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Dr Thomas Schirmacher, Friedrichstrasse 38, 53111 Bonn, Germany.

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# Editorial

We commence this issue with a classic article by Valdir R. Steuernagel (Brazil) which is reprinted from our January 1986 (Vol 10:1) issue. It is an insightful study of 1 Peter 2:9-10, just as valuable now as it was when originally written, emphasising the missionary role of the church, as 'a spiritual house' to 'go out through the world with the message of Christ.'

It is important to be able to communicate this passion to the people of God, so Perry Shaw (Lebanon) puts us in his debt by discussing an integrated and holistic understanding of theological education. As he points out, allowing theology to shape our pedagogy in theological education will entail beginning with central theological affirmations such as the mission of God, the people of God, and the incarnation; only after this can we investigate their implications for our educational practices.

This throws us back further into the mind of God. So Stewart Bezzant (Australia) helps with his case study of the familiar biblical phrase, 'known by God', as it appears in the work of Jonathan Edwards. He concludes, 'Edwards provides resources ...to reflect on [our] own assumptions and aspirations, and thereby to enrich [our] own scholarly reflection. Edwards starts a conversation that reminds, rebukes and refocuses us, so that we might start everything with God.'

The human factor is important as well. So we can turn with profit to another case study, where Samuel Jayakumar (India) discusses the im-

portance of our self-identity, so necessary for a healthy and ordered life. He examines the forces that shape these identities, well-illustrated from his Indian context; he concludes that 'Christians ... draw their identity from their faith relationship with God. But God does not take away our past; he gives it back to us—we are people forever healed and reconciled.'

Inevitably, thinking along these lines will bring us to the problem of evil, so we present a thorough study of theodicy by Rolf Hille (Germany). Developing a fully biblical answer to classic philosophical and religious traditions, he provides a powerful apologetic based on the sovereignty and grace of God and human responsibility; he concludes with a pastorally sensitive reflection, based on the traditional Christian position: '*Crux probat omnia*—God in Christ is, in terms of dogma and in terms of counselling, the only possible answer to theodicy.'

Economic matters cannot be avoided in our mission for Christ. So in our final article, we turn to a paper by Clive and Clara Beed (Australia), commenting on the view that neither capitalism nor socialism is compatible with biblical theology. Their conclusion is that a reformed Christian-based capitalism is biblical, and even more—there is a responsibility for Christians to make positive contributions in these areas. So this too is part of our comprehensive mission!

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

# **An Exiled Community as a Missionary Community**

## **A Study based on 1 Peter 2:9, 10**

**Valdir R. Steuernagel**

### **I Introduction**

The first letter of Peter is an old friend of mine. I remember the church in which I served as a pastor where I became deeply involved in a series of sermons on the letter. University students with whom I had contact as an itinerant minister are also before my eyes at this very moment. With all of them I shared the challenge of living as Christians in society. In this case it was a capitalist society based on profit and consumption. 1 Peter invited us to understand life as a gift of grace and became prophetic by denouncing a style of living absolutely rooted in the idea of consumption. A pilgrim theology was an exciting challenge to live under God and for others in a dimension of witness and service in love. Why does 1 Peter speak so much to my heart and theology? it may be because the letter is so close to the life and struggle of the church in the challenged and suffering context of Latin America.

1 Peter is in fact a pastoral letter and it has to be understood as such. Christian people who were living in different regions of Asia Minor received this letter as claim for resistance in a context of suffering. They were invited

to remember from where they came, who they were and where they were going. Those Christians were called to affirm their community life but at the same time to go out and share with others, regardless of who they are, this marvellous gift of life.

1 Peter is a beautiful document that expresses the richness and struggles of the life of early Christianity. In an astonishing way the message of the Lord Jesus Christ spread out and penetrated the Greek world, without asking for permission. In a period of 30/40 years after all this began, the empire and the gentile people began to perceive that they had to deal with a new reality called 'Christians'. The letter of 1 Peter reflects this new reality and shows the basic struggle of the Christian communities in their context of life as well as the reaction of the non-Christian, the outsiders, because of this new being in the society.

The different opinions about the authorship of the letter are well known. My personal option would be to credit the authorship of this letter, if not to Peter himself, at least, to the Petrine community whose most well-known representatives are Silvanus and Mark (1 Pet 5:12, 14).

In some ways the Christians had become a big family, whose members are spread out through the Roman Empire. The consequence of this fact is both joy and suffering. Joy because the Christians can experience that they are members of a large family. They are not alone. People in other places are witnessing to the same faith. Suffering because the 'outsiders' are perceiving the presence of this strange family in the middle of their society, and are beginning to react.

