-exile Judea,

²¹ Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 71.

²² The Ramban, *Mikraoth Gedoloth*, as quoted by Santata, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 44-45.

²³ The word fence here can refer either to a fence of rocks (e.g. *Baba Baratha* 69a), or to one of shrubs, i.e., a hedge.

²⁴ *Soncino Talmud* (trans. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman; Judaic Classics Library CD ROM; Davka: Chicago, 1995). *Mas. Avoth* Chapter 1. See also *Mas. Yoma*, 73b.

²⁵ *Numbers Rabbah*, 10: 8.

²⁶ *Leviticus Rabbah*, 24: 6.

²⁷ *Ecclesiastics Rabbah*, 10: 9.

²⁸ *Yevamoth*, 90b. (see also *Sanh.* 46a.).

²⁹ *Genesis Rabbah*, 19: 3.

that they had experienced the reality of God's wrath for breaking his commandments, and that they desired to understand, keep and protect them. Zechariah 8:14 can thus use the reality of God's punishment to show the reality of his promises—these people have experienced and know what it is to have God against them. After the Exile, the people were cured of apostasy—knowing that they had been sent into captivity, and lost their sovereignty because they broke the Sabbath etc., they now wanted to understand fully what was required of them, and to do it. That this led to legalism was tragic, but understandable.

Clearly, however, Jesus was opposed to the fence the Rabbis had set around the Torah (Mt 15:9, 5:38-39). The imagery of Micah is helpful here, of a city shut up. Concerning the Pharisees (Mt 23:13) and lawyers (Lu 11:52), he does not even place them within the city, but rather with the enemy, who, as Sennacherib had boasted, had shut the city up, so that no one could leave or enter. For another negative, sectarian view of the Pharisees along the same lines, see the Essene Damascus Covenant 4:19, 'The builders of the wall... are caught in fornication'³⁰—possibly interacting with the Pharisaic word play between *bānāy* and *bōnē* re Isaiah 54:13.³¹

Thus the incredibly radical activity of the Messiah is thrown into sharp relief. Returning again to John the Baptist, Jesus continued, 'For all the

prophets and the law prophesied until John came.' As seen, the Law was given as a fence to Israel, to separate and protect them (Dt 7:6-11). The prophets likewise were those who repaired the fence, who stood in the breach.

R. Nehemiah introduced his exposition with the verse, 'O Israel, thy prophets have been like foxes in ruins (Ezek. XIII, 4). Just as the fox looks about in the ruins to see where it can escape if it sees men coming, so were thy prophets in the ruins. Ye have not gone up in the breaches (ib.) like Moses. To whom can Moses be compared? To a faithful shepherd whose fence fell down in the twilight. He arose and repaired it from three sides, but a breach remained on the fourth side, and having no time to erect the fence, he stood in the breach himself. A lion came, he boldly withstood it; a wolf came and still he stood against it. But ye! Ye did not stand in the breach as Moses did. Had ye stood in the breach like Moses, ye would have been able to stand in the battle in the day of God's anger.'³²

Elijah then betook himself to Moses and said to him: 'O thou faithful shepherd, how many times hast thou stood in the breach for Israel and quashed their doom so that they should not be destroyed, as it says, Had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach, to turn back His wrath, lest He should destroy them (Ps. CVI, 23).'³³

And I sought for a man among them,

that should make up the hedge... but I found none (Ezek. 22, 30)—save Noah, Daniel, and Job.³⁴

See also the Soncino commentary on *Ruth Rabbah*, 11:2; 'Rash. quotes Ezek. 13: 5, where the prophets are criticised for not fencing the house of Israel, whence we learn that 'fence' is metaphorical for the work of prophets'.

But with the coming of the Messiah, everything is changed. He does not simply continue in the tradition of the prophets. Rather than repairing the fence around Israel, he breaks it down. The night is over, and the Shepherd breaks down the protecting wall, and the sheep rush out after him. As in John 10:7-11; before Jesus, the protection was needed, but now the sheep can go out to pasture, and as Micah 2:13 notes, they go out through the Gate. This both affirms the fence as needful in the past, and states that, by his very coming, as the light of the world and the sun of righteousness, the Messiah has changed everything. Note Malachi 4:2; 'But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. *And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall*' (emphasis added).

How then is Jesus the Breaker, the one (as Ramban said), who breaks through the hedge? In Matthew 15:13 Jesus says, 'every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted'. As seen, John the Baptist is also associated with the breaker motif, and in this connection, see Matthew 3:10. Paul, in Ephesians 2:14-15 shows how Jesus destroyed 'the barrier, the dividing wall' by his death.

Indeed, 'He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances', for the Law itself can also be seen as a fence. 'Said R. Eleazar: "Even though the Torah was given as a fence at Sinai..."'³⁵

Surprisingly, this idea of the Messiah abolishing the Law agrees with a minority opinion within Rabbinic thought. The idea of the Messiah as lawgiver goes right back to Genesis 49:10, where 'ruler's staff' *ūmēhōqēq* can also mean 'lawgiver'.³⁶ This suggests that while expressing eternal truths, the Torah in its present form was given only for a certain time, until the Messianic age, where there would be Messianic Torah

The Talmud says; 'The world is to exist 6,000 years. In the first 2,000 years there was desolation [no Torah]. 2,000 years Torah flourished; the next 2,000 years is the Messianic era.'³⁷ The Midrash adds; 'The Torah which man learns in this world is but vanity compared with the teaching of the Messiah.'³⁸ Burt Yellin comments;

The thought of the Torah changing in the 'Age to Come' is again made perfectly clear in the rendering of Deuteronomy 17:18, in Sifra. Here it is stated that the Lord wrote a copy of the Mishna-Torah for Himself, and that He would not be content with the Mishna-Torah of the fathers. The question is asked: 'why

³⁰ Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Ad Novum Testamentum (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 111.

³¹ See *Ber.* 64a.

³² *Ruth Rabbah*, Prologue 5. (See also Ezekiel 13:5).

³³ *Ester Rabbah*, 7:13.

³⁴ *Song of Songs Rabbah*, 11:44.

³⁵ *Leviticus Rabbah*, 1:10.

³⁶ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), s.v. 'hqq', 349. See also Isaiah 33:22.

³⁷ *Sanhedrin*, 97a.

³⁸ *Midrash Qohelet*, 71:8.

does He say Mishna [from the root *shana*, to repeat] -Torah? Because it is destined to be changed.³⁹

Note that the *Pesikhta Rabbati* also says that 'the Torah will revert to its original state'.⁴⁰

There are a number of hints as to how this will occur.

1. Simplification

According to the Talmud;

Moses was given 613 precepts; of these there are 365 (thou shalt) in accordance with the number of days in the year, and 248 (thou shalt not) according to the number of bones in a man's body... Came David and cut them down to eleven (Psalm 15)... Came Isaiah and cut them down to six (Isaiah 33:15-16)... Came Micah and cut them to three (Micah 6:8)... Isaiah came back and cut them down to two (Isaiah 61:1)... Came Habakkuk and cut them to one, as it is written (Habakkuk 2:4), 'the righteous shall live by faith.'⁴¹

This prophecy is fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ; 'For in this gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "the righteous shall live by faith"' (Rom 1:17).

2. Giving of a new law

Yalqut Isaiah [v. 26, *siman* 296] states that, 'The Holy One—may He be blessed—will sit and draw up a new Torah

for Israel, which will be given to them by the Messiah'.⁴² The Targum of Isaiah 12:3 also reads in part; 'And you shall receive new instruction with joy from the Chosen of righteousness.'

This was fulfilled in John 13:34; 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you.' No one but the Messiah could give a new commandment.

3. Closure of the sacrificial system

This is taught on the Midrash on the inauguration of Aaron's priesthood; 'In the Time to Come all sacrifices will be annulled, but that of thanksgiving will not be annulled, and all prayers will be annulled, but [that of] Thanksgiving will not be annulled.'⁴³

This was fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus; 'Unlike the other High Priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day ... this he did once and for all when he offered himself' (Heb 7:27). Concerning the point of the continuation of the sacrifice of thanksgiving, see Hebrews 13:15.

4. Abolition of dietary laws

The Midrash on Psalm 146:7 states that even the laws of kashrut (diet) will be abolished. "'The Lord sets the prisoners free"... What does this 'setting free of prisoners' mean?... in the future the Holy one will make all unclean animals fit for eating.'⁴⁴ This was fulfilled in Mark 7:19; 'thus he de-

clared all foods clean'. Note that this is in a pericope where Jesus has just stated his hedge-breaking credentials (Mt 15:13).

5. Leading us out from the realm of the Torah

The Rabbis taught that the jurisdiction of the Torah ended with death. 'And thus R. Johanan said, "What is meant by the verse, Among the dead [I am] free? Once a man dies, he becomes free of the Torah and good deeds."⁴⁵ This is also taught elsewhere;

Our Rabbis taught: A garment in which [both linen and wool threads are woven may not be worn by the living] ... but it may be made into a shroud for a corpse. R. Joseph observed: This implies that the commandments will be abolished in the Hereafter. Said Abaye (or as some say R. Dimi) to him: But did not R. Manni in the name of R. Jan-nai state, 'This was learnt only in regard to the time of the lamentations but for burial this is forbidden'? — The other replied: But was it not stated in connection with it, 'R. Johanan ruled: Even for burial'? And thereby R. Johanan followed his previously expressed view, for R. Johanan stated: 'What is the purport of the Scriptural text, Free among the dead? As soon as a man dies he is free from the commandments.'⁴⁶

So, in the resurrection life, we are not under the law. Thus the resurrected Jesus is no longer under the law, and as we follow him (Mic 2:13), so we also

are led out from it. This is the teaching in Romans 7:4; 'So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.'

So we can see the Messiah as the one who breaks out of the confines of the law, and how we also rush out, following him. As Perez burst out of the womb to new life, so we have left our school master behind. It is through his resurrection that Jesus made the breach, through 'the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is, through his flesh' (Heb 10:20).

V Consequences

1. For the Breaker

a) Divinity

'Their king will pass before them, the LORD at their head.' The commentators agree that the breaker of verse 12 is also the king, and that the king is the LORD. 'That [the LORD] is the "breaker" is shown by the parallel terms in lines 7 and 8.'⁴⁷ 'We also find an allusion to Deutero-Isaiah's message when v. 13 calls [the LORD] king (41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7), as well as the twofold emphasis that the LORD 'goes before them' (Isa 52:12 cf. 45:1f.)'⁴⁸

This linking the Messiah king to the LORD is found also in Rabbinic literature. *Lamentations Rabbah*, 1:51

³⁹ Burt Yellin, *Messiah: A Rabbinic and Scriptural Viewpoint* (Denver, CO: Roer Israel, 1984), 130.

⁴⁰ Santala, *Messiah in the Old Testament*, 71.

⁴¹ *Makkoth* 23-24.

⁴² Yellin, *Messiah*, 131.

⁴³ *Leviticus Rabbah*, 9: 7.

⁴⁴ As cited by Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 194.

⁴⁵ *Shabbat*, 30a.

⁴⁶ *Mas. Nidah*, 61b.

⁴⁷ James E. Smith, *What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 68.

⁴⁸ Wolff, *Micah*, 86.

asks the question; 'What is the name of King Messiah?' The answer given by Rabbi Abba b. Kahana is: 'His name is YHVH'; in the Midrash Tehillim on Psalm 21:3 [Rabbi Simeon] states that God would; 'set His crown upon the head of King Messiah, and clothe Him with His honour and majesty.'... The Midrash continues with two designations of Messiah, stating that He is: 'YHVH a man of war' and: 'YHVH is our righteousness.'⁴⁹

It is also noted that the LORD as breaker ('Perez') is familiar to the OT (Ex 19:22, 2 Sam 5:20; 6:8). It is a cataclysmic bursting forth of the LORD, regardless of the wishes of man. The prophecy of Micah confirms that the Messiah has the divine name, and does divine things.

b) The serpent's bite

Ecclesiastes 10:8 states that 'whoso breaketh through a fence, a serpent shall bite him'.

Having seen how the Sages perceived their task in terms of protecting the status quo, by placing a fence around the Torah (itself perceived as a fence), it is unsurprising that they should have employed this verse to guard both their work ('For whoever breaks down a fence erected by the Sages will eventually suffer; as it is stated, "Whoso breaketh through a fence, a serpent shall bite him"'),⁵⁰ and God's commands;

[You ask (the serpent),] 'Why do you lurk among the hedges?' 'Because I broke through a fence of the world.' R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: The serpent

broke through a fence of the world [by violating God's law] and was therefore made the executioner of all who break through fences.⁵¹

Leviticus Rabbah 26:2 states;

R. Samuel b. Nahman observed: The serpent was asked: 'Why are you generally to be found among fences?' He replied: 'Because I made a breach in the fence of the world'. R. Simeon b. Yohai learned: The serpent was the first to make a breach in the world's fence, and so he has become the executioner of all who make breaches in fences.

To what extent does this understanding apply to the ben Perez, to the breaker? On the cosmic level, he is the one breaking into the world who will restore the Edenic, pre-fall stature of humanity (the second Adam); a run-in with the Snake who opposes this purpose, conforms to the Messianic prophecy from the fall; 'he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel' (Gen 3:15). The serpent in this sense now guards the fallen world against the breaking in of its redeemer.⁵² The strong man has been bound, however, and his goods liberated.⁵³

As for those breaking out with the King, see Romans 16:20. As the one who broke through, the Messiah suffered the consequences (Eccl 10:8), was struck by the Serpent, and tasted death for every one. As to the Oral Torah, it was his criticism of this that led to the Sages desiring that he would suffer the punishment. This is seen in Matthew 15:12, where he speaks

against Rabbinic law, and about the hedge being broken.

c) Ascension

'The one who breaks through, going up before them'. While, as seen, the 'going up' can legitimately be viewed as a military term, the actual word is also used of eagles ascending (Isa 40:31), of going up to meet with God (Ex 19:3) and of offerings offered to God (2 Kgs 3:20). As often, a prophecy fits the time given, but finds its truest meaning only in the Messiah ('All the prophets prophesied only for the days of the Messiah'),⁵⁴ this word of the King breaking through, and then going up from Jerusalem, also finds its ultimate fulfilment in Acts 1:9.

Focusing on the person of the Messiah, this prophecy then speaks of his mission, to break out, and to liberate others; of his divinity; of the cost to him, and of his exaltation on high.

2. For Israel

Isaiah 5:5 and 7 say, 'Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall and it will be trampled... the vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel.'

The use of the parallelism of 'hedge' and 'wall' is of interest. The Oral Law was seen as providing an additional layer of protection, yet a city besieged would be surrounded both by its own walls and by the enemy siege mound (2 Kgs 25:1-4; Ezek 4:2; Lu 19:43). The second wall would hem in the city, pre-

venting supplies and reinforcements from reaching it, and those inside from leaving. Does this also describe the Oral Law?

While meant to protect, its actual function has been to stop people at its hedge, and so prevent them from reaching the Torah. As seen, Luke 11:52 and Matthew 23: 13 agree with this image. Concerning its initial setting however, Isaiah 37:33 should be noted. See also Ezekiel 13:10-16, and Isaiah 22:4-12.

The placing of a hedge around something was a form of protection (Job 1:10).

And whoso breaketh through a fence, a serpent shall bite him: i.e. Dinah. While her father and brothers were sitting in the House of Study, She went out to see the daughters of the land (Gen. XXXIV, 1). She brought upon herself her violation by Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, who is called *a serpent*, [Hivite being connected to the Aramaic word for snake] and he bit her; as it is written, And Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, and he took her, etc. (ib. 2). 'He took her' --he spoke seductively to her, as the word is used in Take with you words (Hosea XIV, 3); And lay with her'⁵⁵

It was because she went out from her families' protection/fence that the Hivite was able to bite her.

As the Breaker who creates a breach in the hedge, does the Messiah thereby render Israel vulnerable? Paul tells us that Jesus broke down the wall between Jew and Gentile, and Jesus himself prophesied that Jerusalem

⁵¹ *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, 10:12.

⁵² John 12:31; John 16:11; John 14:30.

⁵³ Colossians 2:15; 1 John 3:8.

⁵⁴ *Ber.*, 34b.

⁵⁵ *Eccl. Rab.*, 10:9.

⁴⁹ Yellin, *Messiah*, 23-24.

⁵⁰ *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, 1:25.

would be trodden down by the Gentiles. Is there a causal link here?

Before discussing this further, is there any evidence for a change in the spiritual conditions in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus? Can history inform our discussion?

Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot ['For the Lord'] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-coloured strap become white; nor did the westernmost light shine; and the doors of the Temple [to the Holy of Holies] opened of their own accord. Then R. Johanan b. Zakkai rebuked them, saying: Temple, Temple, why wilt thou be the alarmed thyself [Predict thy own destruction]? I know about thee that thou wilt be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Ido has already prophesied concerning thee [I.e., concerning this significant omen of the destruction of the Temple]: Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that a fire may devour thy cedars. R. Isaac b. Tablai said: Why is its [The Sanctuary. A play on *lēbānōn* connected with *lēbānōn*] name called Lebanon? Because it makes white the sins of Israel... *Yoma* 39b.

Both the strap changing colour, and the western-most light shining were seen to be evidences of God's presence and grace; 'as it has been taught:

Originally they used to fasten the thread of scarlet on the door of the [Temple] court on the outside. If it turned white the people used to rejoice, and if it did not turn white they were sad... and it has further been taught: 'For forty years before the destruction of the Temple the

thread of scarlet never turned white but it remained red.'⁵⁶

And

The westernmost light on the candlestick in the Temple, into which as much oil was put as into the others. Although all the other lights were extinguished, that light burned oil, in spite of the fact that it had been kindled first. This miracle was taken as a sign that the Shechinah rested over Israel. V. Shab. 22b and Men. 86b.⁵⁷

Rashi states that the above events were signs that the Shechina, the Holy Spirit, was leaving the Temple.⁵⁸ 'Forty years before the destruction of the Temple the Sanhedrin went into exile' *Sabbath* 15a. This 'exile' was when they moved to the Chamber of Hewn Stones (after losing the power of life and death).

'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah' (XLIX, 10): this refers to the throne of kingship', *Numbers Rabbah* 3:12. When this departed the Sanhedrin 'went into exile', and were no longer able to impose the death penalty. Rabbi Rahmon said:

When the members of the Sanhedrin discovered that the rights of life and death had been torn from their hands a general consternation seized hold of them. They covered their heads with ashes and their bodies with sackcloth, shouting, 'woe to us! The sceptre of Judah has been taken away and the Messiah

⁵⁶ *Rosh HaShana*, 31b.

⁵⁷ Soncino Commentary, *Yoma*, 39a.

⁵⁸ Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 106.

has not yet come.⁵⁹

Note that the Sanhedrin lost this power when the Romans took over after the death of Herod the Great. By the time the Roman governor arrived, the Messiah, however, had indeed come. Matthew 2:19-21 states,

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.' So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

The prophecy of Genesis 49 was not broken. As the Sanhedrin were moving into exile, the Messiah was entering the land of Israel.

It was also at this time that the priests ceased to pronounce the divine name. It seems therefore, that at the time of Jesus, the Shechina⁶⁰ departed from the Temple, the sacrifice for sin lost its efficacy, the Sceptre seemingly departed from Judah, and the Name of the Lord was no longer used. As a result, it was understood both by ben Zakkai, and a prophet, Jesus ben Ananus,⁶¹ that the Second Temple

was doomed. Just as it was the people forsaking God which led to his removing his Spirit from the first Temple, which then allowed the Babylonians to destroy it, so also with the Second Temple. It will also be noted that all of the above Talmudic references deal directly with the Day of Atonement, the scape-goat and the red heifer.

Seven days before the burning of the [red] heifer the priest who was to burn the heifer was removed from his house to the cell in the north-eastern corner before the Birah. It was called the cell of the stone chamber. And why was it called the cell of the stone chamber [or, the Chamber of Hewn Stones]? Because all its functions [in connection with the red heifer] had to be performed only in vessels made of either cobble-stones, stone or earthenware.⁶²

And 'Our Rabbis taught: Ten times did the high priest pronounce the [Ineffable] Name on that day: Three times at the first confession, thrice at the second confession, thrice in connection with the he-goat to be sent away, and once in connection with the lots.'⁶³ In Ezekiel's description of the Spirit leaving the Temple, the Spirit directly anticipates the departure of Jesus, and this is also the exact reverse of the Lord's final return with the Shechina to the Temple.

These phenomena are explained by the rejection by the nation of Jesus. (Mt 23:38) He was sent out from the Chamber of Hewn Stone (Mt 26:59). It was he who suffered outside the city ('their king will pass on before them' (Mic

⁵⁹ As cited by Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 104.

⁶⁰ The idea that the Spirit of prophecy had departed earlier is well addressed by John R. Levinson, 'Did the Spirit withdraw from Israel? An evaluation of the earliest Jewish data', *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997), 35-57, and Benjamin D. Sommer, 'Did Prophecy cease? Re-evaluating a revaluation', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115-1 (Spring 1996), 31-47.