William Barclay said that first letter of Peter was the result of the love a pastor had for his people and his desire to help them as they faced difficult times and would have to expect even more problems.<sup>1</sup> We could add that it expresses not only a pastor's love, but also the love of a community looking carefully to other communities in a time of suffering.

The letter is a well-elaborated document that, based on a true apostolic tradition, manifests solidarity with the 'exiles'—Christians in Asia Minor. Such solidarity is evidenced in a call to resistance, reminding them that they were ransomed through Christ. It is also an affirmation of their election, a challenge towards a witness to the outsiders and the necessity of maintaining a strong community life, because this is the time of the end: 'By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God; stand fast in it' (1 Pet 5:12).

---

<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Daily Study Bible; original edition 1958) (The New Daily Bible Study, Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 160.

## II Examining the Text

'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.' (1 Pet 2:9–10).

### 1. The Text in the context

According to the structure of the letter it is possible to perceive that 1 Peter 2:9–10 is exactly at the end of the first segment (1 Pet 1:3–2:10). While in the following segment (1 Pet 2:11–4:11), the author will deal especially with the Christian's life in society as well as life in the Christian community, the former segment had established the basis for that more ethical and pastoral emphasis. Verses 9 and 10 are a kind of link between both sections or in general terms, between the theological and the ethical pastoral accent. The beginning of v.9 expresses again who these *oikos tou theou* are but the end of it says that what they are is a sign of mercy that has to be shared. It is fundamental to declare 'his marvellous light' to the outsiders because it is through this opportunity that they may also experience this mercy and become 'Gods own people'. The manner in which the Christians will express this witness is, in some way, alluded to in the following segment. But the theological basis for doing it was given first.

1 Peter 2:4–10 is the specific pericope at which it is necessary to look carefully because it will help us to understand v.9–10. John Elliott considers it fully appreciated when vv.4–10 are

seen as the 'appropriate climax to the entire initial paraenetic section. For here', according to him,

the exhortation to holiness of living and brotherly love and thought of birth and nourishment from the Divine Word are gathered together and substantiated in a final pericope describing the electedness, holiness, and union of the believing community with the elected Lord.<sup>2</sup>

The central motif of 1 Peter 2:4–10 is the election theme. However, the election has to be understood through Jesus Christ, described as 'living stone', 'rejected by men' but 'chosen and precious in God's sight'. The so-called 'aliens and exiles' are also elected and named 'living stones'. But this is possible just because of 'Him'. Through 'Him' they will worship the one who has elected them. Hence, because of Jesus and through his election as the 'cornerstone' these Christians are considered and proclaimed the elected people of God. The interpretation of vv.9–10 is given through vv.4–5. These verses are, in fact, a basic statement developed in vv.6–8 and vv.9–10. As in vv.6–8 we meet Christ, the elect stone, in vv.9–10 we find the faithful community, the elect race.<sup>3</sup>

The whole pericope of vv.4–10 is strongly dependent on the old Testament even if it is interpreted in a christological perspective. Most scholars agree that the author assumed, at that point, some material from the Jewish

Christian tradition, that was already used in its proper context. Obviously this material was adapted to the letter's goal, namely, to a community the majority of which were gentile Christians. 1 Peter 2:4–10, said Elliott, 'is a particularly graphic illustration of

the manner in which sacred Israelite tradition had been appropriated to affirm the continuity and yet the novelty and unique identity and status of the eschatological people of God'.<sup>4</sup>

According to the purpose of this article, it is necessary to concentrate on vv.9–10 in order to know better this faithful community and elect race.

## 2. 'That you may declare'

It was already seen that 1 Peter 2:9–10 is on a point of transition between the affirmation of God's mercy, and the natural, unavoidable opportunity to share concerning this mercy. The mere existence of the people of God evidences God's mercy to themselves and to the outsiders. What is, in fact, the difference between the Christians—the insiders—and the non-Christians—the outsiders? Is there really such a big difference between them? Yes and no! Yes, the difference is between life and death. The insiders 'have been born anew ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ' (1:3). They 'were ransomed from the futile way inherited from your fathers' (1:18). They were 'built into a spiritual house' through the precious cornerstone (2:5). On the other hand, there is not such a big difference be-

<sup>2</sup> John H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4–10 And The Phrase: basileion ieráteuma* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 199.

<sup>3</sup> Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*, 146.

<sup>4</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 226.



tween insiders and outsiders. Some years, months, maybe days ago they had been together in the same futile situation, 'inherited from your fathers'. The author of the letter reminds his 'beloved' Christian fellows that they lived in the darkness, without mercy, and were not people of God (2:9), like all others who are still outside. The only and big difference is God's mercy. The insiders do not have anything that is intrinsically better in relation to the outsiders, except God's decision in choosing them. However, God's mercy is not exclusive but inclusive. In order to demonstrate it to the outsiders it is so important that the Christians 'declare the wonderful deeds of him' to everyone. Therefore, the point of transition (2:9–10) has to be understood in a missiological perspective.

The author of the letter was really a courageous person. He went directly to the heart of the Old Testament and took the central concept of Israel's self-understanding and transferred it to the members of the communities to which he was addressing his letter: the idea of election. He became even more courageous when he applied all the tradition of being elected to people who are identified as aliens and exiles of the Dispersion (1:1–2:11).

What kind of people were they actually? Were they aliens because, as Christians, they were persecuted and had lost their roots in society? Should the word 'dispersion' be interpreted, as Cullmann said, in a 'Christian meaning: ... in the world Christians are foreigners; their true place is in heaven'?<sup>5</sup> It

is again Elliott who gives much attention to the so-called *paroikos*. His basic point is that the receivers of the letter were not *paroikos* because of their faith. In fact; they had been such before they became Christians. That was their social class. According to Elliott's interpretation it is not possible to find the meaning of *paroikos* by looking at the Church itself or by spiritualizing the concept, but by looking at the social and economic reality of that people at that time. The Christian communities were formed by people who had already been outsiders in a sociological understanding, by virtue of their own social class. The fact that they became Christians made the situation even worse. If they, as strangers, went to the Christian community in order to find a 'home', now they were strangers twice because of their social condition and because of their Christian faith.

The addressees of 1 Peter were people who, as members of a small but increasing Christian community, were being persecuted for the sake of their faith and therefore had become aliens in a society in which most of them were already social outsiders. However, this is not the whole picture. They were not losers. They were winners. Even if they were considered strangers by their neighbours, in fact they had found home in God. Being aliens and exiles in this world can receive a positive evaluation if it is seen from the perspective of the writer who sees in those Christians the real participants of the most important event in history. They were not among those who had rejected the 'cornerstone'; instead of this they were 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people ...' (2:9).

Every one of these concepts is very

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *The New Testament: An Introduction for the General Reader* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 105.

rich in meaning to the Old Testament community. Indeed, the author of 1 Peter is using O.T. symbols in order to describe 'what it means to be church'. Therefore his use of the O.T. is very free. He chooses the concepts according to his understanding and applies them in conformity with his necessity. However, this procedure of the author 'does not play off the elect status of the Christians against Israel's rejection of the Gospel'.<sup>6</sup>

The author rejoices in the opportunity to look at the church of the Dispersion in Asia Minor and says to them that they are:

*A chosen race:* Their poor social condition will not determine their understanding of life anymore, even if they remain poor. They are people of a new race, directly chosen by God. The same God who had once elected Israel (Ex 9:6; Deut 7:6–8; Is. 43:20–21) is now electing these insignificant inhabitants of Asia Minor.

*A Royal priesthood:* Using Exodus 19:6 (LXX) the author is referring to those Christians in a very special way. They are participants of a community of priests that worship God, through Jesus Christ. This royal community is in direct relationship with God, and its existence is completely dependent on Christ.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Donald Senior, C. P., *1 & 2 Peter*, New Testament Message, vol 20 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980), 36-37.

7 Senior was probably right when he said that 'the epistle does not address the question of an ordained priesthood (36). Elliott also went in this direction when he said that 2:4–10 speaks neither for nor against a particular ministry or office in the church. However though the letter knows about different functions in the church

*A holy nation:* This community is characterized as a nation and a holy one. No more a geo-political nation but a nation of exiles of the dispersion. People from different places and statements are all together members of God's nation. And since it is his, it has to be holy: '... but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct' (1:15).

*God's own people:* This is the very reason for the existence of this new race, community of priests and special nation. They exist only because God has chosen them and made them his own people. The O.T. community was familiar with these expressions (Ex 19:6; Deut 7:6–8; Is 43:20,21), but it is a novelty that it was applied to another group people, a very special one, the people of Christ, the chosen cornerstone.

The author was not only courageous—he was moved, touched, excited. By using all this rich terminology he was going towards a climax: those aliens, the Christians, were 'God's own people'. What else could be said? As follows, the author moved his attention to the readers in order to transform them from being passive receivers to being active participants in that new story: 'that you may declare ...'. Such a profound experience and new understanding of life had to be announced.

The community of priests should express their gratitude in worship: 'to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (2:5). But they would also announce their discovery and share their experience with the outsiders, the persecutors included.

---

the idea of a priesthood leads the community in a nonhierarchist understanding of ministry.

The discovery was Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. He was the real and the only reason for all that profound change in history and life. However, by talking about him, they would share a personal experience of being 'ransomed from the futile ways', precisely with the 'precious blood of Christ' (1:18, 19). This is the experience of moving from darkness to the light.<sup>8</sup> From *not being to being* people of God, from being without mercy to living a merciful life.