⁶¹ Josephus. *The Jewish War*, ed. Gaalya Cornfeld; trans. Gaalya Cornfeld. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 6:30-9.

⁶² *Yoma*, 2a.

⁶³ *Yoma*, 39b.

2:13), bearing the sin of the people (Jn 11:50), and as Hosea 3:4 states, they now abide without their king, sacrifice and priest. For Jesus is all of these, and without him they lack the Sceptre, the Sacrifice and the High Priest (Heb 3:1). In him the Name of the Lord dwelt, and on him rested the Holy Spirit.

The Breaker both breaches the wall and goes out through it, leading his people with him. The wall that separated (i.e., protected) the Jews from the Gentiles, he broke. *Exodus Rabbah* 11:5 describes Israel as a 'fence for the world'. But by then going out from the city he did a number of things:

a) He separated godliness from Israel. This had already been telegraphed by the Breaker's herald (Mt 3:9). Had he broken the wall, yet stayed inside, the Gentiles would have flooded into Judaism, and this was a wine skin that the Breaker did not want to be burst (Lu 5:37).

b) It also meant that all who would follow him must do what he did, and go beyond the city walls, and bear the shame and reproach.

The failure of the Temple, and the destruction of Jerusalem can thus be attributed to the breaking down of separateness of Israel, and the going out of their King (i.e., as understood in terms of the messianic prophecy in Micah). The context in Micah was one of disobedience and rejection by the people and their leaders, and so it is here. This, however, in no way lessens the tears of Jesus for them.

Again, note the radical use of imagery in this prophecy; for a breaker to make a breach and go out is to speak of loss of unity;

There is no breach (*ḥrs*): [that is], may our company not be like that

of David from which issued Ahitophel. And no going forth: [that is] may our company not be like that of Saul from which issued Doeg the Edomite.⁶⁴

In this context, see also Isaiah 8:12-15, Luke 2:34 and Matthew 10:34-36. Note also that it was the breaking down of the walls which caused the breach (naturally), and the division within Israel (Jn 10:19, where verse 9 is the breach), and his rejection (Lu 4:25-29; Lu 12:51; Acts 22:21-22).

This section has concentrated on the consequences for Israel of the breaking of the hedge and the departure of their Messiah. This is legitimate (Lu 23: 28-31), but the focus of the prophecy is rather on the Messiah and those following after him, rushing, breaking out with him. This is the joy of Acts, of Paul—not to escape from the Jewish people, but to burst free of the law and from the sting of death, into the broad pastures to which their shepherd was leading them.

VI Conclusion

This essay began by asking to what extent the first coming of Jesus could be seen as Messianic. Jewish messianic expectations were seen as being somewhat ethnocentric, and as being more naturally fulfilled at what Christians term the second coming. The essay has therefore proved to be something of a surprise, as the prophecy examined proved to have deeper resonance with Jewish messianic understanding than with Christian, yet the Messiah revealed there is very much a universal saviour.

64 Mas. Berachoth, 17b.

As this dovetails with Christian understandings and claims, the warning of Levinson is pertinent; 'when an early Jewish viewpoint, ... provides what appears to be an exceptionally suitable foil for New Testament points of view, New Testament scholars ought to exercise particular suspicion about the manipulation of data'.⁶⁵ I have therefore tried to exercise care that the patterns described are true to the Rabbinic understanding, by means of including both the context and thematic studies. If the NT can then be shown to honestly participate in such patterns, it speaks more of a shared wisdom than of misappropriation, and has profound consequences for both. That is, Jesus may be the Jewish Messiah, and Jewish exegesis may powerfully inform Christian theology.

The essay has also tried to show how Rabbinic literature can help to clarify an obscure passage in the NT. Clearly, the OT view of the Messiah is prophetic, the rabbinical view is theoretical, and the NT view is experiential. As both of the latter are based on the former, there is legitimate reason to expect some common ground.

Looking at the prophecy itself, what do we have? The first thing to note is the radical nature of the image. The Messiah is portrayed as king, God and breaker, who does not stand in the breach, but creates it, bursting through the protective walls and into the wider world. This is a very threatening image within Rabbinic literature. This Messiah is no mere continuation of the old

order, but violently ushers in the new. As *ḥappōrēs*, he circumcises the law by cutting through the hedge of flesh with which the Pharisees had surrounded it. He also circumcises our hearts by cutting away the works of flesh that we try to protect them with (Jer 4:4; Col 2:11). Not only that, he breaks down the walls between Jew and Gentile.

As to the consequences of this for Israel, by breaking down the wall that protected them from the Gentiles, he ushered in the time of the Gentiles, and with his rejection and departure, the Spirit left the Temple, and Jerusalem was trodden down. Even the division this caused within Israel is itself a fulfilment of OT prophecy. Again, the events which followed the first coming of Jesus are seen to conform to the Rabbinic understanding of this prophecy.

In answer then to the question posed by this essay, the first coming of Jesus was Messianic, in part because it fulfilled Jewish understandings of a messianic prophecy, both as it related to the Jewish people and religion, and as it related to the person of the Messiah himself. In his first coming, Jesus wrought messianic effects.

We have seen, however, as ben Perez, he is also Davidic and a restorer (Hos 6:1). While Rabbinic exegesis sees the ambivalence within the prophecy itself, the mood is one of triumph. He is ben Perez, who breaks the walls between God and man (Isa 59:2), bursts the gates of death, and restores the Edenic stature of man. He is thus a universal Messiah, who breaks into this world, who is bitten by and crushes the serpent, and who ascends before them. He has the Name of God, and all his generations are perfect (1 Cor 15: 45-49; Isa 53: 10). He did not break the

65 John R. Levinson, 'Did the Spirit Withdraw from Israel? An Evaluation of the Earliest Jewish Data', *New Testament Studies* 43, no. 1 [January 1997], 57.

wine skins, and will return suddenly to his sanctuary.

The Rabbinic linkage to ben Perez thus expands the scope of this prophecy (which describes the first coming of Jesus, not so much in terms of his substitutionary death, but how it impacts on Jews, Gentiles and the people of God) and looks to the completion of all things. Through this linkage, Perez remains a positive figure for the Jewish nation, and the triumph of the original prophecy is not misplaced. For a hurting people who wonder how Jesus was the Messiah for them, this prophecy is a powerful word from the Lord.

In the end, what do we have? A Messiah who desires to meet with us, who bursts through our walls of separation and will not allow us to deal with him from a distance, who will not interact with us via an intermediary such as the Law, but desires to see us face to face.

*A garden locked is my sister, my
bride, a garden locked, a fountain
sealed...*

*I come to my garden, my sister, my
bride; I gather my myrrh with my
spice..*

*Make haste my beloved, and be like
a gazelle or a young stag on the
mountain of spices.*

From Patristics to the Study of Early Christianity

Wendy Elgersma Helleman

Keywords: *Archaeology, dogma, feminism, Greco-Roman antiquity, Gnosticism, Judaism, orthodoxy, philosophy, reformers, university.*

The earliest years of Christianity have held a special interest throughout the centuries. Early Christian leaders and authors have been highly esteemed, not far below the writers of Scripture themselves. But the period of the Reformation, when the reformers accused the Roman Catholic Church of betraying its heritage, must be noted for its scholarly attention to this period.

That is also the context in which 'Patristics' or 'Patristic Studies' was first recognized as a specific academic focus and scholarly discipline. The title reflects its central focus on the *Fathers* (*patres* in Greek) of Christian thought and belief. The term 'Father' was an honorary title, given to important teachers, bishops and writers who helped guide, shape and develop Christianity in those early years.¹ As a

title, 'Father' may reflect a degree of affection, based on the apostle Paul calling himself a 'father' to the Corinth congregation which he brought into being.² It certainly reflects common acceptance of early leaders as 'orthodox' for teaching which was widely accepted on the principle of apostolic succession, and in agreement with authentic traditions handed down from the apostles. It also reflects commendation for holiness of life.³

The list of such leaders in the west includes figures like Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, and in the east: Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius and the Cappadocians. As such *Patristics* represents an abbreviation for *Theologia Patristica*, further abbreviated to *Patrologia* or *Patrology*, as the study of writings of the early Christian Fathers which have had a significant impact on the early Chris-

² Frances Young, 'The Greek Fathers', 135-47 in Ian Hazlett ed., *Early Christianity. Origins and Evolution to AD 600* (London: SPCK, 1991), 135-6.

³ Drobner, *The Fathers*, 3-4.

¹ H. R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 3.

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tian church, and on the decisions made in general assemblies, whether at localised synods or ecumenical councils.

When we turn to contemporary academic institutions, it is clear that the term 'Patristics' is no longer commonly applied to the study of early Christianity, its leaders or even the relevant texts. The term is still current at highly traditional universities like Oxford in the UK; it is probably no accident that the large international conferences on Patristic Studies held every four years are hosted by Oxford University. We still find the term, or its near equivalent, 'Patrology', also in reference books which cover the traditional canon of writings of early Christian leaders, as in Johannes Quasten's multi-volume *Patrology* (1950-). But when we turn to contemporary academic study of this material in faculties of theology, seminaries or universities, we are more likely to discover the venue for such study as part of 'Church History', or the 'History of the Early Church'. At most universities such material will be covered by the study of 'Early Christianity', and in the context of a department of Religious Studies.

The present article hopes to make a contribution by tracking these important changes, the thought-patterns which determined the direction of change, and the factors which motivated them. It will also explore the impact of these transitions on contemporary scholarship on early Christianity. Scholars who seek to provide a constructive contribution in this field of studies would do well to recognize the changes for what they are. Understanding these transitions is the first step toward addressing the numerous issues which are raised by current ap-

proaches and methodologies.⁴

I Renaissance and Reformation

The various textual sources of Christianity began to be studied more critically at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation. In this context *Patristics* as we know it today came into its own, particularly with the need to prepare the respective texts for printed editions (after 1450). Also important was the demise of the eastern Roman empire with the fall of Constantinople (1453), giving impetus for an exodus of scholars into Italy, bringing along with them a treasury of ancient Greek literature, Christian and pagan. These scholars could now pass on the knowledge of the Greek language to the Europeans for whom Greek had become a dead language, teaching them to read the texts for themselves.⁵ New study of ancient pagan authors accompanied renewed interest in early Christian authors. Before that time, only the most important works of the Fathers had been available in Latin, particularly as *Florilegia*, or collections of favourite passages and excerpts from church councils, papal decrees, or commentaries on the Bible.⁶

With Martin Luther's (1483-1546)

4 I have greatly appreciated access to the libraries of the University of Toronto in the preparation of this article for publication, and express my thanks to colleagues at the Department of Classics for facilitating use of these excellent resources.

5 Irena Backus, 'The Early Church in the Renaissance and Reformation', 291-303 in Hazlett, *Early Christianity*, 289-90.

6 Backus, 'The Early Church', 300.

publication of theses in Wittenberg (1517), and eventual separation of Protestant Churches from the Catholic Church of Rome, the Reformation had a significant impact on patristic scholarship. Luther and the reformers regarded the contemporary Catholic expression of the faith as a corruption of the purity of early conditions. They placed the blame on syncretism, or adaptation to pagan Greco-Roman culture of late antiquity. The reformers demanded a return to the roots of Christianity (*ad fontes*), back to the Scriptures, and back to the simplicity of worship and practice from the time of the apostles and the early church.⁷ Appeal to the authority of Scripture challenged the dominant argument from 'tradition'. The Catholic historian, Caesar Baronius (1538-1607), responded to the challenge by publishing the 14-volume *Ecclesiastical Annals*, arguing for the Roman church as true recipient of the Christian tradition.⁸

Roman Catholic scholars were also engaged in the publication of works of the Fathers; we have only to think of the significant critical work of Erasmus (1469-1536), in preparing the printed New Testament, the *Textus Receptus* (1516), as the text on which the reformers would base their translations into the vernacular.⁹ Study of patristic

writings was positively encouraged in the territories of the reformers where early Christian practice was regarded as a model for church liturgy, government and discipline. In the debate on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, both Zwingli (1484-1531) and Calvin (1509-1564) cited the Fathers in support of their own teaching and practice. Zwingli appealed to Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) on the symbolic presence, and Luther responded by challenging his interpretation.¹⁰ Calvin acknowledged that not all the Fathers would agree on issues like the sacraments, but his prefatory appeal to the king of France in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), does use patristic witness to argue that the teachings of the reformers is the same as that of the Fathers.¹¹

As a discipline, Patristics was established when the Protestant Johannes Gerhard (d. 1673) published the *Patrologia*, subtitled 'On the Life and Work of early Christian Church Teachers'.¹² Ongoing interest for early Christianity in subsequent years is evident from publication of critical editions of the works of the Fathers. At the time, the preoccupation of patristic scholarship was closely intertwined with that of biblical studies, particularly the study of the New Testament, and study of pagan classical Greco-Roman authors like Virgil, or Cicero.

Press, 1964), 64.

10 Backus, 'The Early Church', 294.

11 See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 20-40, especially 28-36. See also Backus, 'The Early Church', 293, 301-302.

12 Drobner, *The Fathers*, 5.

7 On this theme, see W. E. Helleman, 'Epilogue', 429-511, in W. E. Helleman, ed., *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1994), 429-30.

8 Josef Lössl, *The Early Church: History and Memory* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 34-5.

9 See Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament* (London: Oxford University

Interest in early Christianity was sparked also by new manuscripts of the Bible as these became available. Particularly important was the Codex Alexandrinus in 1628, a gift to the king of England from the patriarch of Constantinople. This famous manuscript included an early letter of the Roman bishop Clement. Equally significant was the 1646 publication of the genuine letters of Ignatius by the Dutch scholar Isaac Voss.¹³

II Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Developments

During these years the heirs of the reformers continued to look to the Fathers for an authentic interpretation of Scripture, but even the nonconformist John Wesley (1703-1791) can be cited for such appreciation.¹⁴ In the seventeenth century the key English universities, Oxford and Cambridge, became important centres of patristic scholarship and critical emendation of the text of the New Testament. Richard Bentley (1662-1742) of Cambridge used his expertise in emendation of classical texts, together with his knowledge of the Fathers, to establish principles for reconstructing the New Testament text.¹⁵ The works of J.J. Griesbach (1745-1812), Karl Lachmann (1793-1851) and Count Tischendorf (1815-1874) were also important on these issues.

During these centuries the centre of scholarly study began to move back

to Europe, particularly to Germany, where Enlightenment studies demonstrated a new critical approach to historical evidence.¹⁶ Substantive advancement in philosophy from Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Georg W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) would also make its own significant impact on theology, and influence understanding of early Christianity.¹⁷ The Enlightenment spirit certainly pervaded the influential work of Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) and his conclusion that Christianity in late antiquity shows the triumph of barbarism, error and corruption. His massive history of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was based on the reliable 16-volume work of L.S. le Nain de Tillemont (1637-1698); but he also used the *Ecclesiastical History* of the eighteenth century rationalist historian J.L. Mosheim, who regarded transcendent factors as irrelevant for church history before Constantine.¹⁸

From this period, the works of the Fathers would be read with more attention to the historical aspect, and for their witness to the understanding of the church in a particular era. At newly founded universities such study would also be supported by a more profes-

¹⁶ Neill, *The Interpretation*, 7-8.

¹⁷ See Neill, *The Interpretation*, 2-5.

¹⁸ See Lössl, *The Early Church*, 37. Elizabeth Clark notes Mosheim's contribution of incorporating primary sources which were difficult to access at the time, a practice also characterizing Gieseler's *Text-Book of Church History* (1824), and the massive *General History of the Christian Religion and Church* by Berlin professor A. Neander. See Clark's 'From Patristics to Early Christian Studies', 7-41 in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

¹³ Robert M. Grant, *After the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 4-6.

¹⁴ Young, 'The Greek Fathers', 485.

¹⁵ Neill, *The Interpretation*, 65.

sionalized context of scholarship with the development of scholarly tools like critical texts, and journals.¹⁹ This all came at a time of rising interest in the sciences, as the companion of industrialisation, with a trend which would eventually express itself in antagonism to theology itself.²⁰

III The Nineteenth Century: Historical Criticism

The impact of historical criticism addressed to the Scriptures can be seen in the revolutionary work of D.F. Strauss (1808-1874), *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1835). Almost any event deemed 'supernatural' was interpreted as 'mythical'; early Christian devotion to Jesus was included in this category. Indeed, the life of Jesus could not be reduced to known categories of history.²¹ Equally influential was F.C. Baur (1792-1860), professor at Tübingen. As a disciple of Strauss, Baur agreed with him on the supernatural and miraculous as essentially unknowable because it is beyond historical evidence. His purely historical interpretation of the Scriptures rejected any human knowledge of a transcendent, personal God who might intervene in this world.

On early Christianity, Baur's approach is noted for applying an Hegelian dialectic of three stages: thesis (Judaic/Petrine Christianity); antithesis (Pauline/Hellenic Christianity); and synthesis (Catholic Christianity, in its response to Gnosticism). The approach is responsible for some ab-

surd conclusions on the classification of New Testament documents, and the late dating of these to the end of the second century.²² Such a dialectical understanding would continue to impact study of early Christianity through its use by Harnack.²³

More constructively, the nineteenth century witnessed the massive collection by Jean-Paul Migne of patristic textual sources in Greek and Latin, the *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, a valuable resource running to hundreds of volumes, even though many of these texts would still need considerable attention in critical editing of the manuscripts. The series gave an important stimulus to translation of the Fathers into modern languages.²⁴

Equally important was 19th century editing of patristic texts gathered by Benedictine Maurist fathers, who had begun to publish the works of Augustine in 1679. In the eighteenth century they continued to provide editions of John Chrysostom, Basil, Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyprian, Origen, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Many of these works would be reprinted by Migne; the *Patrologia Latina* came in 218 volumes during the period 1844-1864, and *Patrologia Graeca* in 166 volumes during 1857-1866.²⁵

In the UK, the response to Baur and

²² Neill, *The Interpretation*, 24-25, 27-28.

²³ Glenn F. Chesnut, 1988, 'A Century of Patristic Studies, 1888-1988', 36-73 in Henry W. Bowden ed., *A Century of Church History: The Legacy of Philip Schaff* (Carbondale: S. Illinois University Press, 1988), 38; and Neill, *The Interpretation*, 19-21. On Harnack, see Helleman, 'Epilogue', 437, and 444-5.

²⁴ Lössl, *The Early Church*, 38.

²⁵ Clark, 'From Patristics', 8, 10.

¹⁹ Clark, 'From Patristics', 8.

²⁰ Lössl, *The Early Church*, 38.

²¹ Neill, *The Interpretation*, 12-16.

the Tübingen school came in the form of careful scholarship on early Christian witness for dating the books of the New Testament. J.B. Lightfoot (1828-1889), B.F. Westcott (1825-1901) and F.J.A. Hort (1828-1892) collaborated in critical investigation of the claims of the German scholars.²⁶ Their efforts to address the weaknesses of historical aspects of the Baur position took the format of commentary on the New Testament.²⁷ Because dating of New Testament books relied heavily on citation by the Fathers, Lightfoot worked on the authenticity of the seven letters of Ignatius (recognised by Voss), and the first epistle of Clement, dating these from the late first and early second century. Because both Ignatius and Clement cite many New Testament documents as already in circulation in their own time, this work was crucial for their conclusions in rejecting Baur's late dating of New Testament books, after AD 130.²⁸

The results of Lightfoot's work were published in *The Apostolic Fathers*, which remains in print in the collaborative edition of Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer (1891).²⁹ Lightfoot also addressed questions regarding the newly discovered *Didachê*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, with its presentation

of a moral catechism and discussion of church order. Lightfoot's dating of this work to the final years of the first century AD is now widely accepted.³⁰

Equally important in affirming the date and authenticity of NT books like Luke/Acts was the archaeological work of Sir William Ramsay (1851-1939) on Greek inscriptions of ancient Asia Minor, through which he was able to corroborate Luke's thorough acquaintance with exact titles of imperial and local officials of the time.³¹ Ramsay's work is a small indication of the growing significance of field work and archaeology for patristic scholarship, particularly in terms of the papyrus manuscript finds in the Egyptian desert, as at the trash heap of Oxyrynchus (1897).³²

Significant work on deciphering and publishing these finds must be attributed to B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, who paved the way for a complete re-evaluation of the common Hellenistic Greek language, the *Koinê*; the results are evident in J.H. Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek* (1908) and the grammar text of F. Blass and A. DeBrunner (1931), translated into English by R.W. Funk (1961).³³ While the Oxford Movement (with E. Pusey and J. Henry Newman) began publishing the *Oxford Library of the Fathers* (1835-1888), their 'high church' orientation would be balanced in Protestant Scotland by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, who published texts relevant for evangelical interests, with the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (1864). At this time

26 Grant, *After the New Testament*, 6.

27 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 33-35.

28 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 47-50, 53, 57. The results of Lightfoot's work were published in *The Apostolic Fathers*, still in print in the collaborative edition of Lightfoot and Harmer (1891); see also Holmes, 1989, rev.2006.

29 For a recent revision and reprint, see Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006 [1989]).

30 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 60, and 92.

31 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 141-3.

32 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 146.

33 See Neill, *The Interpretation*, 149.

we also note the growing impact in the UK of German critical work through the *Journal for Theological Studies*, edited by Henry B. Swete (from 1899).³⁴

Toward the end of the 19th century, in Germany the approach of Baur was taken up by Albert Ritschl (1822-1889) and Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930). Their efforts served to maintain Baur's influence on the study of early Christianity, particularly in terms of the historical-critical reading of the Bible, which remained dominant well into the twentieth century. Ritschl's 'Theology and Metaphysics' (1881), shows the influence of the contemporary rejection of a Platonist epistemology for patristic theology, and Bismarck's attack on Roman Catholicism within the German Empire (1871-1887).³⁵

Harnack agreed that patristic theology had erroneously subordinated the truth to philosophical ideas of Plato and Aristotle.³⁶ But to the extent that since Aquinas, Catholic theology was based on the philosophy of Aristotle, Harnack's views also contributed to an anti-Catholic agenda, feeding Protestant suspicion of 'Catholicism' in anything beyond the New Testament itself.

Catholic scholars themselves would also use early Christianity as a weapon to encourage reform. Although Pope Leo XIII's (1878-1903) papal bull, *Aeterni Patris* (1879), called on the study of Thomas Aquinas to unify Catholic thought in the face of contemporary challenges, the *Histoire des dogmes* (1905-1912) of the Neo-Thom-

ist Joseph Tixeront agreed at least in part with Harnack on the Greek philosophical form of dogma as an inevitable development, even while appealing (against Harnack) to the doctrine of 'substantial immutability of dogma' as revealed truth.³⁷

In his *Histoire ancienne de l'église* (1912), on the other hand, Louis Duchesne (1843-1922) used a modernist perspective and teleological approach on church development. Rejecting rigid Thomist scholasticism, he criticized Platonism as it affected early Christian teaching (in Justin, Clement of Alexandria or Origen). Although he affirmed the growing role of the bishop, Duchesne also accented the need for collegiality.³⁸

Harnack did agree with Lightfoot on the dating of the New Testament. His impressive work on *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity* also reveals a careful approach on the historical data,³⁹ although the contrast between Gentile and Jewish Christianity would remain a significant feature of his approach.⁴⁰ Appreciative of the significant work of Edwin Hatch (1835-1889), *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (1881), Harnack translated the work into German. When Hatch also published *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (1889), a study of the deep influence of Greek thought and cultural patterns on early Christi-

37 Chesnut, 'A Century', 51.

38 Lössl, *The Early Church*, 39; Chesnut, 'A Century', 48-50.

39 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 57-8.

40 See Helleman, 'Epilogue', 437; also Wm. V. Rowe, 'Adolf von Harnack and the Concept of Hellenization', 69-98 in Helleman, *Hellenization Revisited*, 72-3.

34 Clark, 'From Patristics', 13.

35 On Ritschl's essay, see Chesnut, 'A Century', 39-40; on anti-Catholic policies, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 9.

36 Chesnut, 'A Century', 41.

anity, specifically in logic, rhetoric and metaphysics.⁴¹ Harnack provided additional material for the German translation (1892).

Harnack's own approach is clear from *The History of Dogma (Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, 1886-1889; translated by N. Buchanan, 1894-1899)*; he presents dogma as the 'work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel'. According to Harnack, Christian belief was expressed in forms borrowed from non-Christian Greek philosophy, even in the first century.⁴² A living faith, transformed into creeds and rituals, revealed the influence of pagan Greek philosophy.

This was also the underlying theme of Harnack's immensely popular lectures of 1899-1900, *What is Christianity? (Das Wesen des Christentums?)*, which sought to make Jesus relevant for contemporary Protestantism by rejecting the theological terms of (Catholic) dogma; Jesus was presented as a modern Martin Luther and advocate of spiritual freedom. In his response, *L'Evangile et l'église* (1902), the Catholic Alfred Loisy objected to Harnack's 'essentialising' of the core of early Christianity.⁴³ Indeed, Harnack's anti-Catholic rhetoric takes us back to early post-Reformation controversies.⁴⁴

In his eight-volume *History of the Christian Church* (1858-1890), the American scholar Philip Schaff (1819-1893) provided a dissenting voice. With a more ecumenical approach to

Protestantism and Catholicism, as two branches growing from a common trunk, Schaff was clearly ahead of his time.⁴⁵ Indeed, the study of early Christianity throughout the twentieth century continued to witness the deep impact of Harnack's work, even while scholars refined or refuted his positions.

As late as 1965 Joh. Munck complained of positions of the Tübingen school on the Jewish/Gentile division of Christianity as these continued to play a role in hindering understanding of early Christianity in Palestine, and long after they had been roundly refuted.⁴⁶ In examining the 'Greek spirit' which influenced Cappadocian Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Werner Jaeger's *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (1962) presented patristic theology as a positive culmination of Greek thought, and paved the way for more detailed studies of key philosophical terms in Greek by G.C. Stead (*Divine Substance*, 1977) or J.M. Dillon (*The Middle Platonists*, 1977).⁴⁷

The ongoing significance of Greco-Roman antiquity, as indispensable basis for patristic scholarship, was not lost on modern scholars like Peter Brown, whose study of Augustine's life and writings (1967) incorporated a broadened socio-political understanding of the ancient world.⁴⁸

45 Chesnut, 'A Century', 41.

46 Johannes Munck, 'Pauline Research Since Schweitzer', 166-77 in P. Hyatt ed., *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 168-9.

47 Chesnut, 'A Century', 41-2, and 43.

48 Peter R.L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

41 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 137-8.

42 Chesnut, 'A Century', 36-8. For recent analysis, see Rowe, 'Adolf von Harnack', 69-98.

43 Clark, 'From Patristics', 12.

44 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 131-6.

Harnack's understanding of Judaism in the New Testament and early Christianity has also received extensive attention and correction. In *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883), Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) had concerned himself with the Jewish background of the gospels, including relevant rabbinic materials.⁴⁹ On this theme, the 'history of religions' school of thought is represented by W. Bousset (1865-1920), *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter (The Religion of the Jews in New Testament Times, 1903)*.⁵⁰

The debt of early biblical study to Jewish exegetical work on the OT was central to the work of the Catholic scholar Jean Daniélou, who focused on the influence of Judaism, alongside that of Greco-Roman culture. Daniélou also provided a corrective approach on topics of apocalyptic eschatology, angelology and demonology; these were aspects of early Jewish Christianity which had escaped Harnack's assessment of early Christianity (as too 'supernatural' or 'mythical').⁵¹ Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck provided an indispensable scholarly tool with their commentary on the New Testament (1922-1961), incorporating materials from the Jewish Talmud and Midrash.

49 On Alfred Edersheim's work, see Neill, *The Interpretation*, 294-5.

50 See also W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1948; repr. 1955, 1980, 1998).

51 On Daniélou's *Theology of Jewish Christianity* (1958), see Chesnut, 'A Century', 43-4.

IV The Twentieth Century

The theme of Jewish Christianity and the relationship between Jews and Christians would continue to receive considerable attention, particularly after the dramatic discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea scrolls in the caves of Qumran in Palestine. Aside from texts of the OT, these scrolls feature a 'Teacher of Righteousness', and include commentaries, a *Manual of Discipline*, and *Psalms of Thanksgiving* as well as the apocalyptic work, *The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*. As the library of an ascetic community of the first century BC, these texts added significantly to our acquaintance with Judaism beyond the information available from Philo of Alexandria and Josephus.⁵²

Post-World War II studies of Judaism, reflecting international dismay at the Holocaust, typically approach Judaism with assumptions quite different from those of Harnack. Particularly helpful in this connection is the impressive work of E.P. Sanders on Palestinian Judaism (1977), and the ongoing reassessment of Pharisees and Rabbis by Jacob Neusner (1971, 1973, etc.).⁵³ Martin Hengel's *Judaism and Hellenism* (1974), has likewise been significant in establishing the Hellenistic character of postexilic Judaism after the death of

52 For English translation of the scrolls, see Geza Vermès, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965/1962). On the scrolls, see also Neill, *The Interpretation*, 297-312.

53 See L. Michael White, 'Adolf Harnack and the "Expansion" of Early Christianity', *Second Century* (1985/86) 5.2: 97-127, especially 107-8.

Alexander the Great (323 BC).⁵⁴

Patristics studies in the twentieth century have also been deeply influenced by the discovery (1945-1946) of the Nag Hammadi library in the upper Nile region of Egypt, not far from the location of the ancient Pachomian monastery. As with the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, the story of the thirteen leather-bound volumes and forty-nine Gnostic documents has been recounted many times. The treatises were eventually made available for study in facsimile format, and in translation (1977).⁵⁵ Their presence stimulated new discussion of older gnostic documents like *The Gospel of Thomas*. It was now possible to cross-examine Harnack's assessment of gnostic views as an 'acute secularising, or Hellenising' of Christianity, which rejected the Old Testament, while the more gradual 'gnosticizing' process of Catholic theology retained the OT.⁵⁶

From his earliest scholarly career Harnack had considered Gnosticism a product of Greek philosophical thought. But there were other approaches. The school of comparative religion, or the history of religion, associated with Richard Reitzenstein (1861-1931) and Wilhelm Bousset (1865-1920), turned

to Near Eastern thought and belief to explain Gnosticism. These scholars regarded Gnosticism as much older than second century Christianity.⁵⁷ They looked for gnostic origins in Persian (Iranian/Zoroastrian) religious dualism of light and darkness, with a pessimist outlook on our world, and a myth of redemption (to be supported from Mandaean beliefs). A combination of this approach with Martin Heidegger's existentialist view on human alienation in our world and the need for freedom from forces that would enslave, marks the interpretation of ancient Gnosticism in the work of Hans Jonas.⁵⁸

While German scholars focused on gnostic origins in non-Jewish and pre-Christian *gnôsis*,⁵⁹ English scholarship on the Nag Hammadi documents continued to examine gnostic origins in heterodox Judaism.⁶⁰ The Dutch scholar, G. Quispel, also questioned pre-Christian Gnosticism in his work, *Gnosis als Weltreligion* (1951). He recognised that Gnostics behaved like Christian heretics, even if Gnostic views show little inner connection with events pivotal for historically-based Christianity: the life, death and resur-

⁵⁷ Neill, *The Interpretation*, 160-4, and 177-8.

⁵⁸ Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (1954/1934), appeared in English translation as *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (1963/1958); see also Neill, *The Interpretation*, 175-6.

⁵⁹ See Chesnut, 'A Century', 62; and Neill, *The Interpretation*, 179.

⁶⁰ Neill (*The Interpretation*, 180) also cites R.McL. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem* (1958) among scholars looking to Judaism, and particularly with the development of eschatological thought after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

⁵⁴ See also Larry W. Hurtado, 'Martin Hengel's Impact on English-speaking Scholarship', *Expository Times* 120.2 (2008), 70-6. Elizabeth Clark ('From Patristics', 21) alerts us to important recent work on Judaism by Wayne Meeks and Robert L. Wilken (1978, 1992), Ross Kraemer (1992), Miriam S. Taylor (1995), and Paula Fredriksen (1999, 2006).

⁵⁵ J.M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: Brill; New York: Harper & Row, 1996/1977).

⁵⁶ See Chesnut, 'A Century', 62, on Harnack's *History of Dogma* (1971) 1.227-8.

rection of Jesus.⁶¹

Recognition of an underlying current of anti-Judaism in many gnostic documents also led to a search for origins at the outer fringes of Christianity. The American (Episcopalian) scholar Robert M. Grant, noted for his *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (1959), and *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period* (1961), pointed to the absence of a redeemer figure in pre-Christian or Greco-Roman religion, and realised that the relevant model is to be found in Jesus. But the question of origins cannot be solved without clarity on the distinctive features of Gnosticism itself.⁶²

On these issues too, outstanding work was done by R.M. Grant (1959, 1961).⁶³ On the other hand, study of Platonism and Pythagoreanism in late antiquity led scholars like John Dillon to a new appreciation of Harnack's approach; his work, *The Middle Platonists* (1977), depicts Gnosticism in terms of a 'Platonic underworld'.⁶⁴

1 Archaeological work

Developments in archaeology have made a significant impact on the direction of patristic studies in the twentieth century, taking the discipline well beyond a focus on literary documents. Indeed, recent work in archaeology has uncovered a wealth of materials: papyri, inscriptions, church building architecture, and wall or mosaic decoration. These have certainly helped to illus-

trate the nature and spread of early Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world. After the challenges posed by writings of D.F. Strauss (1808-1874) and Ernest Renan (1823-1892) on the life of Jesus, scholars also turned to archaeology in a desire to prove (or disprove) the biblical records. With a similar concern to confirm Luke's account of the travels of Paul, W.M. Ramsay followed contemporary interest in Turkey (as the ancient Asia Minor) after the treaty of Berlin (1878); these explorations led to the significant discovery of Jewish inscriptions, as mentioned above.⁶⁵

For twentieth century English scholarship, the outstanding contribution is that of W.H.C. Frend, working in the ancient villages of Numidia (present-day Algeria), in North Africa. Frend recognizes that modern archaeology as it pertains to early Christianity can be dated back to Renaissance archaeological exploration of the catacombs in Rome by members of the Roman Academy.⁶⁶

As a serious discipline, archaeological excavation began in the mid-nineteenth century in the Mediterranean area, in countries like Algeria, where such work was made possible through the French colonial regime. Here archaeologists had amazing success in uncovering temples, triumphal arches, baths, colonnades, houses and churches, all intact. The work was particularly significant in uncovering evidence

⁶⁵ W.H.C. Frend, 'Archeology and Patristic Studies', 9-21 in E.A. Livingstone ed. *Studia Patristica* 18 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications: 1985), 12.

⁶⁶ Frend, 'Archeology', 10-11; and Elizabeth Clark, 'From Patristics', 8.

⁶¹ Neill, *The Interpretation*, 180.

⁶² See Neill, *The Interpretation*, 175.

⁶³ Chesnut, 'A Century', 55.

⁶⁴ Chesnut, 'A Century', 62-3.

of groups on the fringes of Christianity, like the Donatists, excluded from the orthodox communities and recognised through inscriptions from their watchword, *Deo Laudes*.

Archaeological evidence on these schismatic groups revealed socio-economic conditions which reinforced martyr cults, in defiance of Roman authorities (pagan or Christian); the archaeological remains provide significant clues to the tenacity of Donatist resistance in late antiquity.⁶⁷

2 Studies in the modern university context

Archaeological discoveries multiplied throughout the twentieth century, with increasingly careful methods of excavation; but finds could also be haphazard or incidental, like the postwar discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls or the Nag Hammadi documents. While archaeology has contributed substantially to new understanding of early Christianity in North Africa, evidence on relevant socio-economic conditions also helped to link the study of early Christianity with the broader themes of Greco-Roman history.⁶⁸

For Patristics this meant study of early Christianity as another (if important) contribution to the historical beginnings of European medieval culture.⁶⁹ And it also meant that early Christianity would be studied as just one more component in the emerging history of Europe.⁷⁰ This is clear

from studies of Greco-Roman antiquity which noted the impact of pagan culture on Christianity, like C.N. Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture*, or W.H.C. Frend's *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (1952).

We find this also in the study of ancient rhetoric as it influenced the progress of Christianity, detailed by G. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (1983), or the *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (1984). Also significant in this genre are: A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (1963); F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy* (1966); F.E. Peters, *Harvest of Hellenism: A History of the Near East from Alexander the Great to the Triumph of Christianity* (1970); and A.E. Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (1976).⁷¹

These publications reflect an approach to early Christianity fostered in North American universities where early Christianity is taught within the context of a 'religious studies' or 'classical studies' program; here Christianity loses the privileged status it enjoys in other contexts, the seminary or theological faculty.⁷²

At the same time it is clear that significant scholarship on early Christianity is now based on other academic disciplines: history, sociology, or literary criticism. Because of its support for

the relevant languages (Greek, Latin), departments of classical studies could make a significant contribution. But we must recognize that, aside from an older tradition still alive at universities like Oxford, the 'Classics' have been marked by a fairly sharp divide between pagan and Christian authors; early Christian writers have not usually been included.⁷³

In recent decades it is interesting to note some reversal of that trend, with the disappearance of older divisions between classical studies and the study of theology or religion, psychology, and sociology.⁷⁴ The institutional connections of many current leading scholars in 'Patristics': Timothy Barnes, Peter Brown, Averil Cameron, Robin Lane Fox, Ramsay MacMullen, Robert Markus and Mark Vessey, are with more specialised disciplines, like late ancient history, literary theory or anthropology.⁷⁵

Patristic studies had already shifted its focus from the written texts of the Fathers to study of the 'early church' as such in the context of nineteenth century Protestant European universities; study of the early church, with significant attention to social realities, could easily be subsumed in the study of 'Church History' as an academic dis-

cipline.⁷⁶ The appearance of significant 'material' evidence from archaeological discoveries, introduced by scholars like Frend, motivated new directions in the study of Christianity, particularly in the direction of concern for the social environment, the actual lives and careers of Christians, thereby fostering an interweaving of literary and archaeological evidence.⁷⁷ And Frend capitalised on the attraction of archaeology at a time when Harnack's influence meant far less scholarly enthusiasm for edicts of the church councils or teachings of the Fathers.⁷⁸

This was also an important factor in a further transition in the discipline, from being subsumed under 'Church History' to a broader study of 'Early Christianity'. Especially in departments of religious studies specific use of the term 'Patristics' would be abandoned, as a reflection of goals relevant for ecclesiastical 'orthodoxy', if not 'male' concerns, but irrelevant for scholars pursuing work at secular universities.⁷⁹ Archaeology made a significant contribution in establishing such studies on a non-dogmatic basis: questions of orthodoxy or heresy were far less relevant in assessing archaeological discoveries.⁸⁰

Discoveries like those of Qumran or Nag Hammadi, alongside the accumulation of the archaeological witness,

⁷³ W. E. Helleman, ed., *Christianity and the Classics: the Acceptance of a Heritage* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1990), 13-30.

⁷⁴ Chesnut, 'A Century', 61.

⁷⁵ David Brakke, 'The Early Church in North America: Late Antiquity, Theory, and the History of Christianity', *Church History* 71.3 (2002), 473-91, especially 475-6; also Clark, 'From Patristics', 16.

⁷⁶ Clark, 'From Patristics', 9; Lössl, *The Early Church*, 13-14.

⁷⁷ W.H.C. Frend, *Saints and Sinners in the Early Church: Differing and Conflicting Traditions in the First Six Centuries* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 18.

⁷⁸ Frend, 'Archeology', 9-10.

⁷⁹ Clark, 'From Patristics', 14.

⁸⁰ Frend, *Saints and Sinners*, 10.

⁶⁷ Frend, 'Archeology', 14.

⁶⁸ Frend, 'Archeology', 14-15.

⁶⁹ Frend, 'Archeology', 9-10; and Clark, 'From Patristics', 16.

⁷⁰ For some of the implications of this move,

see Lössl, *The Early Church*, 2-4.

⁷¹ Chesnut, 'A Century', 60-1.

⁷² On the implications, see Chesnut, 'A Century', 61; and Lössl, *The Early Church*, 12-13.

have served to change the nature of the study of early Christianity dramatically in the course of the twentieth century. In response to sectarian evidence of the Dead Sea scrolls, scholars began speaking of *Judaisms*; the response to closer acquaintance with Nag Hammadi gnostic documents was to speak of *Christianities*.

For Christianity such an approach can be found in Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1934; translated 1971). While Bauer professed impartiality and scholarly objectivity, he clearly emphasized a diversity within early Christianity, as the matrix from which an 'orthodox' understanding developed. According to Bauer, 'orthodox' Christianity was initially in a minority, and able to impose itself only with later developments.⁸¹

In the last few decades, the work of Bauer has been critiqued, with evidence that these heretical movements were neither as early, nor as strong as Bauer alleged.⁸² Although Bauer was certainly not the first to devote 'non-partisan' attention to 'heretics', his work was significant for a shift in patristic studies to 'apology' on behalf of early *haireisis*.⁸³

⁸¹ P. Henry, 'Why is Contemporary Scholarship so Enamored of Ancient Heretics?' in E.A. Livingstone ed., *Studia Patristica* 17.1 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 123-6.

⁸² For critique of the 'Bauer thesis' by scholars like T. Robinson (1988), see Michel Desjardins, 'Bauer and Beyond: On Recent Scholarly Discussions of Haireisis in the Early Christian Era', *The Second Century* 8 (1991), 65-82, especially 66-8.