The terminology used in v. 10 to express God's acceptance of those Christians as his people comes from Hosea, where 'God's relationship with Israel is expressed by a personal experience of rejection and acceptance of a woman and her children'.<sup>9</sup>

Here, according to 1 Peter, some Jews, but especially some gentiles, are accepted by God and transformed into an eschatological community through Jesus Christ. And this has to be announced.

Is it possible to put the nose outside the door, if the Christians are experiencing such a popular persecution and so strong a rejection by both Jews and gentiles? Hostility against the traitors to the imperial and common religions can be smelled in every place. Would it not be prudent to take care of the community itself during this time of difficulties? A case could be made that to answer this question is to touch at the secret of the life of the early Church.

<sup>8</sup> Goppelt pointed out that here we have a continuity from the O.T. Jewish tradition, used to refer to the fact of being called to faith as a move from the darkness to light.

<sup>9</sup> Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (ET, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1993), 151.

1 Peter is not proposing a self-assured strategy. On the contrary, it is a challenge to the communities to go out and to share the gift of life.

In 1 Peter Christians are called to participate in and integrate the social order and to maintain exemplary conduct in society. By so doing the Christians will show that they are people, similar to others, who want to live in society and are concerned about their neighbours. The Christians will be able to do so even in relation to their persecutors, and even if they are misunderstood. In fact, they can do so because they are exiles of the Dispersion; they are free (1:1; 2:16). By being ransomed by Jesus Christ they became free—from themselves and from others. Whether they are accepted or rejected, continue to live or die, they are free. Free to be persecuted, to proclaim the wonderful deeds, to maintain good conduct, to 'honour all men, to love the brotherhood and to fear God' (2:17) in the name of Christ.

### III A Missiological Perspective

That the letter of 1 Peter has an undeniable missiological content has already been seen. At this point the goal will be to summarize the mission perspective in three points. It was Senior, in his commentary, who mentioned the missiological content of the letter:

One of the major contributions of 1 Peter is the robust sense of Christian mission he conveys. Even though these fragile communities are embedded in a hostile environment and suffering abuse, he does not prescribe reaction or caution. The Christians are not to flee the world but to participate in it (2:13).

They are not to condemn or berate the world, but to treat it with respect, even gentleness, all with the hope that in its own time, the world will join the Christians in glorifying God'.<sup>10</sup>

### 1. Mission and identity

In affirming the missiological content of 1 Peter, the writer makes no attempt to hide the tension-filled life of the communities and the temptations to a 'ghettoization'. It is the letter's goal to avoid confinement and to direct the tension towards mission. The author does it by reminding them of the heart of their faith—Jesus Christ, calling them to faithfulness, recalling them to brotherhood and challenging them to mission, because they are the elected people of God. Therefore, the strong accent of the letter regarding the identity of the Christians is not in contradiction with the call to go out. They are in fact very inter-related because there is no mission without identity. The identity given to them by God transforms them into *oikos tou theou*, even if the outsiders call them aliens. As *oikos* they have found a meaning for their life, as well as a place in a brotherhood and a task for the whole life: 'to declare the wonderful deeds of him' (2:9).

### 2. Chosen but not exclusive

There is always a thin line between election and exclusion. An arrogant exclusiveness is almost the shadow of a healthy identity. However, a healthy identity is always an invitation for companionship. The history of Israel or

even of the church could be seen from the point of view of the tension between 'be a blessing to the nations' (Gen. 12:2) and being satisfied with itself and promoting confinement: 'We have Abraham as our father' (Lk. 2:8). This conflict is certainly also experienced by the communities to which 1 Peter was written. Fortunately the letter is a document that helps to get balance between identity and mission: chosen, yes, but not closed to outsiders. Chosen for witness, in word and deed.

Werner Bieder, in his article *Grund und Kraft der Mission nach dem I Petrusbrief*, calls attention to the fact that word and deed are both dimensions of Christian witness.<sup>11</sup>

(a) The ethical aspect is an important part of the Christian witness but neither the only one nor enough in itself.

(b) Christians want to tell the story to those who are still outside, who are living in the same situation in which they formerly lived and from whence they were redeemed. Based on their own experience Christians believe in the conversion from paganism to faith and want to be prepared to give reason for their faith.