⁸³ On decided sympathy for heretics like the Gnostics by the Pietist scholar Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), see Lössel, *The Early Church*, 36-7.

Bauer's approach owed its success to support from major liberal theologians like Rudolf Bultmann and Helmut Koester. Widespread attention to the 1971 English translation of his work can be attributed to a factor of timing—it occurred when scholars were also focused on the Nag Hammadi documents for acquaintance with early 'heretics'. Bauer's argument for priority of heretical positions may well have reflected a desire to give legitimacy to 'unorthodox' forms of Christianity of his own time, a factor compounded by modern contempt for power strategies used by 'winners'.⁸⁴ Among more recent scholarly work on Gnosticism, Elaine Pagels' *Gnostic Paul* (1975) and *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979) should be noted for building on the approach of Koester and Bauer.⁸⁵

3 New directions: women in early Christianity

It is clear that during the last decades of the twentieth century the development of patristic studies has been characterised by a diversity of emphasis in scholarly principles borrowed from other disciplines (literary criticism, psychology, sociology or anthropology), or in area studies, like Syriac and Coptic Christianity.⁸⁶ Particularly significant in that regard are studies on the social and ecclesiastical role of women in early Christianity.

⁸⁴ Henry, 'Why', 125-6.

⁸⁵ On Pagels, see Chesnut, 'A Century', 63.

⁸⁶ On the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Paris, 1903-), and important work by P. Ladeuze, L. Théophile Lefort, J. Lebon, Sebastian Brock and S.H. Griffith, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 13-14.

For this new initiative the work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has been foundational. Her important book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1983), focuses on New Testament evidence for participation of women in the circles following Jesus, and the role of women in the house churches established by Paul, as an environment which would provide significant opportunities for women in leadership.⁸⁷

While Schüssler Fiorenza commented on relevant biblical texts, issues of social historical background were addressed by Ross Kraemer (*Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*, 1992), and Luise Schotroff (*Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, 1995). Significant recent scholarship by Rosemary Ruether, Elizabeth Clark, K.J. Torjesen, Gillian Clark, Elizabeth Castelli, Gail P. Corrington, Virginia Burrus and Verna Harrison has focused on issues of gender, sexuality, asceticism and power.⁸⁸

If women enjoyed a degree of prominence in the earliest years of Christianity, why were they restricted to subordinate roles by the end of the first century? This issue has received considerable attention. A. Jensen (*God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 1996) contends that women's roles as such were not diminished, but (male) writers of the second century took less interest

in these roles.⁸⁹ Karen King's publication of *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (1988) focused on prominence of women in gnostic circles.⁹⁰ Feminist authors argued that asceticism, as life on the fringes of traditional family structures, gave women considerable freedom from constraints and dangers inherent in marriage and child-bearing.⁹¹

A different approach was taken by Kate Cooper (*The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity*, 1996), arguing for the positive impact of Christianity on the lives of women through Christian prohibition of abortion and (female) infanticide. While this may have meant a rise in female fertility, Christianity would have provided a counterbalance through the ideal of virginity. Alluding to significant recurrence of a *prohibition* of female leadership in the acts of church councils, Rodney Stark (*The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, 1996) argued that opportunities for women in leadership in the first five centuries were probably more numerous than we might assume.⁹²

Assumptions of diminished involvement of women in the church after the first two generations have also been challenged by an important recent study of inscriptions and epigraphical evidence. Ute E. Eisen's *Women Office-*

⁸⁹ On Jensen, see also McKechnie, *First Christian Centuries*, 195-7.

⁹⁰ On female imagery in the Nag Hammadi texts, see also Clark, 'From Patristics', 22.

⁹¹ For significant bibliography on the theme, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 19-20, and 22.

⁹² On this work, see McKechnie, *First Christian Centuries*, 198-201; also Chesnut, 'A Century', 59-60.

⁸⁷ See Paul McKechnie, *The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church* (Leicester UK: Apollos/ InterVarsity Press, 2001), 191-2.

⁸⁸ Clark, 'From Patristics', 18-19.

holders in *Early Christianity* (2000) provides considerable evidence for women in significant roles as wives of bishops, or patrons for the house church, and even as bishops themselves. Especially among Montanists, women are known to have taken on roles as deacon, presbyter, or bishop, whether they inherited that role as a 'confessor' and survivor of martyrdom, or through ordination.⁹³ Numerous inscriptions reflect the office of deacon as relatively 'normal' for women before the fourth century.⁹⁴

While historians in the past have typically undervalued the role of women in the history of Christianity, there are now indications that the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. Popular novels like Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), relying in turn on Michael Baigent's *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982), provide what are allegedly historical and factual accounts of a matriarchal or feminine principle, suppressed with the repudiation of Gnosticism. Capitalising on public interest in the relatively strong role of women in earliest years of Christianity, such authors have resorted to conspiracy theory to criminalise the intentions of the 'majority' Christian church of the time.⁹⁵

4 The impact of sociology and anthropology

Together with the impact of archaeo-

logical work, study of women's roles from a feminist perspective has been instrumental in encouraging use of principles from other disciplines, like sociology and social anthropology. This approach can be noted in the work of Wayne Meeks and Robert Wilken (*Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, 1978), emphasising diversity of social structure and status within Christian communities. Also important was the work of Meeks on urban Christianity (*The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 1983); Ramsay MacMullen on social relations (*Roman Social Relations: 50 BC to AD 284*, 1974); and H.C. Kee's *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective* (1980).⁹⁶

A sociological approach was already exemplified in Arnold Toynbee's study of history (1935-1961), and in J.G. Gager's *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (1975), portraying Christianity as a sectarian movement affected by kinship ties, social status and income.⁹⁷ Peter Brown's *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (1967), mentioned above, appealed to sociology of religion;⁹⁸ his examination of religious belief and power structures in essays like the 'Holy Man in Late Antiquity' (1971), and 'Sorcery and Demons' (1972), also demonstrates the perspective of social anthropology.⁹⁹ R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1987), similarly

demonstrates attention to the wider religious, cultural and social context. And we note study of the psychological dimension in the appeal of Christianity in A.D. Nock's widely cited work on *Conversion* (1933, 1939); also in E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (1951).

In recent decades the study of late antiquity has itself emerged as a new focus for scholarship from a variety of perspectives; relevant topics of study include asceticism, law, slavery, literacy, the family, women, children, and heresy.¹⁰⁰ The designation of 'late ancient studies' or 'late antiquity', using no clear or special reference to Christianity, shows the impact of contemporary postmodern critical theory as it questions the 'construction of grand narratives' by 'complicating the relationship between text and context'.¹⁰¹ New perspectives also encourage study of early Christianity itself as an *interdisciplinary* effort, involving various academic disciplines, like philosophy, classical philology, theology, history, biblical studies and literary theory.¹⁰²

Even so, publications with a more traditional approach, like Henry Chadwick's work on church history or J.N.D. Kelly's work on the creeds, have not outlived their usefulness.¹⁰³ The same can be said for ongoing philological

work, exegetical studies, translation and editing of texts, and work in theology. We note Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (1997), or Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: from Plato to Denys* (1981); in history, H.A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Oration* (1976), or T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981).¹⁰⁴

The contemporary challenge in the study of early Christianity is to formulate a comprehensive view, embracing the multiple kinds of data being collected and studied. For such efforts we note the new journals, like the *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum (Journal of Ancient Christianity*, from 1997), which seeks to incorporate 'Patristics' into scholarship on Late Antiquity, and promote new methodologies, especially the use of 'material culture', as it serves to link scholars in different fields of study and national contexts.¹⁰⁵

V Conclusions for the 21st century

Patristic studies have clearly undergone substantive changes in the last five decades, greatly expanding the scope of interest and range of methodologies in the interpretation of relevant documents and other kinds of evidence. In his 1988 review of patristic studies of the past century, G.F. Chesnut affirmed patristic studies as an academic

⁹³ See McKechnie, *First Christian Centuries*, 204-6.

⁹⁴ McKechnie, *First Christian Centuries*, 207-8.

⁹⁵ Lössl, *The Early Church*, 7-8; and Bart Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 141-84.

⁹⁶ On seminal work on the social context of early Christianity, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 17.

⁹⁷ Chesnut, 'A Century', 58-9.

⁹⁸ Chesnut, 'A Century', 57-8.

⁹⁹ See Chesnut, 'A Century', 59; also Clark, 'From Patristics', 18.

¹⁰⁰ For important bibliography, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 17.

¹⁰¹ See David Brakke, 'The Early Church in North America: Late Antiquity, Theory, and the History of Christianity', *Church History* 71.3 (2002), 473-91, especially 475-8, and 480-91; also Clark, 'From Patristics', 21.

¹⁰² Gerard Vallée, *The Shaping of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 4-5.

¹⁰³ See Brakke, 'The Early Church', 474.

¹⁰⁴ Lössl, *The Early Church*, 40-1; Chesnut, 'A Century', 61; Clark, 'From Patristics', 14.

¹⁰⁵ Clark, 'From Patristics', 10.

discipline that is still alive and well.¹⁰⁶ In this positive assessment, Chesnut compared the Enlightenment-oriented perspective of Harnack with contemporary ecumenical consciousness, as in the work on Christian doctrine by J. Pelikan (1971-). He called special attention to the ongoing constructive role of the study of early Christianity in ecumenical efforts, to bridge the divide between sectors of Christianity which have long been deeply divided, and remain distant from one another.¹⁰⁷

Such an ecumenical spirit is evident in the comment of Gerard Vallée on scholars of various confessional backgrounds overcoming division when they cooperate in looking at ancient witnesses: 'The discovery of the lush diversity that characterised the early centuries is conducive to greater tolerance and mutual understanding.'¹⁰⁸

This impetus is also embodied in the international conferences in Patristic Studies inaugurated by F.L. Cross at Oxford in 1951, and held there at four-year intervals since that time. These conferences have done much to stimulate patristic studies across denominational and national boundaries, attracting up to a thousand international scholars for a week of animated discussion. The spirit of cooperation from different theological and denominational perspectives is a living testimony to the possibility of Christian unity, and demonstrates the end of the polemical spirit of nineteenth century scholarship.

If we examine the context in which

such studies are now hosted, we note the transfer of locale from the faculties of theology which once held the honour of being regarded as the 'queen' of the sciences within the medieval universities, to specifically-founded theological schools and seminaries of Protestant churches, and finally the modern secular universities with their departments of classical and religious study.

We know that anti-clerical motives in 19th century France removed Patristics from the university, to be incorporated in the Catholic Institute. This was not a good solution, however, because such an institution was not legally enabled to grant the degrees proper to university level work.¹⁰⁹ And the state-supported universities of 19th century Germany may have provided an excellent environment for modern scholarship, with all the necessary tools, especially in terms of library facilities; but they were not necessarily hospitable for disciplines closely associated with theological reflection or the church.¹¹⁰

Within the context of the public universities, it is clear that the study of early Christianity as such could not maintain the privileged status enjoyed in the seminaries or theological schools. Ideologically, departments of religious studies have to treat all religious groups, Christian or otherwise, on an equal footing. Professors also need to respect the diversity of the student population addressed in their lectures. And expectations of the university could make an enormous difference in the nature and focus of scholar-

ly work accomplished in that context.

Chesnut recognises the challenges of doing justice to the full spectrum of Christian religious belief, the specific struggles or controversies of early Christianity as such in that context.¹¹¹ 'Political correctness' militates against public acknowledgement of allegiance to one specific point of departure in religion. And Lössl is brutally candid in acknowledging that many of the scholars who now study early Christianity may have no more than a professional interest in the subject. They may well regard Christianity as just one of the numerous religious options in the Roman Empire, and its role for medieval Europe the outcome of a struggle for power and status.

Indeed, these scholars may even be motivated by an underlying agenda of hostility, perhaps as a reaction to negative personal experience of Christianity. Accordingly, Lössl cautions readers to be aware of unspoken motives not

immediately evident in scholarly work; contemporary analysis must be prepared to 'deconstruct' these views for a balanced understanding.¹¹²

The incredible growth in attendance at the Oxford Patristics conferences over the past decades attests to a discipline which appears to be flourishing. Scholarly questions now addressed to early Christian texts and the material evidence from early Christian communities are both increasingly diverse and interesting. There are challenging new approaches as it incorporates directions from sociological, anthropological or feminist studies.

The present essay has attempted to give an account, in broad outlines, of how we got from 'Patristics' to the modern approach on 'early Christianity'. It has sought to give the necessary background, and thereby also some useful direction for constructive engagement of contemporary Christian scholarship on early Christianity.

111 Chesnut, 'A Century', 61.

112 Lössl, *The Early Church*, 2-4.

106 Chesnut, 'A Century', 64.

107 Chesnut, 'A Century', 46.

108 Vallée, *The Shaping*, 6.

109 On the relevant law of 1880, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 11-12.

110 Clark, 'From Patristics', 8.

Evangelical Theology at the Crossroads

Gerald R. McDermott

KEYWORDS: *Dogmatics, foundationalism, Arminianism, Calvinism, Meliorists, Traditionalists, Paleo-orthodox, Post-conservatives, The New Perspective, theological method, Scripture*

I The Good News

Imagine the scene. Ancient Jerusalem is at war. Its army is fighting far away. Behind the city walls, its old men, women and children nervously await word on what happened in battle. Their lives and future are at stake. Suddenly, a cry rings out from the sentries watching from the look-out points on top of the wall. 'Your God reigns!!' A rider approaching the wall has signalled victory. The whole city explodes in celebration. The word 'evangelical' comes from this Hebrew idea of announcing the good news that God now reigns with power and grace.

This essay will argue that while evangelical theology has come into its own in recent decades, it is also deeply divided. One branch contrib-

utes to the development of historic orthodoxy, while another follows a trail blazed by Protestant liberals. The future will probably see further distance between these two kinds of theology, with one perhaps becoming 'evangelical' in name only. I will begin the essay by outlining recent successes, and the ways in which evangelical theologians since the 1970s have understood their own distinctives. Part II will uncover the divisions in today's evangelical theology, and Part III will highlight the doctrines that evangelical theology is re-examining. I will conclude with projections for the future (Part IV).

II Success

Evangelical theology has come of age. This is not surprising, given the explosion of the movement in recent decades, not only in England and America but especially in the Global South. While evangelicals were confused with fundamentalists by most of the academy until recently (and still are by many), the rise to academic promi-

nence of evangelical historians (such as Mark Noll, George Marsden, Harry Stout and Nathan Hatch), scripture scholars (the likes of N.T. Wright and Richard Bauckham), ethicists (led by Richard Hays) and theologians (including Kevin Vanhoozer, Miroslav Volf and Alister McGrath) has demonstrated the growing maturity of this movement's intellectual leaders. Outside of England and America, leading evangelical thinkers such as Simon Chan (Singapore), Thomas and Christine Schirrmacher (Germany), Samuel Escobar (Peru), and Vinoth Ramachandra (Sri Lanka), have demonstrated the prowess of this movement.

However, evangelical theology has not yet reached the self-confidence of Roman-Catholic and post-liberal Protestant theology, and some of its strongest thinkers borrow from the two latter schools. But more of them are learning from their own tradition (for example, from Jonathan Edwards's mammoth philosophico-theological project and John Wesley's capacious if diffuse theology), and sounding distinctive voices in the world of Christian theology. The result has been a new profusion of evangelical theologies.

Already, at the end of the 1990s, Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten was saying that

the initiative in the writing of dogmatics has been seized by evangelical theologians in America... [M]ost mainline Protestant and progressive Catholic theology has landed in the graveyard of dogmatics, which is that mode of thinking George Lindbeck calls 'experiential expressivism.' Individuals and groups vent their own religious ex-

perience and call it theology.¹

Evangelicals, on the other hand, mostly still believe theology is reflection on what comes from outside their experience as the Word of God. Perhaps for that reason, they have more to say—talking not just about themselves but about a transcendent God. In any event, they have been remarkably productive. In the first decade of this new century, the presses have groaned under the weight of books by evangelicals in systematic theology, historical theology, ethics, hermeneutics, biblical theology, philosophical theology, theology of culture, public theology, theology of science, and a host of other theological sub-disciplines.

But this is not the evangelical theology your father knew in the 1970s. Back then, evangelical theology had little but contempt for the charismatic movement because of what seemed to be its loosey-goosey attitudes toward doctrine and serious thinking. Now some of the best-known evangelical theologians—Clark Pinnock, James K.A. Smith, and Amos Yong, for example—are charismatics and Pentecostals, and few theologians hold tightly to the old theory that charismatic gifts ceased after the apostolic age. In the 1970s there was a sizable gulf between dispensational and Reformed theology, with neither side talking to the other. Now that respected scholars such as Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising have developed 'progressive' dispensationalism, that gap has narrowed.

The questions have also changed.

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¹ Carl E. Braaten, 'A Harvest of Evangelical Theology', *First Things* 61 (March 1996), 45-48.

In 1976, which *Newsweek* magazine dubbed 'The Year of the Evangelical', evangelical theologians debated inerrancy of the Bible, the timing and existence of a millennium, Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy, and the threat posed by abortion-on-demand. They agreed that liberal theology was bankrupt, tradition suspect, and universalism (the view that everyone will eventually be saved) impossible. Most evangelical writers were convinced that Roman Catholicism was a religion of works, and apologetics a useful way of showing that Christian faith is reasonable. Other religions were barely on the theological radar—except as proofs that only Christians would be saved.

Almost a half-century later, the assumptions and questions have shifted dramatically. Evangelical theology has accepted the collapse of classical foundationalism—the notion that there are, or should be, logical or rational grounds for belief. Although most still see a clear line separating Roman Catholic from evangelical theological method, and some still regard Catholicism as sub-Christian, many have learned from the Catholic theological tradition and agree with the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification (1999) that the Catholic tradition does not teach salvation by works. Basic theological differences between Calvinists and Arminians remain, but today's debates swirl around the role of women in the home and church, what it means to care for creation, whether justification was too narrowly defined by the Reformation, whether God knows our future choices, if non-Christians can be saved and learn religious truth through their traditions, if we need to change our thinking about homosexuality, and

whether the damned are destroyed or eventually saved.

All assume the Bible is final authority for Christians, but some are saying we ought to learn about the Bible from (mostly Catholic) tradition.² Theologians on both sides of the debate over tradition are divided over the basic task of theology—whether it is to reapply existing evangelical and orthodox tradition to new issues, or to rethink and possibly change the tradition as theologians gain 'new light'.

All evangelical thinkers recognize that revelation in Scripture contains propositions—ideas that can be expressed in words—as well as non-propositional elements such as stories and images which also reveal. Nearly all would agree that the Bible tells one grand story. But while some think revelation is God both acting *and* speaking so that doctrine and experience can never be separated, others say revelation is about God's acts rather than words and that the essence of faith is experience not doctrine.³

III Divisions

Evangelicals have always been divided over John Calvin, but now they are even

² Kevin Vanhoozer, Christopher Hall and Daniel Treier are among the leaders of this evangelical return to a 'theological interpretation of Scripture'.

³ Of course this raises the question of whether this 'faith' is the existential act of believing or the content of what is believed. But while the orthodox tradition has regarded the two as interconnected and generally has not wanted to prioritize experience over doctrine or vice-versa, the group I call 'Meliorists' tends to separate the two and favour one over the other.

more so. Today's movement emerged from a Puritan-Reformed tradition indebted to Calvin, and a Wesleyan/Pietist tradition reacting against Calvin and all his works. Wesley agreed with Calvin that salvation is by grace, but for Wesley this meant a 'free will supernaturally restored to every man' rather than only to the elect. Wesley denied Calvin's unconditional election, preferring the view that God saves based on the condition of faith which he sees from 'all eternity at one view'.⁴ Wesley also rejected Calvin's 'perseverance of the saints'—his assurance that true believers will never lose their salvation.

The conflict between Arminians and Reformed continues today, with, for example, Ben Witherington arguing in *The Problem with Evangelical Theology* (2005) against irresistible grace, the idea that Christians are in bondage to sin, and individual election as something that takes place before a person's own choices. He also faults dispensationalism for its rapture theology (arguing it has no basis in the Bible) and his own Wesleyan tradition for an overly-optimistic view of free will.⁵ But the fault line between these two evangelical theological traditions is familiar—dividing Arminian synergism (we are saved and sanctified by our wills cooperating with God's will)

from Reformed monergism (God's will determines ours but without making us robots).

Now this traditional division has morphed into a larger theological split that has turned former foes into allies. I choose to call the new opposing camps the Meliorists and the Traditionists. The former think the tradition of historic orthodoxy needs improvement and sometimes basic change. The latter believe it might sometimes be wise to adjust our approaches to the tradition, but that generally it is more important to learn from than to change it. The new division is loosely connected to the old, for most of the Meliorists are also Arminian, and most of the Traditionists are Reformed. But there are some curious realignments, such as the Paleo-conservatives (led by Thomas Oden, who is Wesleyan) who are among the Traditionists. Oden, a 1970s convert from trendy liberalism to what he and others call the Great Tradition (of early church, medieval and Reformation theology), famously said his goal is to eschew anything new, for everything worth saying has already been said.