### 3. Mission is an exercise of the community

The letter of 1 Peter is a strong community document. In the theological understanding the Christian faith is conceived and articulated in terms of *génos*, *ethnos*, *lâos*, *oikos tou theou*. In the pastoral dimension, the Christians

<sup>11</sup> Werner Bieder, *Grund u. Kraft der Mission nach dem I Petrusbrief*, Theologische Studien. 29 (Zuerich: Evarig. Verlag A. G. Zollikon), 6–9.

are reminded not only about the suffering in other places (5:9) but also that they have to stay together in difficult times (4:8–10). And last but not least, mission is also conceived of as a task to be exercised in a communitary dimension. In word and deed, in joy and suffering, it is the privilege of the community to ‘declare the marvellous deeds of him’ until he comes.<sup>12</sup>

This communitary dimension has already been mentioned. It would be important to discuss the relation between *paroikos*, *oikos tou theou* and the ethical household approach of the letter. At this point our purpose is to detach the corporate from the individual understanding of Christian life, a natural and corporate comprehension of mission from a specialized department-mentality as well as to call attention to the fact that the life of the community itself had a missionary dimension:

‘The love and service that binds the Christians together as God’s household are the most potent witness they can offer a world starved for meaning’.<sup>13</sup>

#### IV Conclusion

The pictures are mixed before my eyes. Chile, Peru, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Pontus, Galatia, Cappodocia ... I feel as though a piece of me were in each place. The struggle for life in the Christian communities in Asia Minor, but also the starving of all the people of that world are brought to me by the

letter of 1 Peter. However, the picture of the ‘favelas’, ‘barreados’ or ‘vilas miseria’ in Latin America is much more fresh before my eyes. The cry of the Christians from the Presbyterian Church in Callqui, Peru, whose six young men were killed by soldiers of the Marines in front of the church, can still be heard. Would it not be the case that 1 Peter helps us to look to Latin American reality also, in order to ask about the Church’s task in society, the identity of the Christian communities and the call to mission? What would be the secret of such a powerful letter that is able to be a sign of hope in spite of its old age? Could we not invite 1 Peter to visit Latin America in order to share its relevant understanding of life with a continent that is thirsty for meaning and hope? What would the author of the letter say to us?

In the north area of Peru called Ayacucho, the evangelical church has been facing serious problems and its life has been threatened. Ayacucho is a ‘Departamento’ occupied by the military because of the presence of the ‘guerrilheiros del Sendero Luminoso’. Firstly the Christians had a privileged period: whoever had a church ID was left free by the military inspections. Many people learned that and went to church; some ‘guerrilheiros’ went too. Hence, when afterwards the military killed some people, ‘guerrilheiros’ or not, sometimes the IDs and those people’s documents were found together. The Church got into difficulties: it was suspect now and began to be persecuted by the military. Then the church began to criticize the ‘guerrilheiros’ and they reacted saying that they would kill believers unless they stopped criticising them. What could the Church do? How

<sup>12</sup> It is important to remark that the strong eschatological expectation is not understood as a motif for indifference or escape from the world as it so often occurred in the history of the Church and in our days.

<sup>13</sup> Senior, *1 & 2 Peter*, 7.

might it exercise ministry? What does it mean to be a witness in such a context? Persecution and suffering are, at least, good words to describe their situation.

In Chile things are quite different. There the evangelical Church has been giving support to the military government during the last ten years. Presently, the economic, political and social situation is so bad that the people are not able to tolerate it anymore. The Catholic Church, perceiving this situation, is beginning to criticize the government. The official reaction refuses the Catholic Church's 'intervention', and is becoming more violent towards the whole society. Should Chile be a kind of Babylon in our days? What does it mean to be a Church with a prophetic role in such a context?

There is no claim for justice without persecution and suffering in a situation of oppression, violence and injustice. We cannot compare, in a simple way, the situation of the church in Pontus, Galatia, Cappodocia, Asia and Bithynia with that in Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Nicaragua ... The suffering is quite different and the reaction against the Christian faith certainly comes from different segments of society, but the principal motif will be the same: witness produces reaction, discipleship calls down persecution, and persecution calls down suffering.

Probably 1 Peter would say to us that suffering is a common point between them and us. Even if the reason and expression of suffering is different, he would assure us that Christian witness produces reaction, discipleship calls down persecution, and persecution, in spite of suffering, is a sign of faithfulness and a reason for joy

because it is an opportunity to share Christ's sufferings.

*Persecution and suffering* are, in fact, symptoms of violence and injustice. However, Christians are not called to flee, but to participate in the world in order to offer a new system of values with a new message. This has to be expressed in the midst of society itself, exercised in the life of the Christian community, as a model and an invitation to be imitated. Thus, the new message will be proclaimed. Jesus Christ, the rejected stone, is the cornerstone to the *hope for the world*. There is hope because of his death and resurrection. There is hope because he will come again. While the Christians are waiting for his coming they are called to plant a seed of hope that may be irrigated with suffering and tears, but will certainly grow, because it was planted in the same soil that first received the blood of Christ. A small plant can be born from that seed, but it will be recognized as God's special bush of hope, as once the Christians in Asia Minor were declared the people of God. Therefore perhaps 1 Peter would say to us that we have to be ready to be small and weak, but strongly rooted in the experience of salvation. The same experience transformed the Christians once in *oikos tou theou*, although they were a persecuted minority.

The reality of being a spiritual house, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, will renew life constantly and challenge the Christian community to go out through the world with the message of Christ, with the hope that everyone in every place will 'offer spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (2:5). This would be the real and final fiesta.

# Holistic and Transformative: Beyond a Typological Approach to Theological Education

Perry Shaw

## I The Typological Approach

One of the most widely referenced texts on theological education is David Kelsey's *Between Athens and Berlin*.<sup>1</sup> The title intentionally alludes to Tertullian's famous quote, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem ... or the Academy with the Church?'<sup>2</sup> For Tertullian the question was either/or: the authoritative teaching of scripture and the teachings of philosophy are incompatible; it is not possible for the church to embrace Greek philosophy, the latter being the major source of sub-Christian heresies. Tertullian's question has always been with those concerned about training leadership for the church of Jesus Christ, and the debate has continued throughout the centuries—most strikingly

in the rivalry between the monastery/seminary and the university.

Kelsey changed the direction of the discussion, seeing the more ecclesial model as reflective of an 'Athens' education in which personal formation is central, as against the 'professional' scholarly emphasis of the university model, epitomized in the Humboldt University of Berlin. In his review of the works of Farley,<sup>3</sup> Hough & Cobb,<sup>4</sup> Stackhouse,<sup>5</sup> and Wood,<sup>6</sup> Kelsey sees all of theological education as somehow coming under one of these two

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<sup>1</sup> David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, in A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translation of the Writings of the Fathers, Down to AD 325* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), Vol. III, 246. (Original work published ca. 220.)

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) and *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Hough & John Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico: Scholars, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Max Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985).

rubrics, and the two as ‘unsynthesizable’. There are inherent limitations to Kelsey’s dichotomistic typology, not least in Kelsey’s apparent assertion that (as one friend described it) ‘you cannot be both godly and a scholar’. Consequently, a number of adaptations has been suggested, perhaps the best known being that suggested by Edgar,<sup>7</sup> in which Jerusalem and Geneva paradigms are given as additional possibilities.

At first glance the typological approaches suggested by Kelsey, Edgar, and others sound very reasonable, and are widely referenced and used. However, I would suggest we need to move beyond this sort of typological understanding of theological education. At the very least we should access these sorts of typologies with great caution.

## II Foundational Problems

There are numerous problems with taking a typological approach to understanding theological education. The first is common to many typologies: the tendency to see the various patterns as discrete entities, oftentimes seeking to force items to fit into distinct elements in the typology. This is not unique to Kelsey: in my own specialization of education it is seen in the attempts to create typologies of learning. The famous cognitive-affective-behavioural typology, for example, while being a helpful corrective to the traditional cognitive focus of education, is nonetheless totally artificial as the elements are inextricably intertwined. Thus also

with Kelsey and Edgar: while perhaps a helpful starting point for discussion the distinctions drawn are artificial.

In Edgar’s lucid article he uses a variety of catch-phrases for each of the suggested paradigms: transforming the individual (classical—Athens); strengthening the church (vocational—Berlin); converting the world (missional—Jerusalem); knowing God (confessional—Geneva). In point of fact a healthy approach to theological education will wish to say, ‘All of the above’. God has created us as whole people and each of these elements is so inextricably linked that to separate them out into discrete components serves only to create an artificial fragmentation that is the commonly-cited bane of higher education.

One paradigm without the others does not work: a healthy church is a missional church, and such churches cannot be strengthened without the transformation of the individuals within the community, and this in turn cannot take place without nurturing a knowledge of God. And the conversation between the suggested facets can be turned around: personal Christian formation is invalid outside the community, and a Christian community can find its true identity only by looking beyond itself. The elements are profoundly interwoven, and any healthy approach to theological education, irrespective of the understanding embedded within the use of the term, must involve a vigorous interaction between these paradigms. In truth, the goal of integration undergirds most healthy typological taxonomies: the point of the taxonomy is not to create discrete categories, but to correct undue focus on one element and to emphasize the

<sup>7</sup> Brian Edgar, ‘The Theology of Theological Education’, *Evangelical Review of Theology* Vol. 29, no. 3, 2005, 208-17.



essential necessity of all facets in dialogue with one another.

I recognize that both Kelsey and Edgar caution their readers in the use of their analyses. This appears to be the central message of Kelsey's final epilogue chapter, in which he draws a distinction between end goal and practice: for Kelsey a 'teleological' focus in theological education should place the Athens-Berlin dichotomy as a secondary issue. Edgar is perhaps the clearer at this point, emphasizing the primary value of typologies as possible self-evaluative mirrors, and in the concluding words of his article urging extreme caution in the use of his model. However, I have heard too many people justify a fragmented and traditional curriculum by referencing the typologies of Kelsey and Edgar to embrace the typological approach uncritically.