This new division has developed from attacks by post-conservatives on what they call 'conservative' evangelical theology. 'Conservatives' are allegedly still stuck in Enlightenment foundationalism, which seeks certainty through self-evident truths and sensory experience. It supposedly sees the Bible as a collection of propositions that can be arranged into a rational system. Doctrine is said to be the essence of Christianity for the 'conservatives', who build a rigid orthodoxy on a foundation of culture-bound beliefs because they do not realize the historical

⁴ John Wesley, 'Predestination Calmly Considered', in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 447, 433.

⁵ Ben Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005).

situatedness of the Bible. In *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (2007), Olson suggests this brand of evangelical theology is fundamentalist in spirit because it hunts down heretics and chases them out of their 'small tent'. He calls his brand of evangelical theology the 'big tent'.⁶

Olson divides 'conservatives' into two camps, 'Biblicists' (a derogatory term in theological circles) and 'Paleo-orthodox' (another unseemly moniker suggesting musty museums). The Biblicists (who according to Olson include Carl Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, J.I. Packer, Wayne Grudem, Norman Geisler and D.A. Carson) see revelation as primarily propositional and doctrines as facts. But most importantly, Olson claims, they also regard doctrine as the 'essence' of Christian faith.⁷

The Paleo-orthodox include Baptist D.H. Williams, the Reformed author-pastor John Armstrong, Anglicans Robert Webber and David Neff, William Abraham at Perkins School of Theology, and of course the Methodist Oden. For this sub-division of 'conservatives', the ancient ecumenical consensus is the governing authority that serves as an interpretive lens through which Christians are to interpret Scripture. The critical and constructive task of theology is conducted in light of what the ecumenical church already decided about crucial doctrinal matters.⁸

Meliorists such as Olson think the basic problem with Traditionists (both the Biblicists and Paleo-orthodox) is that they give too much weight to tradition. They believe Biblicists pay too much attention to evangelical tradition, and Paleo-Orthodox thinkers are too subservient to the pre-modern consensus. Olson asserts that the Great Tradition has been wrong in the past, which just goes to show that all tradition is 'always ... in need of correction and reform'. Evangelicals should reject any appeal to 'what has always been believed by Christians generally' because tradition by nature protects vested interests. The creeds are simply 'man-made statements'. They all need to be re-examined for possible 'revisioning of doctrine' based on a fresh reading of scripture.

Nothing is sacrosanct, everything is on the table. Only the Bible is finally authoritative. But even that is too often mistaken for revelation itself, which in reality consists more of the 'acts of God' in history than the words of the Bible. Meliorists tend to reject the idea that the actual words of the Bible are inspired, and often prefer to speak of 'dynamic inspiration', in which the biblical authors but not their words are inspired.⁹

Here is where things get puzzling. While Olson, for example, seems to prefer this newer approach to inspiration, he also sometimes says the Bible's words are inspired and is typically orthodox in his conclusions. Pinnock urges 'steadfast loyalty to the

doctrines of classical Christianity' and advises evangelicals to 'drop our prejudice against tradition'.¹⁰ Olson says we should think of the Great Tradition as a 'Third Testament' which should be ignored 'only with fear and trembling', and warns that 'whatever overthrows the Great Tradition is likely to be heretical'. He insists that 'no postconservative evangelical wishes to discard tradition' and that all their theologians 'respect' the consensus of the early church fathers and the Protestant Reformers.¹¹

It is not clear if other Meliorists have the same respect for the Great Tradition. What is clear, however, is that some are challenging that Tradition in significant ways. Theologians like Steve Chalke, Joel Green and Mark Baker are challenging penal substitutionary atonement (PSA). Chalke says it is rooted in pagan practice and so needs not just 'reworking but ... renunciation'.¹² Green and Baker assert that most popular and scholarly understandings of PSA portray a God with 'vindictive character who finds it much easier to punish than to forgive'. They deny that the Bible teaches that God's wrath must be appeased or 'that God had to punish Jesus in order for God to be able to forgive and be in rela-

tionship with God's people'.¹³

Other evangelical theologians are reluctant to speak of damnation and give fresh support for universalism (for example, Gregory MacDonald a.k.a Robin Parry). Parry's *The Evangelical Universalist* (2006) argues that 'all can, and ultimately will, be saved'.¹⁴ Brian McLaren, a post-conservative guru of 'emerging' churches, recently declared his support for gay marriage. In a book he co-authored with Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point* (2003), Campolo dismisses Old Testament strictures against homosexual acts by saying they are part of the purity code we now call 'Kosher rules', and suggests that Paul 'was not condemning homosexuality per se' but simply pederasty and heterosexuals who 'choose homosexual behaviour as a new, kinky sexual thrill'. He says Christian tradition condemned gay eroticism, but then 'if we yielded to church tradition on *all* points, women would not be allowed to teach Sunday school or serve as missionaries'.¹⁵

Gregory Boyd and Clark Pinnock, the most prolific proponents of Openness of God theology, argue that God does not know what we will decide in the future because if he did, our choices could not be free. In the abstract

6 Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker academic, 2007) 34.

7 Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 20.

8 Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 21-22.

9 Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 192, 17, 190, 88, 46; Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 102-04.

10 Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way Through Modern Theology From an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990) 119; Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 233.

11 Olson, *Mosaic* 37, 43; Olson, *Reformed and Reforming*, 121.

12 Steve Chalke, 'The Redemption of the Cross', in Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker, eds., *The Atonement Debate* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) 42.

13 Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 2nd edn. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 174, 188. Of course the Great Tradition never taught that God punished Jesus in abstraction, but as a substitute for us because Jesus was willingly taking the penalty in our place.

14 Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2006).

15 Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 182, 185.

God could have chosen to have absolute foreknowledge, but he has decided to limit himself in this way so that our choices would not be hindered.¹⁶

These new proposals may not be the result of Meliorist method per se. Heterodoxy and heresy often arise less by way of novel method and more because of cultural pressure on specific beliefs. Yet because of these new challenges to historic orthodox consensus, evangelical theologians will no doubt want to examine four Meliorist approaches to doctrine, experience and Scripture. These evangelical challengers seem to have less of Olson's 'fear and trembling' about revising the Tradition, and might be tempted to use these new approaches to further distance themselves from historic orthodoxy.

The first thing to observe is that despite Meliorists' respect for the Great Tradition, they treat it in practice with a certain ambivalence. All of it, they insist, is 'man-made'; it 'always' needs correction and reform. It always gets a vote, but never a veto.¹⁷ Never? Not even the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds? Or the Chalcedonian consensus? To say that all of the Great Tradition is man-made is to deny what the Great Tradition itself has claimed—that important chapters such as the development of the Trinitarian doctrines were inspired by the Spirit.

Second, Meliorists exalt experience at the expense of cognitive understanding (doctrine). Olson says that the essence of authentic faith is a distinctive spirituality 'rather than' cor-

rect doctrine. Orthopraxy is 'prior to' orthodoxy, the main purpose of revelation is transformation 'rather than' information, and doctrine is 'secondary' to evangelical experience.¹⁸ Leading Meliorist thinkers speak of experience as 'confirming' belief rather than supplying it, but this exaltation of experience over doctrine may open the door for Meliorist disciples to look to experience as a source of doctrine, thus travelling the experiential expressivist route to liberal Protestantism.

Third, we have seen a new hesitation among Meliorists to support plenary inspiration—the view that the words of Scripture are inspired. Olson reports on post-conservatives who see 'the words of Scripture as more the human authors', than the Holy Spirit's', and new acceptance of Bernard Ramm's Barthian view that the Bible itself is not the Word of God but is a culturally conditioned 'witness' to the Word of God.¹⁹

This is critical because of Meliorist insistence on the final authority of Scripture over tradition. If we can overrule tradition because of Scripture, but the words of Scripture are neither the Word of God nor inspired, then how do we decide which concepts 'in, with and under' the words are the Word? And who decides? If the biblical authors were culturally-conditioned, and all of the Great Tradition is culturally conditioned, what prevents the evangelical theologian from being just another culture-bound interpreter of spiritual experience?

These last questions point to the fourth problem: lack of authority. The Great Tradition is respected but never has veto power. Scripture is said to be authoritative, but its words are not inspired. Since the Word is hidden among phenomena clouded by ancient cultures, only those with knowledge of those cultures can have authority: charismatic Meliorist scholars and writers. But even they disagree with one another, so we are left in a muddled mess.

The combination of these four elements, along with the new departures from orthodox understandings by some evangelical theologians, raises questions. For example, will evangelicals who feel embarrassed by the Tradition's moral theology use methods endorsed by otherwise-orthodox Meliorists to strike out for more liberal waters? It would not be difficult. For if the words of Scripture are culture-bound but not inspired, then one could reason that the particulars of Levitical or Pauline sexual admonitions must give way to the true Word behind the words—love and non-judgmentalism.

It doesn't matter that this new pitting of one set of biblical passages against another also violates the biblical hermeneutic of the Great Tradition, for the Tradition (to most Meliorists) is culture-bound and demands revision, especially when confronted by the experience of committed love and so-called new knowledge. The result is to follow precisely the path of mainline Protestantism as it continued to proclaim the authority of Scripture and respect for tradition while rejecting the Tradition at the point where culture was at war with the words of Scripture.

Not all those called 'postconserva-

tives' endorse these progressive principles. Olson claims as a fellow 'post-conservative' the redoubtable Kevin Vanhoozer, who stands with Alister McGrath as among the most respected evangelical theologians. It is not clear, however, that this reputation fits very well. Vanhoozer may be called 'postconservative' because he is post-foundationalist and rejects the view that revelation is *purely* or *primarily* propositional. But he differs from Meliorists on the critical relation between doctrine and experience, and shows a way forward.

Vanhoozer objects to the Meliorist bifurcation between doctrine and experience, decrying the 'new ugly ditch' dug between them. Lessing's original 'ugly ditch' separated the particular facts of history from supposedly universal dictates of reason, but now (says Vanhoozer) Meliorists create a false dichotomy between doctrine and experience. As George Lindbeck has argued, our religious experience is created in large part by the 'doctrines' that show us how to interpret reality, so we cannot say doctrine is distinct from or subordinate to experience.²⁰

Although Vanhoozer does not aim at Meliorists in particular, he has suggested in his magisterial *Drama of Doctrine* (2005) that views of doctrine like

¹⁶ See, for example, Clark Pincock et al, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 63.

¹⁸ Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 28, 62, 87, 88.

¹⁹ Olson, *Mosaic*, 102; Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 107-110.

²⁰ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); for Vanhoozer in this and the next two paragraphs, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Scripture and Hermeneutics', in Gerald R. McDermott, *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35-52; and Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

theirs are one-dimensional, emphasizing the cognitive dimension of doctrine at the expense of the 'phronetic' (imparting sound judgment). Christian doctrine, Vanhoozer insists, is not only *scientia* (knowledge) but also *sapientia* (wisdom). It gives us not simply understanding of God but also a way of being in the world.

Vanhoozer also has a different view of how the Bible works as authoritative Word. For most Meliorists, the Bible's authority is primarily functional. God speaks through it when he chooses, and only at those times can we say the Spirit speaks through it with authority. But for Vanhoozer, Scripture has ontological authority. God of course *uses* the words of Scripture to speak to us, but the canon itself is a divine act speaking to the world. The Spirit is active not only on those occasions when particular parts of the Bible are illuminated for us, but was also active in the formation of the words of the canon.

Not all 'postconservatives', then, are Meliorists. Vanhoozer is merely a 'methodological' postconservative, which means he reformulates traditional doctrines without rejecting them. He is a Traditionist who rejects the notion that we are free to jettison doctrine if it no longer fits our reading of the Bible.

John Franke, who some say is the theologian of the 'emerging' churches, stands somewhere between the two camps. He sides with Grenz in finding the 'essence of Christianity' in Christian experience, and speaks of creeds and confessions as merely 'human reflection' that must be perpetually reexamined and reformulated. But at the same time he urges evangelicals to see that 'Scripture and tradition

must function together as coinherent aspects of the ongoing ministry of the Spirit'.²¹ While his proposal that the Spirit speaks through culture risks constructing what H. Richard Niebuhr called a 'Christ of culture', his 'coinherence' of Spirit and tradition affirms what evangelicals too rarely consider—that the Great Tradition might not be simply man-made.

It turns out then, at the end of the day, that what finally divides evangelical theologians today is their attitude toward tradition and Scripture. Meliorists say the historic church's understanding of Scripture should be scrutinized warily. Some of them profess respect for the Great Tradition, but because of their slippery approach to biblical inspiration and subordination of doctrine to experience, their relation to that Tradition is tenuous. Because the meaning of the Word is found not in the words of the Bible but in the theology of the Meliorist interpreter, *sola scriptura* can become—despite the best intentions of its leading thinkers—*sola theologia*, with the charismatic theologian the final authority.

Traditionists, on the other hand, also affirm *sola scriptura*, but sometimes in a manner that is really *prima scriptura*—Scripture is primary, but the great Tradition is the authoritative guide to its interpretation. Because they see doctrine and experience not above or below but inextricably bound up in one another, they allow the Great Tradition a veto. They yield far more often to that authority. They are ready, as Meliorists are not, to say that not

²¹ John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 160.

only the words of Scripture but also significant segments of the unfolding of the Great Tradition were guided by the Spirit.

IV Flashpoints

The new fissure between Traditionists and Meliorists is the most basic, but not the only, change in evangelical theology since the 1970s. Others involve the questions of macro-evolution, the roles of women in marriage and the church, whether Adam was a historical figure, the nature of conversion, the meaning of church, and universalism.

At the heart of these debates is the question of how to interpret the Bible. As we have seen, Meliorists champion individual interpretation and reject a propositional view of Scripture. The Bible, they say, is the story (principally) of God's acts, and it is through this story that we experience God. But Vanhoozer, whose overall approach is Traditionist, transcends the dichotomy between propositions and experience by saying the Bible is itself God's mighty act. God uses propositions in the biblical story, but for more than mere information. He presents himself and relates to people through the proposition-laden story, so that they can then experience the Triune God.²²

But how do we interpret that story? Does tradition play a role? Alister McGrath proposes that evangelical arguments over the millennium, charismatic gifts, and the nature of baptism and communion illustrate evangelical theology's dirty little secret: it has always used tradition (its own or the

greater church's) to understand the Bible. Many evangelicals have insisted they should submit to 'no creed but the Bible' (which Thomas Albert Howard nicely calls *nuda scriptura*), and that the best evangelical theology has never regarded creeds and traditions as anything but flawed 'man-made' theories. (Meliorists agree that the Bible can never be interpreted apart from *some* tradition, but they also avow that all tradition is simply man-made.)

McGrath replies that Luther and Calvin, whom most evangelicals regard as theological mentors, were self-consciously guided by the Great Tradition, especially Augustine, Ambrose and Chrysostom. He adds that the recent dispute over the New Perspective on Paul shows that many evangelicals—especially those who tend to denigrate tradition—ironically prefer the Reformation tradition on justification to new evidence coming from the New Testament itself. The debate is over whether Paul's 'Judaizing' opponents taught salvation by works (and what was meant by 'works'), and whether justification is limited to God's legal verdict of acquittal to the believer.²³

N.T. Wright, an evangelical leader of the New Perspective, argues that Luther was wrong to think the Judaizers were Pelagians (teaching that works save). He and his New Perspective colleagues also assert that for Paul justification involves not only acquittal (forensic imputation) but also participation in Christ's holiness.²⁴ It may not

²³ McGrath, 'Faith and Tradition', in McDermott, *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 81-98.

²⁴ See especially N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

²² See Vanhoozer, 'Scripture and Hermeneutics'.

be coincidental that most of Wright's opponents, foremost of whom is Minneapolis pastor John Piper, are also suspicious of theological tradition—except that of the Reformers.

These debates reveal the hidden tensions between Meliorists and Traditionists, but most evangelicals are barely aware of these differences. Yet most *are* familiar with the rival visions behind the debates over sexuality, gender and eschatology. When some evangelical theologians, such as emerging church guru McLaren, want to avoid talking about homosexuality, Robert Gagnon argues that avoidance suggests either that sexuality is irrelevant to discipleship or that the Bible is wrong—unless one tries to say the Bible can support homosexual practice, which Gagnon says is exegetically impossible.²⁵ Besides, two thousand years of church tradition have read the Bible on sex and marriage in a uniform way (when it comes to gay practice and partnerships).

Meanwhile, most evangelical theologians outside the West want nothing to do with revised theologies of sex and marriage and instead have focused on what they consider more pressing issues. Thomas Johnson in Prague has called for evangelical use of natural law to defend human rights; Christine Schirrmacher presses for sensitive but clear-eyed examination of Islam; Thomas Schirrmacher has called attention to human trafficking and persecution of Christians worldwide; Vinodh Ramachandra unveils contemporary myths about terrorism, multicultural-

ism and postcolonialism; Simon Chan calls evangelicals to examine spiritual and liturgical theology; Samuel Escobar charts the way toward a new global missions movement.

V Futures

Some years ago, evangelical historian Nathan Hatch said 'there's no such thing as evangelicalism'.²⁶ By that he probably meant that evangelicalism and its attendant theologies constitute a many-headed monster that regularly transforms itself into new shapes.

However, historic evangelicalism does have a recognizable character, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter. As William Abraham has quipped, 'It would be a mistake ... to dismiss evangelicalism as a useless category for understanding Christianity; without it we would have to invent a functional equivalent immediately.' It represents a network of Christians 'bound together by a loose but identifiable cluster of convictions and practices that have been and continue to be a potent religious force'.²⁷

But what will be its future shape? And what of evangelical theology? The recent explosion of evangelicalism in the Global South means that future evangelical theology, which is already beginning to come from Asia and Africa and Latin America, will give more attention to the reality of spiritual powers in history and manifestations of the

supernatural such as dreams, visions, healing and direct messages from the Spirit.

Because of the tendency of majority-world Christians to take the Old Testament more seriously, evangelical theology will have more of a Jewish flavour and be less inclined to spiritualize prophetic promises of land and kingdom. It will be far less ready to sever the connection between moral and dogmatic theology, as northern theologies have done. Therefore future evangelical theology will be less tempted to relax traditional understandings of the meaning of sex and marriage. But it will also deal with new issues, says Mark Noll, such as the destiny of ancestors and what it means for families and large groups to convert en masse.²⁸

Present divisions between Meliorists and Traditionists will widen along two tracks—theological method and the nature of Scripture. On method, the issue is not the historic evangelical appeal to *sola scriptura* per se. Commitment to this principle has spawned repeated divisions from the first evangelical awakenings in the eighteenth century. The lesson evangelicals should have learned is that *sola scriptura* is necessary but not sufficient for maintaining theological orthodoxy.

Only a 'single-source' view of tradition in which hermeneutical authority is given to the mutual interplay of Scripture and orthodox community—the method that the church practised for most of Christian history—can protect evangelical theology from

going the way of all flesh, to liberal Protestantism.²⁹ Meliorists claim Traditionists elevate tradition above Scripture. Traditionists say they want to submit their individual interpretations of Scripture to those of the wider and longer orthodox church, and think through their reformulations by thinking *with* the Great Tradition.

Meliorists over-reacted to evangelical excesses in the inerrancy debates of the 1970s. In understandable distaste for rationalistic, a-historical, and un-literary readings in the 'Battle for the Bible', Meliorists separated revelation from the biblical text, and located a so-called Christian essence in religious experience fundamentally removed from words and concepts. Far better is Vanhoozer's response to errancy among the inerrantists. He is not afraid to use the word 'inerrant', but talks about different biblical genres and ancient literary conventions. He knows that ancient historiographical standards were different from ours.

Better still is the return of many Traditionist theologians to the medieval four-fold sense that restores a theological reading of Scripture, rejecting the modernist assumption that every biblical text has only one meaning, which is whatever the human author originally intended. More and more Traditionist theologians are recovering this theological reading of Scripture as the foundation of systematic theology, finding the 'literal' sense which corresponds to what we call the literary but not literalistic meaning.³⁰

²⁵ Robert A.J. Gagnon, 'Sexuality', in McDermott, *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 449–64.

²⁶ Nathan Hatch, 'Response to Carl F.H. Henry', in Kenneth Kantzer and Carl Henry, eds., *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 97.

²⁷ William J. Abraham, 'Church and Churches: Ecumenism', in McDermott, *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 303.

²⁸ Mark Noll, 'What Is 'Evangelical,' in William J. Abraham, 'Church and Churches: Ecumenism', in McDermott, *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 19–34.

²⁹ See McGrath, 'Faith and Tradition'.

³⁰ See Vanhoozer, 'Scripture and Hermeneutics'.