We need also to acknowledge the thoroughly western origin and shape of the typologies. All of the texts which Kelsey uses as primary source material were written in North America, and with one exception by white males in mainline Protestant schools. While acknowledging the limited nature of this sample, Kelsey nonetheless feels comfortable in asserting the global nature of his analysis. Edgar's broader adaptation brings in an evangelical perspective, but the voices are still largely white, western, and male. As is so common, white western male understandings of education are seen as normative. The unspoken assumption is that the rest of the world should follow the West and be measured according to western standards.

We must also keep in mind that with the possible exception of the so-called 'Jerusalem' approach, all of the sug-

gested paradigms emerged in a context where the relationship between the church and the wider society was largely in a 'Christendom' paradigm—that is, the assumption was that the church could and should have a level of power and influence in society. The 'Christendom' paradigm has never been relevant in the non-western world and is no longer relevant in most of the West. Hence an undue focus on a more traditional paradigm is unlikely to be a meaningful approach in the twenty-first century. As Cannell<sup>8</sup> puts it,

A structure formalized in the medieval period, modified to suit the theological shifts of the Reformation, influenced by the scientific methodology of the Enlightenment, shaped by the German research university, deeply affected by modernity, and assumed to define true theological education today is likely not adequate for the challenges of contemporary culture and the education of Christians who have been shaped by that culture.

Elsewhere<sup>9</sup> I have raised concerns about the hegemony of western educational paradigms, rooted as they are deeply in the Greek philosophic heritage, among which is the tendency to categorize and separate study into 'disciplines' and 'branches of learning'. There is no question that the Aristotelian approach of breaking things down

<sup>8</sup> Linda Cannell, *Theological Education Matters: Leadership Education for the Church* (Newburgh: EDCOT, 2006), 306.

<sup>9</sup> Perry Shaw, "New Treasures with the Old": Addressing Culture and Gender Imperialism in Higher Level Theological Education', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 38, no. 3, July 2014, 265-79.

into the constituent parts has done much to create discipline in the fields of the physical sciences, but its value in other forms of knowledge is more questionable. Typologies are another face of the Greek approach of studying the bark on the trees to understand the forest.

In contrast, the preferred approach of much of the non-western world is to focus on the beauty of the forest as the starting point for seeing the trees and their bark.<sup>10</sup> A call for more holistic understandings is an essential element of the growing post-modern critique of modernist approaches to education—not only in the humanities and the so-called ‘people professions’, but even in the scientific academy. If these questions are being raised in the West, how much more should we be guarded about a typological approach in regions such as Asia and Africa with their strong heritage of holism and connectedness.

Perhaps the most significant concern I have with the typological approach is that what was originally intended as a descriptive approach has become for many a prescriptive basis for preserving questionable practices in theological education. Paul Sanders’ refrain too often rings true: ‘The problem with much of theological education is that it is neither theological nor educational.’<sup>11</sup> More than once I have heard people say to me, ‘Ah, so you use the Jerusalem approach; well, I use

the Berlin approach’—as though all of these approaches are equally valid.

There is a difference between religious studies and theological education: in the former it is valid to view the studies as somewhat disconnected from issues of faith commitment; in the latter the title ‘theological’ necessitates a theological reflection on what we are doing. Unfortunately, particularly in the university faculties of ‘theology’, there has oftentimes been a confusion at this point, and what is delivered is not genuinely an education shaped by theology but rather a program in which religion and religious texts are studied. If we wish with integrity to call our program ‘theological education’ then a theological undergirding to our pedagogy is required.

I am often surprised to hear otherwise thoughtful theologians do little in the way of theological reflection on theological education, or biblical scholars justifying a traditional approach to theological education by engaging in an eisegetical approach to Scripture that they would never accept from their students. It is natural to want to affirm one’s own education, and hence it is not surprising that those trained in European universities advocate this approach as the best, and those trained in American seminaries advocate this approach as best.

We are all prone to teach as we have learned and to develop schools along the models of the schools where we were trained. Consequently, there are scattered across the globe a plethora of little Trinitys, Fullers, Dallases, Princetons, and occasionally Oxfords, Edinburghs and Tübingens—despite the fact that these models are generally irrelevant to the context of the Middle

**10** Richard Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently ... And Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

**11** Paul Sanders, ‘Evangelical Theological Education in a Globalised World’, presentation delivered at Centre for Theological Education, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 17 November 2009.

East, Africa, Asia or Latin America.<sup>12</sup> And yet, no model or approach should be seen as adequate unless it begins with solid reflection on the foundational purpose of our existence—as individuals, as communities of faith, and as schools.