Another way to understand this growing divide in evangelical theology is to listen to Meliorist responses to charges that they are following in the path of Schleiermacher, the father of liberal Protestantism. Olson, their most distinguished thinker, says that his theology is not at all similar to Schleiermacher's because the German professor-pastor did not believe in supernatural conversion (and Olson does), taught a universal God-consciousness that is in all human beings and is the essence of religious experience (Olson's account of faith is Christ- and cross-specific), and gave to that God-consciousness a higher authority than Scripture (Olson says revelation is first-order speech). Fair enough. On the content of Christian faith and the role of Jesus Christ, Olson is no Schleiermachian.³¹

Yet critics could be forgiven for noticing similarities between Schleiermacher and Meliorists on the relative importance of doctrine. For both, doctrines are 'expressions' of spiritual experience, and experience is the centre and essence of faith—more important than creeds. Now Olson and Grenz have written repeatedly that doctrines are not *merely* expressions of faith, and that God through Scripture speaks from outside the self to challenge and transform the soul—while for Schleiermacher there is no external authority that takes precedence over the immediate experience of believers. Yet for

both Meliorism and Schleiermacher piety is more important than doctrine, Christian experience of greater significance than its creedal formulation.

Schleiermacher's doctrine of Scripture was also remarkably similar to the Meliorist view. Curiously enough, the German theologian started with orthodox commitments, as do Meliorists. For example, the father of liberal theology held Scripture to be the 'norm for all succeeding presentations'. He said each part of the Bible was to be interpreted in light of the Bible's great theme, Christ. So far, so good. But then, just as Meliorists often do, Schleiermacher insisted the Bible itself cannot be equated with revelation. He said revelation is instead Christ himself, who imparts his own God-consciousness to the believer from the outside. The words of the Bible are not God-given but represent human reflection on religious experience.³²

So while most Meliorist conclusions are orthodox, their views of Scripture and experience converge with Schleiermacher more than most want to admit. This is why Meliorist evangelical theology may resemble that of liberal Protestantism before too long, even though the top Meliorist theologians will reject that move. As in any movement, epigones are more consistent with their mentor's principles than the mentors were. Theological innovators are more willing to hold in tension competing principles, but disciples collapse those tensions. If professed commitment to orthodoxy conflicts with theological method, disciples will follow

³¹ Olson, *Reformed and Reforming*, 61-63, 76-77; Professor Olson saw several drafts of this chapter in advance, and it is better because of his suggestions. He does not agree, however, that what I call Meliorism may be headed toward liberal Protestantism.

³² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 62-68, 594, 597-98, 594-96, esp. 593.

that method to its liberal conclusions.

Karl Barth denied he was a universalist, but his epigones typically followed Barthian principles to their logical conclusion and found hell to be unpopulated.³³ Similarly, Meliorists locate authority not in Scripture itself but an ambiguous 'revelation', while some say more directly that 'God's word ... is an event mediated by the Bible and not the book itself' (Dave Tomlinson), and that (not surprisingly) they 'don't know what to think' about homosexuality, hell, penal substitutionary atonement and a host of other teachings in the Great Tradition (McLaren).³⁴

Nearly twenty years ago James Davison Hunter famously distinguished between the 'orthodox' and 'progressive' moral sensibilities in our broader culture. The orthodox, he proposed, believe in 'external, definable and transcendent' standards for morals and life, while progressives tend to re-symbolize historical faiths according to 'prevailing assumptions of contemporary life'.³⁵ The current divide in evangelical theology does not precisely follow Hunter's dichotomy, for Meliorists teach transcendence and external standards. But so did Schleiermacher, who also and importantly defined true religion as experience that is not in-

trinsically tied to any specific doctrinal formulation.

The result was then and is now a faith that is curiously non-definable and hyper-attentive to 'prevailing assumptions of contemporary life'. Just as Hunter's orthodox and progressives have moved even farther apart in these last twenty years, so too will Meliorists and Traditionists. In another twenty years, Meliorists may have difficulty being recognized as evangelicals, and, like the liberal Protestants they might come to resemble, they will also have trouble filling their pews.

Is there a way to avoid division? Perhaps. A few things would be required. First, evangelical theologians would have to look more seriously at their own tradition. Their greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards, professed repeatedly that our only authority in religion is the written text of the Scriptures. But in practice he operated with the tacit recognition that the Bible can be read only through and with tradition, and that ultimate religious authority is mediated by God through a story of divine redemption, which is known by theological reflection and transmitted through a theological tradition.

Therefore tradition, whose importance he often downplayed, proved to be more significant for the evangelical theologian in actual practice. John Wesley, while not a systematic theologian but a powerful theological thinker in his own right, showed keen interest in the Great Tradition and was chary to subvert it.

Second, evangelical theology would need to renounce the triumphalism that has heretofore treated church history as little more than darkness before the Reformation or 18th century awaken-

³³ See, for example, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.3.1 (Peabody: Hendricksen, 2010), 354-55.

³⁴ Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 120; for McLaren, see McLaren and Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point*.

³⁵ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 45.

ings. It would need to adopt a new attitude of intellectual humility—a certain willingness to submit to a vision of the whole that can be found only by living in the whole (theological) tradition.

Third, evangelical theologians need to beware the peculiarly academic sort of ambition that seeks acceptance and recognition by our liberal colleagues. We want their approval, and so we are tempted to write and teach what will be more consistent with the academy's moral and theological sensibilities. Or we seek the thrill of intellectual sophistication that is unencumbered by traditional formulations. But as Donald MacKinnon once observed and William Abraham has reminded us, the great orthodox creeds are the ordinary Christian's protection against the ingenuity of the wise and intellectually superior.³⁶

These days the most common temptation is to disconnect moral theology from dogmatic theology, saying in neopietist fashion that doctrine and morality are finally unimportant as long as there are warm, fuzzy feelings about Jesus. Or we reduce Scripture to the human expression of religious experience, finding revelation somewhere other than in the biblical text itself. In the process, however, we have run roughshod over Scripture's claim for itself as '*words* taught not by human wis-

dom but by the Spirit' (1 Cor 2:13).³⁷

I will go so far as to say that if evangelical theology does not adopt these suggestions, it will not survive. But it will strengthen itself and preserve itself against internal dissolution if it sees itself as a reform movement in the church catholic. The monastic movements, the Clunian reform movement, the Dominican preaching revival, the Franciscans, and the Reformation itself thrived and influenced the broader church by relating to and learning from the broader church. Only if evangelical theology sees itself as a renewal and reform movement raised up by the Spirit from amidst and for the purpose of the wider church catholic, and therefore learns from that universal church, will it save itself from disintegrating into even more subjectivist and individualistic sects, many of them neither evangelical nor orthodox.

Evangelicals have always put a premium on the local church. If they have talked about the universal church, typically they have thought only in terms of the universal church of fellow evangelicals. It is time for evangelicals to look more broadly, at the universal church beyond evangelical boundaries, not only around the world today, but especially to the last two thousand years of rich theological reflection.

³⁷ This is not an assertion that revelation is found only in Scripture, for the Tradition has had much to say about general revelation outside Scripture. But it is to say that Scripture is our normative guide when interpreted by the Great Tradition (which includes creeds and liturgy and the Fathers and the sacraments), and its revelation is in, with, and under its words.

'New Treasures With the Old': Addressing Culture and Gender Imperialism in Higher Level Theological Education

Perry W. H. Shaw

KEYWORDS: *Gender, curriculum, action research, relational learning, contextualisation, dialectics, logic, mind-mapping*

He learned German, French, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, in addition to English, church history, systematics, homiletics, exegesis and pastoralia, as one part of the requirements for his degree. The other part, the dissertation, he wrote on some obscure theologian of the Middle Ages. Finally he got what he wanted: a Doctorate in Theology. It took him nine and a half years altogether, from the time he left his home until he passed his orals and set off to return.... At home relatives, neighbours, old friends... all gather to welcome him back... Dancing, jubilation, eating, feasting—all these go on as if there were nothing else to do, be-

cause the man for whom everyone had waited has finally returned. Suddenly there is a shriek. Someone has fallen to the ground. It is his older sister... he rushes to her. People make room for him and watch him. 'Let's take her to the hospital', he calls urgently. They are stunned. He becomes quiet. They all look at him bending over her. Why doesn't someone respond to his advice? Finally a schoolboy says, 'Sir, the nearest hospital is 50 miles away, and there are few buses that go there.' Someone else says, 'She is possessed. Hospitals will not cure her!' The Chief says to him, 'You have been studying theology overseas for 10 years. Now help your sister. She is troubled by the spirit of her great aunt.' He looks around. Slowly he goes to get Bultmann, looks at the index, finds what he wants, reads again about spirit possession in the New Testament. Of

³⁶ D.M. MacKinnon, *The Church* (London: Dacre Press, 1940), 50; cited in William J. Abraham, 'Systematic Theology as Analytic Theology', in Oliver D. Crisp & Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: new essays in the philosophy of theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57.

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course he gets the answer: Bultmann has demythologised it. He insists that his sister is not possessed. The people shout, 'Help your sister, she is possessed!' He shouts back, 'But Bultmann has demythologised demon possession.'¹

John Mbiti narrated this story 35 years ago to illustrate the cultural irrelevance of much western theological education for the now-majority non-western Christian world. Thankfully, in the years since then, discussion of cultural factors has led to a greater openness to scholarship that seeks answers to the questions of the non-western world. However, in spite of broader contextual discussions in *content*, the *methodology* of higher education remains fixedly subject to the hegemony of predominantly white western male understandings of learning—particularly at the advanced masters and doctoral levels. Even in fields such as missiology the language of cultural sensitivity advocated in theory is denied in practice because of the current restrictive understanding of the nature of scholarly research.

I am a white western male who relates well to the accepted methodology of higher education, and I found my doctoral thesis-writing process relatively straightforward. However, nearly two decades of teaching education in the non-western world has made me increasingly uncomfortable with the status quo. I have become convinced that there is a frightening level of culture and gender imperialism in higher level

theological study—not so much in content as in the narrow understanding of scholarly methodology embedded in the linear-analytic shape of thesis-writing that has become virtually sacrosanct in the academy.

The church has become impoverished by limitations imposed on what is possible in the methodology permitted in advanced theological reflection. But around the globe quality assurance in higher education is increasingly being assessed on the basis of 'fitness for purpose'² rather than adherence to a narrow band of instructional input. Therefore, while not rejecting the traditional model, there is great potential for new approaches to prepare quality scholar-teachers—approaches the non-western church is now well-equipped to embrace, if it has the will.

I Culture, Gender, and Learning

Culture and learning: An overwhelming body of research has established what cultural anthropologists have intuited for decades: people from different cultures think in fundamentally different ways. While the differences are not absolute, and there is wide diversity and individual variation, there are strong, statistically significant differences between the ways in which information is processed by people from different cultural backgrounds, and this has a profound impact on the ways in which learning takes place from culture to culture.

Numerous examples could be proffered. One example is found in the work of the team led by Richard Nisbett³ who studied differences in thinking and learning patterns between East Asians and European Americans studying together at the same American university. Despite comparable instructional input it was found that the western students tended to process information through more analytic approaches, while the Asian students preferred working through holistic reasoning. From this, and other research, Nisbett's team suggested four areas in which westerners and easterners process information differently:

Attention and control: Reasoning processes begin with filtering through the surrounding information. Since it is impossible to attend to everything all the time, people are highly selective in the way material is filtered, and these processes seem to be culturally influenced. In general, East Asians tend to focus on the overall field, seeing wholes, and observing co-variations; while westerners tend to focus on specifics, isolating and analysing the elements as the necessary step towards generalisation.⁴

Relationships vs. rules: Cultural variations in attending to the environment also lead to differing ways of organizing objects, events, and people. For instance, Chinese students are more likely to group on the basis of some kind of relationship, while European-American students are more likely to group on the basis of a shared category.⁵ These different results are consistent with the communal nature of East Asian society as against the analytical-individualistic character of most Western societies.

Experiential knowledge vs. formal logic: When engaging in deductive reasoning, East Asian students tend to prefer beginning with experiential knowledge based on intuitive understandings emerging from direct perception,⁶ reflecting a general understanding of truth and reality as relational and changeable. In contrast, Western students tend to rely on logic and abstract principles, reflecting a general understanding of truth and reality as consistent.

Comparing the Attention to Context of East Asians and Americans', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 34, No. 9, 2008, 1260-1275; Nisbett et al., 'Culture and Systems of Thought'.

⁵ L-J. Ji, 'Culture, Language, and Categorization', unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2001, quoted in Nisbett et al. 2001, 'Culture and Systems of Thought', 300.

⁶ Cf. M. V. Alfred, 'Philosophical Foundations of Andragogy and Self-directed Learning: A Critical Analysis from an Africentric Feminist Perspective', in M. Glowacki-Dudka (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 19th annual Midwest Research to Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education* (pp. 21-26), Madison: U. of Wisconsin, 2000, who sees the same pattern in African-American learners.

¹ J. Mbiti, 'Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church', *Lutheran World*, Vol. 21 No. 3, 1974, 251-260.

² *European University Association (EUA) Bologna Handbook*, on-line at <http://www.bologna-handbook.com>, accessed 12 October 2009.

³ R. E. Nisbett, I. Choi, K. Peng, & A. Norenzayan, 'Culture and Systems of Thought: Holistic versus Analytic Cognition', *Psychological Review*, Vol. 108, No. 2, 2001, 291-310.

⁴ A. Boduroglu, P. Shah, & R.E. Nisbett, 'Cultural Differences in Allocation of Attention in Visual Information Processing', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2009, 349-360; L-J. Ji, K. Peng, & R.E. Nisbett, 'Culture, Control, and Perception of Relationships in the Environment', *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, Vol. 78, No. 5, 2000, 943-955; T. Masuda, R. Gonzalez, L. Kwan, & R.E. Nisbett, 'Culture and Aesthetic Preference:

ent and logical.⁷

Dialectics vs. the law of non-contradiction: East Asians and European-Americans have differing levels of commitment to avoid apparent contradiction in deductive reasoning. Peng and Nisbett⁸ suggested that these differences emerge from cultural patterns of logic. For example, in western logic rules such as these have played a central role:

- The law of identity: A = A. A thing is identical to itself.
- The law of non-contradiction: A ≠ not-A. No statement can be both true and false.
- The law of the excluded middle: Any statement is either true or false.⁹

In contrast, Chinese logic is based on Chinese dialecticism which embraces principles such as the following:¹⁰

- The principle of change: Reality is a process that is not static but rather is dynamic and changeable.¹¹ A

thing need not be identical to itself at all because of the fluid nature of reality.

- The principle of contradiction: Partly because change is constant, contradiction is constant: old and new, good and bad, exist in the same object or event and indeed depend on one another for their existence.
- The principle of relationship or holism: Because of constant change and contradiction, nothing either in human life or in nature is isolated and independent, but instead everything is related. It follows that attempting to isolate elements of some larger whole can only be misleading.

In summary, Nisbett's team suggested that western students tend toward information-processing that is linear, specific, analytic, theoretical, and individualistic-competitive, while East Asian students prefer to think through patterns that are circular, interconnected, holistic, experiential, and communal.

This is just one example from the enormous body of research into culture and thinking which is unanimous in affirming the wide variety in thinking and learning patterns across cultures. In particular, the growing body of intercultural research suggests that the linear-analytical thinking of Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment which have so shaped western educational systems is globally atypical. While the specifics differ, the general pattern of information processing throughout most of the non-western world tends towards holism and networked think-

ing, rather than the tight specificity so typical in western academia.¹²

Gender and learning: The hegemony of narrow linear rationalist structures in higher education is not merely a case of western cultural dominance of the academy but also an act of gender discrimination—for holistic interconnectivity in thinking patterns is also the norm for women, even white western women.

Recent research has revealed that the typical male brain tends to be highly attuned to specificity in tasks, and prefers to compartmentalise and simplify tasks as much as possible: it is hard-wired for understanding and building systems around specific content.¹³ The typical woman's brain tends to be geared to see multiple implications and prefers to see the big picture when completing tasks.¹⁴

¹² See for example C.W. Bauman & L.J. Skitka, 'Ethnic Group Differences in Lay Philosophies of Behavior in the United States', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2006), 438-445; S. Merriam, R.S. Caffarella, & L.M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 238-239; S.H. Schwartz, 'Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries', in M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 1-65), Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1992; H.C. Triandis, 'The Self and Social Behavior in Differing Cultural Contexts', *Psychological Review*, Vol. 96 (1989), 506-520.

¹³ S. Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain* (New York: Basic, 2003).

¹⁴ D. Goleman, *Social Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 2006), 139; M. Gurian & P. Henley, *Boys and Girls Learn Differently! A Guide for Teachers and Parents* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 41-42.

Women have also greater interconnectivity between the verbal, reasoning, and emotional parts of the brain, and consequently tend to prefer learning in community by talking through the issues and ideas being presented.¹⁵ In contrast, males tend to prefer processing ideas and issues without having to exercise the language parts of their brains; or if they use speech in learning it tends to be through debate and argument over very specific points.

Males like abstract arguments, philosophical problems, and moral debates about abstract principles, and are happy to do big picture theoretical philosophy or theology divorced from day to day life. Women have difficulty understanding the value or meaning of theory without specific, concrete examples, and tend to do best in learning opportunities in which they are involved in hands-on, practical experiences.¹⁶ Stated simply, men tend to prefer to go from theory to practice, women tend to prefer to go from practice to theory.

¹⁵ M.F. Belenky & A.V. Stanton, 'Inequality, Development and Connected Knowing', in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (pp. 71-102) (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 82; C. Stonehouse, 'Learning from Gender Differences', in K. O. Gangel & J. C. Wilhoit (eds.), *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education* (pp. 104-120) (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker, 1993), 117.

¹⁶ M. Philbin, E. Meier, S. Huffman, & P. Boverie, 'A Survey of Gender and Learning Styles', *Sex Roles*, Vol. 32, No. 7-8, 1995, 485-494; M.F. Williamson & R.L. Watson, 'Learning Styles Research: Understanding how Teaching Should be Impacted by the Way Learners Learn; Part II: Understanding how Learners Prefer to Receive Information', *Christian Education Journal*, Series 3, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2006), 343-361.

⁷ A. Norenzayan, 'Rule-based and Experience-based Thinking: The Cognitive Consequences of Intellectual Traditions', unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999, quoted in Nisbett et al., 'Culture and Systems of Thought', 301.

⁸ K. Peng & R.E. Nisbett, 'Culture, Dialectics, and Reasoning about Contradiction', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 54, No. 9, 1999, 741-754.

⁹ Nisbett et al., 'Culture and Systems of Thought', 301.

¹⁰ J. Spencer-Rodgers, H.C. Boucher, S.C. Mori, L. Wang & K. Peng, 'The Dialectical Self-concept: Contradiction, Change, and Holism in East Asian Cultures', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (2009), 29-44.

¹¹ See also L.-J. Ji, 'The Leopard Cannot Change his Spots, or Can he? Culture and the Development of Lay Theories of Change', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 34,

No. 5 (2008), 613-622.

II Culture and Gender Imperialism in Higher Research

The classic approach to higher level research is linear, specific, analytic, hypothesis-driven, and individualistic-competitive: this is seen in the standard shape expected in higher research theses, almost irrespective of the discipline. The approach is deeply rooted in the West's love affair with the scientific method, an approach that brought great gifts to the development of knowledge in the physical sciences. The scientific method in turn emerged out of the Enlightenment's embrace of Greek analytical patterns of reasoning. Because of the great benefit experienced by western society through this form of analytical reasoning, particularly during the Industrial Revolution, the scientific method was subsequently applied to all fields of study as the only source of sure knowledge.¹⁷

The linear, specific, analytic, hypothesis-driven, and individualistic-competitive approach to research is far more likely to suit the thinking processes of white western males than women in general, or students from collectivist societies.¹⁸ This is not surprising, given that the now internationalised model of advanced masters and doctoral education was developed in the West and in its earliest generations was a virtual 'closed shop' for

male students only. Until today the most admired academic institutions in the world are in the West and are dominated by white male faculty and administration. These institutions have enormous influence on the shape of international accreditation, which in turn dominates globally the curricular decisions of higher education. The approach is rarely questioned. In part this is because most white western males cannot understand how people could learn otherwise: more than once I have been asked by colleagues in the West, 'Doesn't everyone learn this way?'

The need for holistic wisdom amongst Christian thinkers is imperative in the post-modern world. We should not completely reject Greek-based analytic cognitive reasoning, but we need to be aware that it is not the only way to perceive and process information, and that it has inherent limitations. It needs to be enriched by other forms of reasoning in order to be able to assess life situations in alternative and possibly more comprehensive ways.

Sadly, in the process of satisfying the linear-analytical requirements of the academy, many non-western and women scholars become increasingly westernised and male-genderised, and so we lose the great potential gift of alternate thinking patterns they offer—in particular a level of holistic multidisciplinary theological reflection desperately needed by a church whose 'centre of gravity' is moving increasingly east and south.

III The Hidden Curriculum of Higher Theological Education

Much higher education (including the-

ological education) has lost its focus on genuine learning, and has instead devolved into a means by which a person might join a fraternity (the gender is intentional). Even Protestants, with their supposed passion for 'the priesthood of all believers', have embraced a new high priesthood guild of academics who often view with disdain the simple faith of many in the church.¹⁹ To paraphrase from Cleophus LaRue,²⁰ 'too many scholars leave our theological schools clutching a degree that says Doctor of Divinity, but people do not come to know God until they have been doctored by Divinity'. One hopes that theological educators would long for more than this—especially when churches are desperately in need of servant leaders!

One of the most stark reminders of the guild nature of higher education is the rigid emphasis on style. As Theodore Ziolkowski commented, '[A]t many institutions, the locally approved manual of style has become so dominant and so tyrannically enforced that the candidate comes away with the notion that style matters more than substance.'²¹ This is seen in the almost 'sacred' adherence of most programs of higher education around the world to Kate Turabian's *Manual for*

Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations,²² originally published in 1937 at the height of western modernity, and now in its seventh edition.

My wife spent six months writing two complex significant chapters of her doctoral thesis. Following a successful viva, in which she demonstrated clear mastery of the field and scholarly competence, it took her almost another six months to satisfy the trivial style requirements of the administrative staff of the well-known Christian institution. The time and effort involved was largely meaningless, and the contribution to genuine learning was nil. A friend commented, 'I think you have to realise that it's not about learning; it's about paying your dues to the academy.'

The extent to which leaders in evangelical theological education have accepted and promoted the status quo is disturbing, and it reflects a profound ignorance of the negative hidden curriculum embedded within the traditional model of higher theological education.²³ The current practices unwittingly but very powerfully communicate that:

- White western males have the 'best' approach to learning; they have established the system and through their international accreditation patterns they have the power to force the world into their 'better' mould. The rigid linear-analytical and individualistic approach to ad-

17 T. Ziolkowski, 'The Ph.D. Squid', *American Scholar*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 1990, 177-195.

18 S.P. Ango, 'Lessons for Effective Christian Education in Golmo: An African Traditional Approach to Teaching and Learning', *Christian Education Journal*, Series 3, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2007, 17-33.

19 L.W. Caldwell, 'Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context', *Journal of Asian Mission*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1999, 21-43; P.W.H. Shaw, 'The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education', *Journal of Asian Mission*, Vol. 8, No. 1-2, 2006, 23-51.

20 C.J. LaRue, 'God's Foolishness', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, New Series Vol. XXI, No. 3, 2000, 283-286.

21 Ziolkowski, 'The Ph.D. Squid', 193.

22 K.L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Seventh Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers) (Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago, 2007).

23 Shaw, 'The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education'.

vanced research communicates a hierarchical imperialistic—even racist—understanding of education.

- A 'real' scholar thinks as a white western male. Obtaining a doctoral degree is the reward for becoming like a white, western, male. In the process of higher education non-western emerging leaders are trained to answer questions that nobody in their context is asking, or to answer questions using thought processes which people in their context find unconvincing. Non-westerners and women are trained to learn and then teach in patterns which are inappropriate to their culturally or gender-preferred learning style. Is part of the reason for the well-known 'brain drain' by non-westerners from the non-western world that they are not just 'wiser and more intelligent' after their studies, but are now cultural misfits in their homeland?
- Christian leaders should engage in mindless submission to authority in order to be accepted into positions of power and respect. Our bondage to a pre-determined shape of higher level study rewards those with a predisposition to conform and penalises genuine creativity,²⁴ when one of the greatest needs the church faces today is the development and nurture of creative and visionary

leadership.²⁵

- The final measure of accomplishment is not the quality of the content but the shape of the minutiae. This is reflected in the petty perfectionism which requires so much time to be wasted on focusing on the trivialities of thesis format.
- In Christian higher education it is more essential that we imitate and satisfy the secular world than it is to provide a witness to the world by showing a better way of practising fundamental Christian values of stewardship of time and money.

'The medium is the message.'

The most powerful formative lessons learned in any institution are those communicated not through the direct instruction given but through the shape of the leadership and structures nurtured by the institution. And much of what takes place through the current medium of higher theological education is counterproductive for meeting the needs of the church in the non-western world.

IV What is Higher Theological Education Trying to Accomplish?

Increasingly, higher education accrediting bodies are seeking quality assurance based on 'fitness for purpose'²⁶ rather than strict adherence to a standardised pattern. A consequence of this is that the issue for doctoral competence should not be whether candidates can complete a set of standard-

ised tasks, but whether the purpose of doctoral study has been achieved.

Essentially there are two goals for higher education: First, expanding the horizons of scholarship; and then, ensuring a well-educated cadre of informed teachers for emerging generations of students.

1. Scholarship

No one questions the call for quality Christian scholarship. Continuing new contributions to knowledge and understanding are desperately needed, and theological reflection should be at the forefront of how contemporary world issues are addressed. There is also no question that the classic approach to higher level research makes a significant contribution, especially within narrow bands of research.

However, what needs to be appreciated is that the linear, specific, analytic, and hypothesis-driven form of research rarely sees either the big picture that comes from more holistic and multidisciplinary studies, or that the individualistic and competitive approach to study creates graduates who experience difficulty seeing beyond their own career agendas to the broader needs of the kingdom of God. If the church is serious about developing leaders characterised by genuine reflective wisdom and kingdom-mindedness there needs to be far greater diversity in the options available for higher study—both in terms of content and methodology.

2. Teachers

Higher degrees are a form of certification for teaching: accrediting agencies expect faculty to have significantly higher qualifications than the students

they are teaching. 'You can't give what you haven't got' (a well-known Arabic saying) is the basis for this expectation. While this statement is generally true, the converse is certainly not necessarily so. Simply knowing material does not necessarily mean that a person can teach.

Most of us have experienced instructors at tertiary level who are a boring tribulation to their students, showing little or no teaching competence. Often the real interest of faculty is their own research and they teach under duress rather than from pleasure and commitment. Faculty contracts often reinforce this pattern: they state expectations for faculty to write and publish extensively—and as the basis for promotion—but rarely mention the need for faculty to seek excellence in instructional methodology.

Far too many faculty have never either attended a seminar on educational theory and practice or taken time to understand how best to nurture and enhance adult learning. The end result is instructors who teach as they have learned, with a strong predilection for a combination of lecture input and papers as student output that is linear, specific, analytic, abstract, and often with little relevance to the lives of the students.

If the church is serious about giving meaning to higher level theological education as a basis for developing cadres of quality teachers, then there needs to be a greater emphasis on excellence in instructional skill to match the expectation of reflective excellence.

²⁴ F. Cano-Garcia & E.H. Hughes, 'Learning and Thinking Styles: An Analysis of their Interrelationship and Influence on Academic Achievement', *Educational Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2000), 413-427; R.J. Wlodkowski & M.B. Ginsberg, *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 277.

²⁵ Shaw, 'The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education', 37.

²⁶ EUA Bologna Handbook.

V 'New Treasures with the Old': Suggestions for Ways Ahead

I do not want the academy to reject outright the traditional linear, specific, analytic, hypothesis-driven, and individualistic-competitive approach to theological reflection. The theological world has benefited enormously from the model and can continue to do so. However, if the church is to move beyond mere rhetoric about globalising theological education serious attention needs to be paid to the current hegemony of white western male patterns of research. A far broader range of options needs to be made available in terms of both content and methodology.

Quality graduates at senior masters and doctoral level should be able to demonstrate both a high level of mastery of the field *and* teaching competence. However, it may be that alternative approaches will prove equal to, or even better than, thesis-writing for demonstrating competency in these two areas. I will suggest six possible alternatives. While many schools are already incorporating elements of some of these suggestions into their programs, I encourage these *in and of themselves* to be acceptable in lieu of the thesis.

1. Multidisciplinary research built on mind-mapping

Rather than requiring a student to focus in depth on a narrow field, opportunity and encouragement should be given to develop broad-stroke multidisciplinary study based on the complex intertwining that emerges from mind-

maps. This arises from the concern expressed by Mark Taylor:²⁷

[The current] university model has led to separation where there ought to be collaboration and to ever-increasing specialization.... [As] departments fragment, research and publication become more and more about less and less. Each academic becomes the trustee not of a branch of the sciences, but of limited knowledge that all too often is irrelevant for genuinely important problems.

Contemporary technology has made extensive cross-referencing for meaning-making a far easier process than in the past, as it guides the reader through the complex intertwining of thought involved in broad interdisciplinary research. The result may provide little solution and clear result, and so may not satisfy many who have studied in classic Aristotelian categories. However, my experience of reading non-linear work written by non-western students is that, while it may take more patience to understand the analogical patterns of thinking, a new level of dynamic insight may result. This is particularly so in the field of theology, in which pointing out mystery and complexity without demanding immediate resolution may be just as important as explaining and predicting.²⁸

27 M.C. Taylor, 'End the University as we Know it', *New York Times*, April 27 (2009), A23.

28 M. Enns, "Now I Know in Part": Holistic and Analytic Reasoning and their Contribution to Fuller Knowing in Theological Education', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 29, No. 3, (2005), 251-269.

2. Action research

While the sterile objectivity and theoretical speculation praised by rationalist philosophy has lost some of its credibility in the post-modern world, it still tends to dominate the *shape* of thesis-writing, even among those who pay lip-service to the demise of modernism. But there may be greater significance for the church if the emphasis on 'reflective practice' is more on the practice than on the reflection, and the basis of assessment is the student's ability to lead a church reflectively in evangelism, the pursuit of justice, discipleship and spiritual growth, rather than the product of solitary library research.²⁹ Andrew Kirk has reinforced the potential of this:

It is now a commonplace of much theological endeavour in the church of the global South that the verification of genuine theology is determined not so much by criteria formulated within the parameters of the academic community, as by its ability to liberate people for effective involvement in society. If it does not have this effect, it is considered an alienated and alienating force.³⁰

Over the past 30 years the challenges embedded in the work of Paulo Freire³¹ have gained ground in secular

higher education, and 'action research' has become an increasingly credible alternative to the traditional 'scientific' model. The foundation of action research is the conviction that significant social knowledge seeks not merely to reflect on an action from afar but seeks to both transform and be transformed by well-informed action in practice. The process involves simultaneous

[A]ction and inquiry [in] a disciplined leadership practice that increases the wider effectiveness of our actions. Such action helps individuals, teams, organizations become more capable of self-transformation and thus more creative, more aware, more just and more sustainable.³²

In light of the pressing need for the church to move from orthodoxy to orthopraxis, comparable opportunities for reflection in action should be affirmed and encouraged in higher theological education.

To take this one stage further, it may be possible for a person to be granted an advanced masters or even a doctoral degree by publishing one or more reflective articles that both document action and challenge the church—perhaps accompanied by evidence of a major contribution to the life of the church and extensive oral examination. The end result may benefit the reflective life of the church much more than many successful senior academic theses.

29 R.J. Priest, 'Christian Theology, Sin, and Anthropology', in W. Adams & F. Salomone (Eds.), *Anthropology and Theology: God, Icons, and God-talk* (pp. 59-75) (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000).

30 J.A. Kirk, 'Re-envisioning the Theological Curriculum as if the *Missio Dei* Mattered', *Common Ground Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 23-40.

31 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by M.B. Ramos (London: Penguin, 1970).

32 W. Torbert & Associates, *Action Inquiry: The Secret of Timely and Transforming Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2004). Cf. the emancipatory learning model of M. Hammond & R. Collins, *Self-directed Learning: Critical Practice* (London: Nichols, 1991).

3. Writing for the church

Even in programs of study that purport to be ministry-oriented, few theses or dissertations are seen by the church or considered meaningful to the church. Frankly, they are boring and nobody *wants* to read them! Too often the seminary seems to exist for itself or (worse) to impress the broader secular academy. If the seminary genuinely exists for the church in its missional calling to the world, there needs to be a greater emphasis on projects that are meaningful for the church!

Think of John Stott, Ajith Fernando, Ravi Zacharias, Colin Chapman, and Eugene Peterson: these are some of the world's most influential evangelical thinkers, but they (among others) have never completed a formal doctoral degree. How much more valuable is the written work of these scholars to the reflective practice of the church than the vast majority of dissertations that have been written! May it be possible for the doctoral project of an evangelical leader to be writing and publishing a book that is theologically significant and connected to the life of the church? This would benefit the church in the non-western world much more than theses that are read by so few.

An allied contemporary approach is advocated by Taylor.³³ Observing the dramatic decline in the number of dissertations converted into books and the dismal sales of those that are printed, Taylor asserts that the traditional dissertation is obsolete. Instead, higher education should embrace contemporary technology and encourage students to develop analytic treat-

ments in modern technological formats (hypertext and web sites, films and videos) that are more likely to carry meaning among emerging generations of thinkers.

4. Passionate writing

A holistic understanding of human personality is essential to biblical anthropology. Effective learning also requires interconnection between the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions.³⁴ Such interconnection is an essential element in the thinking and learning patterns of women in general and of scholars from most non-western contexts. Males tend to have difficulty articulating their emotions³⁵ and it is natural for them to seek the safety of rationalistic approaches to learning. However, to force the same approaches on women and non-westerners is an act of gender discrimination and cultural imperialism.

Affirming the affective dimension in reflection and writing must inevitably bring positive results. A person's intelligence quotient (IQ) contributes at best about 20% to life success: Of far greater significance is one's emotional intelligence (EQ), measuring factors like emotional stability, social skills, positive attitudes, and self-motivation.³⁶ Indeed, if material is worth

34 P. W. H. Shaw, 'Multi-dimensional Learning in Ministerial Training,' *International Congregational Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2006, 53-63.

35 D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 1995), 54; M. Gurian & P. Henley, *Boys and Girls Learn Differently! A Guide for Teachers and Parents* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 29-32.

36 Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*; P. Salovey & J.D. Mayer, 'Emotional intelligence', *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, Vol. 9

studying to the level of depth demanded in doctoral study, it is worth getting passionate about. Is a lack of emotion a sign of academic superiority, or a sign of imbalance in the human personality?

If we are serious about building a cadre of competent scholar-teachers then we must take seriously the need to move beyond the current commitment to sterile rationalism and see as imperative the embrace and nurture of the affective dimension of learning.

5. Relational learning

The solitary and isolated study needed to complete the doctoral dissertation reflects the individualistic character of western society, but is uncomfortable and inappropriate in more collectivist cultures.³⁷ Foundational to good teaching is the quality of relationship between teacher and student. People with high emotional intelligence (who make good teachers) tend to prefer relational learning methods that are frequently underemphasised or ignored in the research/dissertation approach of higher-level studies. So does the current approach applaud people who are prone to be bad teachers or social misfits?

At the very least, in advanced studies, a far greater emphasis needs to be

placed on the learning community. Ziolkowski observed that

all the studies have shown that few factors affect rapid completion of the Ph.D. as powerfully as a close and encouraging relationship between student and adviser—a relationship that thrives much less easily in the lonely 'library disciplines' than in the more convivial laboratory sciences.³⁸

If this is true in western, male contexts, how much more significant is the need for supervisor and peer support and encouragement with women and non-westerners.

The current emphasis in higher theological education on objective, individualistic learning is rooted in a theologically faulty epistemology. When the Bible speaks of 'knowing' it is not speaking of some sort of objective knowledge, but of a relationship.³⁹ 'To know' in the Scriptures is to have relationship—a relationship between God and a person, between God and the community, between person and person.⁴⁰ This is a knowing relationship that finds its source in God's self-revelation to humanity.⁴¹ It is not a

38 Ziolkowski, 'The Ph.D. Squid', 192.

39 Shaw, 'Multi-dimensional Learning'; N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 239.

40 D.E. Miller, *Story and Context: An Introduction to Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987), 271.

41 T. Gillespie, 'What is "Theological" about Theological Education?' *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1993), 55-63; R. Banks, *Re-envisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, IL: Eerdmans, 1999), 63.

33 Taylor, 'End the University as we Know it.'

matter of *us* discovering truth, but of *us* coming to know *only as we are already known*.⁴² Theology is relational, not just cognitive.⁴³

In light of the fundamentally relational character of theological knowledge, it may be possible to embrace a more radical but culturally-sensitive approach to advanced level theological education by enabling two or more scholars to collaborate on a major project. Certainly, the hidden curriculum of affirming synergetic learning holds great potential, developing leaders who have experienced and modelled team work through learning together. Monitoring such joint projects can be notoriously difficult, but surely a fair assessment of the competence of each team member is possible through the careful documentation of the contributions of team members and extensive oral examination.

Another approach that affirms relational learning would be to remove the thesis requirement completely, and instead require candidates to lead a series of substantial seminars, each seminar accompanied by a detailed seminar paper. This approach would affirm the relational predilection of many women and non-westerners, while ensuring competence in both scholarship and instructional skill.⁴⁴ Some institutions have embraced this approach at the MA level, but it could be extended to the granting of advanced masters'

and doctoral degrees for innovative and original instructors.

6. Contextualised methodology

Much is written and discussed in the name of 'contextualised theology', and the insights gained are invaluable, but the reality is that the *methodology and shape* used in most 'contextualised theology' continues to be thoroughly western. Genuine contextualised theology will not simply discuss contextual issues, but will use contextual methods of argument. Aristotelian logic has become the predominant shape of white western argument, and it is consequently quite reasonable for western scholars to engage in theological reflection through this shape.

However, this is only one form of reflection and argument. In many other societies the dominant shape of persuasive discourse is through narrative, poetry, epic, and proverb (all of these find strong precedent in the Scriptures). The theological world could benefit as it affirms other methods of discourse alongside westernised forms of communication in theological reflection.

African scholars like John Mbiti and Kwame Bediako are remarkable in the powerful way in which they communicate profound theological ideas through narrative. I have on occasion challenged Middle Eastern scholars to consider the primary approaches to meaningful communication in their own local context, and to communicate 'contextualised ideas' in 'contextualised forms' such as poetry, proverb, and epic. Generally the response has been, '... but this would never be accepted or read beyond our own community!'

Could scholars be acknowledged as scholars for doing contextualised theology in both content and form? What would be the response of the academy to a Persian who offers an epic theological poem for his ThD, or a Nigerian who discusses profound theological thought through an extended tribal narrative, or an Arab who communicates through an extended text that intertwines ideas with proverbs and passionate rhetoric? Certainly the worldwide community of faith would be enriched by such.

VI The Courage to Challenge

Almost twenty years ago Paul Stevens lamented that, despite the rhetoric, in reality

[T]he current practice of globalization tends to work against contextualization. Instead of mutual sharing and mutual learning there is usually wholesale, uncritical importing and exporting of the Western model. In other words, globalization has become the universalization of the

Western model with a minimum of contextualization.⁴⁵

Evidence points to the future centre of God's work worldwide lying not in the West but in the rapidly-growing Church of the South and the East. The time has come for the global non-western church to recognise the strength of its holistic and relational educational traditions for the development of quality theological leaders.

The main thing preventing significant creative change is the courage to challenge the white western male hegemony of the academy and to affirm the possibility of alternative methods in higher theological education. Given the growing strength of the church in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the issue is no longer whether methodological change will take place, but who will step out and do it.

⁴² 1 Cor 13:12. Cf. P.J. Palmer, *To Know as we are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983).

⁴³ A. McGrath, *The Future of Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 139.

⁴⁴ Cf. R.S. Barth, *Learning by Heart* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 130-134.

⁴⁵ R. P. Stevens, 'Marketing the Faith: A Reflection on the Importing and Exporting of Western Theological Education', *Crux*, Vol. XXVIII, (2 June 1992), 6-18.

Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Michael W. Campbell
Alister McGrath, Carol Stream
*C. S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius,
Reluctant Prophet*

Reviewed by J. Scott Horrell
D. A. Carson
*Jesus the Son of God: A Christological
Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes
Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed*

Reviewed by Nicholas G. Piotrowski
Graeme Goldsworthy
*Christ-Centered Biblical Theology:
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Principles*

Reviewed by Benjamin Hegeman
Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton and Bill
Nikides (eds.)
*Chrislam: How Missionaries are
Promoting an Islamized Gospel*

Book Reviews

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**C. S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric
Genius, Reluctant Prophet**

Alister McGrath,

Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House
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Many pastors are familiar with C. S. Lewis' famous apologetic work *Mere Christianity*. As a child, I enjoyed his Narnia books, which my teachers read to us in class. Later, during a church youth backpacking trip, I was surprised when some of my 'kids' discussed his *Mere Christianity*, which convinced me

of his far-reaching influence within Evangelicalism. McGrath argues that Lewis's influence is, in large, partly due to 'a vision of the Christian faith that ... [was] found to be intellectually robust, imaginatively compelling, and ethically fertile' (373).

Alister McGrath divides up his compelling biography of Lewis into five parts: the prelude of his early life (chapters 1-3), his life as an Oxford don (chapters 4-10), the world of Narnia (chapters 11, 12), his years at Cambridge (chapters 13, 14), and, finally, some reflections on his legacy (chapter 15). His book contains a revisionist's take on his life that significantly updates previous biographies, in addition to challenging some long-established notions about his life. McGrath, unlike many previous biographers who never knew Lewis, based his work upon Lewis's writings.

McGrath presents the many challenges that Lewis went through, especially during his early life. Challenges, such as the loss of his mother and an increas-

ingly distant relationship with his father, caused him to question the meaning of life. He ultimately became an atheist. Readers will enjoy the detailed narrative of Lewis's conversion that includes a significant revision of the chronology of when and how this happened, based upon extant sources (131-159). Early on, Lewis dreamed of being a poet; but when no opportunities arose, he continued his studies at Oxford. He ultimately won a 'first place' standing in three areas known as a 'triple crown'—a rare honour. His failure as a poet allowed him to develop the ability to write prose with a poetic vision (108).

Lewis rose to fame largely as a result of a series of war talks that later became the book, *Mere Christianity*. His rise to popular acclaim placed him 'on the margins of academic culture' (247), and he was turned down for advancement within Oxford because his peers felt that such popular writing was not truly worthy of an academic. Even J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis's close friend, who played a significant role in leading Lewis to Christ (146-151), later resented the fact that Lewis dedicated *The Screwtape Letters* to him as Tolkien viewed the book as a lightweight work (217) and later viewed his Narnia works as shallow (266). Despite this, Tolkien played an influential role in helping Lewis obtain a prestigious Cambridge position. Lewis held Tolkien in high regard and recommended Tolkien to receive the 1961 Nobel Prize in Literature (352). This complex relationship, symbolized by Lewis and Tolkien, led a group of Christian intellectuals known as the Inklings to model them and critique their ideas and writing.

Lewis shifted from apologetics to fiction after World War II (254). He saw 'imagination as the primary means by which an individual is brought to a point

of giving serious rational attention to the Christian faith' (174). This, in turn, led to the Ransom Trilogy (233-238) and later the Narnia series (263-305). '*The Chronicles of Narnia*', suggests McGrath, 'resonate strongly with the basic human intuition that our own story is part of something grander which, once grasped, allows us to see our situation in a new and more meaningful way' (279). Now recognized as one of the best works of children's literature, this book served a purpose: '*The Chronicles of Narnia* have a far greater scope and reach, using an imaginatively transposed version of the Christian narrative to enable its readers to understand and cope with the ambiguities and challenges of the life of faith' (282).

If you have ever wanted to know more about C. S. Lewis, then this is the book for you. Pastors will appreciate how Lewis struggled to take complex theological ideas and translate them into the vernacular (208). Clergy, like authors, need to know their audience. I hope that all Christians will be challenged by reading this biography, of the continued need to share the reasonableness of Christianity with a secular world.

ERT (2014) 38:3, 282-284

**Jesus the Son of God:
A Christological Title Often
Overlooked, Sometimes
Misunderstood, and Currently
Disputed**

D. A. Carson

Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway, 2012

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index

*Reviewed by J. Scott Horrell, Dallas
Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, USA*

Respected New Testament scholar, D. A. Carson writes a short, accessible work on the phrase, 'Son of God', first in its broad biblical usage, then in two central New Testament passages, and finally in its Christological importance in Muslim translation contexts. Research professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and president of the Gospel Coalition, Carson has written or edited some 60 books. The particular concern of *Jesus the Son of God* is the 'hiatus between careful exegesis and doctrinal formulations' (11) or, more exactly, how careful biblical exegesis 'rightly leads to Christian confessionalism' and 'fosters clear thinking' in the divine familial language translation debate (12).

Chapter One provides an overview of sonship terminology. In the Semitic world a father determined a son's identity not only biologically but also functionally: the son followed in his father's way, that is, a person's identity passed from father to son—and not vice-versa. Clearly, too, sonship language was often metaphorical as in 'sons of Belial' or 'sons of the kingdom'. The phrase 'son[s] of God' refers to a diversity of beings. God is father to angels, Adam,

all humanity, the nation of Israel, David's son(s), and God's New Testament covenantal people.

Carson then summarizes aspects of the Christological 'Son of God': Jesus is the promised Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:13–16; Is. 9:6–7); he serves as the embodiment of true Israel; and to Jesus 'the Son' is ascribed divine status including pre-existence. A host of Sonship passages informs the title such that in the highest sense Jesus 'is the Son of God from eternity, simultaneously distinguishable from his heavenly Father yet one with him' (41).

Chapter Two unfolds the meaning of the title 'Son of God' by centering on only two passages, Hebrews 1 and John 5:16–30. In Hebrews 1, Carson demonstrates that the writer gathers various messianic texts in a chorus that declares not only that the Davidic Son is greater than the angels but that (as the prologue announces) 'he is *also* the Son of God by virtue of his preexistence and unqualified divine status' (60). Leaning on his previous work in *The Gospel according to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), Carson observes that in John 5 Jesus assumes the prerogatives of God yet insists that he is uniquely subordinate to the Father. That is, Jesus claims 'coextensive action with the Father' (67) and that he has life in himself similar to and via the Father.

In the final chapter, Carson addresses the controversial translation of divine familial language. He does not presume to resolve all the issues but he does set forth several observations. (1) Not all uses of 'Son of God' are the same. (2) Biblical trajectories are important if we are to understand how 'Son of God' commonly works. (3) The relationship between exegesis of 'Son of God' passages and the categories of systematic theology is not a simple one. And (4)

'the "eternal generation of the Son" is especially convoluted territory' (80). Carson cites at length L. Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* to note the exegetical fragility of traditional systematic defence of eternal generation—a doctrine nevertheless that Carson affirms as a *theological* deduction from John 5.

It is of interest to consider how these issues relate to biblical translation, especially in a Muslim context. There are several ways. First, while certain sonship expressions in the Bible might be colloquially translated, the Christological phrase, 'Son of God', is multilayered and theologically laden, therefore best translated directly (with explanatory notes).

Second, titles such as 'Messiah' are not adequate substitutes for 'Son of God'. Admitting that the Synoptic Gospels vary in such use, Carson argues that we must recognize different theological agendas of each author yet also take into account the trajectory of the David-king/son of God motif in all the canon. '(I)t is one thing to observe diversity found in Scripture and preserve it in our translations, and another thing to appeal to the diversity in Scripture in order to eliminate some of it. ...The result of the logic being deployed is a systematically unfaithful translation' (97).

Third, Carson finds the 'new translations' 'a wee bit slippery' (99) and unduly pragmatic. He urges consistent renderings that accurately reflect 'Son' and 'Father'. The biological meanings inherent in Father-Son language reflect more than social relationship; rather also Jesus's ontological identity as both God and man. The greatest Muslim offence, Carson argues, derives not from misunderstood biblical expressions but what has been understood and rejected. Fourth, Carson suspects the new

translations are 'an undisciplined form of reader-response theory' (102), such that outside interpretations trump the biblical author's intent. He refers back to John 5:16–30 to insist that no language or culture is equipped to understand Jesus's astounding testimony as the Son of the Father. Translation must not domesticate Scripture, but instead allow it to challenge cultural perception. The 'distinguishable uses of "Son of God" can be used side by side, *held together by nothing more than the expression itself*, with the result that the entire conception of "Son of God" is enriched' (105, italics his).

As might be expected in a short work like *Jesus the Son of God*, Carson picks and chooses his issues—a method that streamlines his thoughts on the one side but may frustrate those desiring greater ballast of argument. The panorama of sonship passages in the first chapter gives adequate backdrop to two deeper studies in Hebrews 1 and John 5. These two chapters serve to frame, if only partially, the final chapter's excursion into the world of Bible translation in Muslim contexts. The author has remarkable ability to dissect issues with exegetical and theological clarity, thus most readers will forgive him for occasional scolding or pontification.

Although *Jesus the Son of God* was written before the WEA independent Bible Translation Review Panel's Report (April 26, 2013), Carson's suggestions appear consonant with the committee's recommendations regarding Wycliffe/SIL's translation policy. The Report concerns itself significantly with the 'wee bit slippery' ambiguity in the 2012 Wycliffe/SIL statement by recommending various levels of auditing of divine familial language translation (levels partially already in place). Yet Carson recognizes like the review

panel that there is no silver bullet for every instance of 'Son of God' in every language. He sees as well, however, that direct translation safeguards the faith. Paratextual explanations can clarify and defuse objections.

In the end, this is an extraordinary gem for those desiring familiarity with the title 'Son of God' and its centrality to apostolic faith. Indeed, it is the Father-Son language more than any other that is the bridge into full Trinitarian confession.

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**Christ-Centered Biblical Theology:
Hermeneutical Foundations and
Principles**

Graeme Goldsworthy

Downers Grove, USA: IVP Academic,
2012

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Pb., pp 251, bibliog., indices, illus.

*Reviewed by Nicholas G. Piotrowski,
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Graeme Goldsworthy—former lecturer in Old Testament, biblical theology and hermeneutics at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia—has been a mainstay in evangelical discussions of biblical theology since the publication of his *Gospel and Kingdom* in 1981. In that seminal work he lays out a tripartite structure to redemptive history that gives orientation to the biblical-theological process: the kingdom revealed in (1) Israel's History, (2) Prophecy, and (3) Jesus Christ (the contours of Eden serving as the essential theological outline for all). Subsequent works have explored this structure and employed it in interpretation (see especially his 1991 volume, *According to Plan*). Now

this latest contribution to the discipline comprises his most thorough attempt 'to establish a valid rationale for [this] approach to biblical theology' (23) and to publically credit the scholars from whom he learned it, especially Donald Robinson.

The first five chapters comprise a lengthy introduction that addresses the necessity of biblical theology, evangelical definitions and presuppositions, approaches others have taken, and Goldsworthy's own thesis. Chapters 6–8 make up the heart of the book where his redemptive historical schema is described and defended at length. To Goldsworthy the structure of redemptive history is not a preconceived paradigm placed upon the Scriptures simply as an organizing technique, but emerges from the pages of the Bible itself. Internal evidence shows 'what makes one epoch distinct from the others, but also how they relate' (111). According to Goldsworthy that evidence points to a three-stage schema. While Genesis 1–11 theologically frames the entire canon, salvation history begins in earnest with Abraham. God's promises in Genesis 12, 15 and 17 then become the touchstone for understanding *the rest of redemptive history*. The narratological development of how God brings his promises to Abraham and his descendants to pass comprises the first stage. It reaches its climax when all of God's promises to Abraham are fulfilled in 1 Kings 10. There Israel possesses its largest territory under the peaceful reign of the son of David, God is dwelling with his people in the Jerusalem temple, and the nations are coming to be blessed by Solomon's wisdom. Thus, there is an unbroken line between Abraham and David/Solomon that creates the backbone of God's redemptive purposes. Both the Mosaic covenant and the Davidic covenant are

seen as important developments *within this larger outworking of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant*. (Here Goldsworthy challenges Vos and Clowney whose Moses-to-Christ epoch is too long and 'tends to overshadow this redemptive zenith' [132]. On this Abraham-Moses-David relationship, see also O. Palmer Robertson's *The Christ of the Covenants*.) Starting with 1 Kings 11, however, all the covenantal accomplishments of the first stage are run in reverse as the nation slides towards exile. But '[t]he matrix of revelation is clearly indicated by the way the later writers and theological commentators in Israel recall the past' (148). This is the second stage where the prophets repaint the *same* paradigm in eschatological colours. They forecast a day when the glories of David/Solomon's kingdom will be eclipsed by a greater redemptive historical climax: the arrival of the eschatological Eden—all under the auspices of the Abrahamic covenant. Finally, in the third stage, 'the New Testament writers bear testimony to the same pattern or matrix of revelation in the course of their exposition of the fulfilment of the promises of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ' (152). Drawing most of his evidence from Acts, Goldsworthy provides examples of how New Testament authors thought of redemptive history in terms of Abraham-David-Christ. The incarnation, death, resurrection, outpouring of the Spirit and coming parousia are the already-not yet redemptive historical climax that David/Solomon's kingdom foreshadowed and the Latter Prophets anticipated. Now the creation only awaits the full return to Eden in once-and-for-all fulfilment of the promises to Abraham.

The payoff comes in the schema's ability to guide what Goldsworthy calls 'macrotypology', where entire stages of revela-

tion are understood to be typological. In his own words, '[r]ather than following Greidanus's approach in making typology one of a number of "roads" from Old to New Testament, I would propose an understanding of typology that embraces all of his valid distinctions and shows the underlying unity that exists between them. This lays bare the underlying structure or matrix of Scripture that generates the variety of connections. If we understand the substructure, we have a comprehensive basis for tracing the way that every text in the Old Testament is a testimony of Christ' (189).

Chapter 10 then provides a few examples from Robinson's own work of the fruitfulness of this approach. And chapter 11 concludes the book with some practical advice for using the schema in exploring biblical theological themes and situating any text in its overall canonical context.

The value of Goldsworthy's work can be seen on many levels. I will comment on only two. For one, the recognition of 1 Kings 8–10 as the Old Testament's high-water mark is critical. Seeing all before leading up to this point, and all after descending from it, is crucial for situating any pericope within the larger biblical narrative. And, of course, he is also right to emphasize the ultimate climax in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Secondly, Goldsworthy makes an honest (and in my opinion largely successful) attempt to legitimately and fruitfully establish the Psalms and wisdom literature as integral parts of redemptive history. The Psalms presuppose the schema and wisdom is part and parcel of Israel's crowning moment: when God's rule on the earth is mediated through his king, Solomon the son of David.

Yet, while it is clear that I am largely

convinced of Goldsworthy's kingdom paradigm, less sympathetic readers might quibble over the method by which he comes to his conclusions. He simply cites passages and explains the connections between them. Fair enough. But what of the passages Goldsworthy does not address? In this discussion there are not simply a few *loci classici* over which exegetes fight. Rather, everyone seems to have their own go-to texts in making their arguments. For example, in discerning whether the New Testament's authors used this three-stage schema, why should Acts be privileged? It seems that in Galatians Paul is using an Abraham-Moses-Christ (i.e. David is not in the middle) pattern for making his case. I suppose it depends on who is answering what question when.

This is really no critique of the book. Goldsworthy can do only so much in a finite number of pages. All this simply underscores the difficult challenge that biblical theology is. How high above the text should we fly? Where should we swoop in for closer examination? Nevertheless, I do think a true centre can be found and a legitimate structure discerned. Surely the path to such discoveries leads not only through this book but the entire Goldsworthy corpus. Perhaps, additionally, the works of Gerhard Hasel can also help. His concern for the 'integrity of each individual witness' (103) suggests that the theology of any given book stands between a text and its place in the fullness of the canon, or even—as Goldsworthy would have it—in its particular redemptive historical stratum. Thus, the theology of any given book would indicate which texts deserve pride of place, particularly in terms of their contribution to a given book's theology.

This minor limitation notwithstanding, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology* will, I

predict, have a long shelf life and prove fruitful for biblical theologians, mid-course seminarians and hermeneutics teachers. Throughout its pages Goldsworthy pays homage to Robinson; with each publication we all increasingly owe the same debt of gratitude to 'Goldy'.

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Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel

Edited by Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton and Bill Nikides

Garden Grove Ca: i2 Ministries Publications, 2011
ISBN: 978-0984022902
Pb., pp 344

Reviewed by Benjamin Hegeman, Baatonou Language Bible College in West Africa

(This is a slightly abbreviated version of a review previously published in *Seedbed*, December 2011)

When doves love they quarrel; when wolves hate, they flatter. (Martin Luther)

Who has not heard the thunder rumbling on the missions-to-Muslims fronts? Well, latch down for the storm. Choose your climate zone but *Chrislam* is written to burst like a tropical hurricane or a cold arctic tempest over Evangelical quarters in North America, who are, according to Jay Smith 'funding the inside movements out of ignorance' (295).

The title *Chrislam* is alarming. It is meant to be. It is designed to be the grand *slam* on the most mercurial missiological movement known in our post-Lausanne era called the 'Inside Movement' (IM) in this text. Nor does the subtitle, 'How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel', leave room for an interrogative debate. This is a multi-authored verdict from the

keyboard of the most troubled judges in the 'historical camp': their book is their collective verdict.

While *Chrislam* is not a 'Whose Who' of the debate, it has succeeded in bringing many strong voices to the Evangelical jury, including many quotes from other authors. There are many other voices I missed, but in a Christian world that now recognises more than 500 Evangelical emerging experts on Islam, listening to 50 leaders in this selected anthology is, frankly, impressive. Nor again was this book about the moderates bridging the middle; for good measure that may yet come.

The tone and the introductory material marshalled by the three editors is very strong drink: Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton and Bill Nikides. Lingel, who is both the i2 Ministries director and a global apologist, contributes two chapters in the book critiquing the Muslim-friendly Bible translations. West African missionary and i2 Ministries curriculum writer Jeff Morton focused three further chapters on the 'dubious missiology' of IM, while Presbyterian minister and i2 Ministries Asian researcher Bill Nikides contributed three additional chapters, chiefly on IM's questionable theological underpinnings. This book is truly an i2 Ministries production.

Following their introductory 'missiological storm warning', Nikides, Morton and Lingel first hold court by presenting three chapters filled with a systematized anthology of prominent IM theological, missiological and translation citations and quotes. This is noble and a helpful abridged anthology. Their desire is to 'be fair and honest with their views' (2). As a reader, you will need to decide if the IM proponents have been quoted adequately in this text or if they could have wished to summarize the editor's

questions in a more favourable light. But fair is fair: the quotes are all selected from published IM-writings. We do well to anticipate their rejoinders.

According to *Chrislam*'s authors, what IMers are doing is, mildly put, extreme missiology; strongly put, syncretism and heresy. The authors do not argue with new believers living as temporary insiders. What horrifies them is the IM theology of keeping new believers inside the very forms of the religion of Islam. You will read the authors' assault on (1) what they see as IM 'mantra' Bible verses used to justify 'remaining in' Islam; (2) what they see as the naïve re-packaging of fourteen-century old anti-Christian Islam into a Jesus-friendly *proto-evangelium*; (3) what they see as disdain for unity within the Body of Christ, which is rich in the Spirit's wisdom of Christian history, and finally, (4) the termidity of replacing eternal titles of God as Father and Son with Muslim-sensitive alternatives.

There is much in this book with which teachable IMers must agonise. That not all concerned detractors will speak to them this undiplomatically will become evident to them over time. They will need much grace to hear most of the author's strong pent-up critique and, 'prove it from the whole of Scripture', questions of what they may have assumed to be the Spirit's brilliant blessings on their creative, never-look-back, IM missiology. That *Chrislam* can register so many biblical critiques, so many theological alarm bells, so many 'why is this not heretical' questions, is ample evidence that the IM can no longer dismiss this storm breaking over their fleet—and, truth be known, if these accusations are not answered satisfactorily, it may well cause a lot of generous churches to cease sending their funds to them.

Will this new i2 Ministries text inspire their IM brothers to willingly admit their errors? Or again, might *Chrislam* cause the regrettable hardening of the arteries in both camps? Will it be cheered by 'historical' colleagues, who agree with the book's authors, as the definitive rebuttal of the IM theology, missiology and the translation issues? Will it join fear-mongering texts on our shelves, suffering from a too damning tone? Or will God allow it to become one of several tools that lead to a profound missiologi-

cal audit on both sides? My prayers go for the last option.

Unmistakably, the honeymoon is over. For two decades, the spokespeople for the creative IM movements have crowed like proud roosters over alleged numerical breakthroughs among Muslims. They do well now to hear this text's theological roar from historical orthodox thinkers and accept that this is one missiological storm within which they would be wise not to duck and hide.

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Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy.* *A Christian Introduction to the Love of Wisdom*

A Faithful Guide to Philosophy is the only British Christian introduction to Philosophy, a book that will be used as a course textbook and by church study groups and individual readers alike. It covers subjects of central importance to the Christian worldview – the relationship between faith and reason, the objective reality or truth, goodness and beauty, the existence and nature of God, the existence of the human soul and of free will, and so on – from a philosophical viewpoint. This is the broadest range of topics covered by any Christian introduction to Philosophy and will be prized by many.

‘*A Faithful Guide to Philosophy* is an extremely well-researched book that is tightly argued, excellent in topic selection, deep in coverage yet readable in style. Williams has done a masterful job of producing a book that is now a must read for Christians who want to explore the intellectual underpinnings of their faith. I highly recommend this delightful volume.’

J.P. Moreland, Biola University

‘Peter S. Williams has a real gift of clarity and communication. He makes the complex accessible and interesting, without distorting the issues.’

Stefan Gustavsson, Credo Academy, Stockholm

Peter S. Williams is Philosopher in Residence at the Damaris Trust

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