### III Centring Theological Education on God and his Work

I believe that the final chapter of Kelsey's book is the strongest section of his work. After 200 pages and more of a rather convoluted journey from Athens to Berlin, Kelsey seeks to draw the threads together in a critical-reflective epilogue by reinterpreting Schleiermacher's notion of a 'teleological' approach to understanding theological education. Kelsey suggests our end should not be clergy-training or individual formation, but rather the development of an approach that allows theology to shape the faith community and engage meaningfully with society. While at no point using the term 'missional', the essence of what Kelsey advocates bears many similarities to the contemporary understanding of a 'missional' approach to theological education.

This missional approach is seen clearly in the 'logic model' developed by Rupen Das.<sup>13</sup> Adapting the language of community development, Das sug-

gests a process whereby we have 'inputs' (physical plant, book resources, finances, and people), which support the 'activities' (the curriculum), that we hope will lead to desired 'output' (graduates who have changed as a result of their studies), that in turn leads to positive 'outcomes' (churches that are more faithful and effective in their missional calling), that result in 'impact' on society. The goal is not so much personal formation or clerical preparation but Christian impact. The resources, the curriculum, the students, and the churches are not the reason for our existence but key elements along the path to that end.

A genuine 'teleological' understanding of theological education would focus not on our ends but on God's ends—a theological education that is shaped by theological considerations: good theology should drive our pedagogy. Unfortunately, in the past this process has tended to devolve into a theological evaluation of current practice. A genuine theology for theological education would begin not with practice but rather an investigation of the implications of our theological affirmations for what we do educationally and administratively.

The Scriptures themselves point to an understanding of theological reflection that begins with God and his declarative acts. The Scriptures open with the words, 'In the beginning God ...' (Gen 1:1) and close with the hope of consummation (Rev 22:20-21). It is not surprising, therefore, that virtually every text in systematic theology across the confessional spectrum begins either with a discussion of the meaning of revelation or with theology proper. In either case the realization—

<sup>12</sup> Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Carlisle: Langham, 2014), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Rupen Das, *Connecting Curriculum with Context: A Handbook for Context Relevant Curriculum Development in Theological Education* (Carlisle: Langham, 2015).

whether intuitive or intentional—is that the starting point of theological understanding is not with humanity seeking God, but with a God who reaches out to us to be known and loved and worshipped. As Wright<sup>14</sup> describes it,

The whole canon of Scripture is a missional phenomenon in the sense that it witnesses to the self-giving movement of this God toward his creation and us, human beings in God's own image, but wayward and wanton. The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God.

Consequently, with Banks,<sup>15</sup> Cannell,<sup>16</sup> Cronshaw,<sup>17</sup> De Gruchy,<sup>18</sup> Kirk,<sup>19</sup> Wright,<sup>20</sup> and numerous oth-

ers, I believe that the starting point for theological reflection on theological education must be with the missionary character of God. The central message of the Scriptures is of a God who reaches out in creation and redemption, and who invites us to participate in his great missional work individually and corporately. This should be the warp and woof of all that we do—understanding God and his acts and responding accordingly. As Cronshaw<sup>21</sup> so eloquently expresses the missional nature of the church and seminary, '[I]f we want to be in step with the Spirit, then we want to be part of [the] Trinitarian movement of being sent into the world.'

This understanding of a 'missional' foundation to theological education is worlds away from Edgar's description of 'mission' as 'converting the world'. The biblical message is not so much that the church has a missionary program but that God is a God of mission and has the church to fulfil that mission.<sup>22</sup> The missional mandate of the church is no more nor less than an outworking of the missional character of God. As articulated in the Lausanne Movement's Cape Town Commitment,<sup>23</sup>

**14** Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 48.

**15** Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

**16** Cannell, *Theological Education Matters*.

**17** Darren Cronshaw, 'Australian Reenvisioning of Theological Education: In Step With the Spirit?' *Australian eJournal of Theology* Vol. 18, no. 3, December 2011, 223-35, and 'Reenvisioning Theological Education and Missional Spirituality', *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, Vol. 9, no. 1, 2012, 9-27.

**18** Steve de Gruchy, 'Theological Education and Missional Practice: A Vital Dialogue', in D. Werner, D. Esterline, N. King, & J. Raja, eds., *Handbook of Theological Education: Theological Perspectives—Regional Surveys—Ecumenical Trends*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 42-50.

**19** J. Andrew Kirk, 'Re-Envisioning the Theological Curriculum As If the Missio Dei Mattered', *Common Ground Journal*, Vol. 3, no. 1, 2005, 23-40.

**20** Chris Wright, 'Effectiveness and Impact in Theological Education From a Biblical Perspective'. Plenary lecture delivered at the triennial consultation of International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, Antalya, Turkey, 6 November 2015.

**21** Cronshaw, 'Australian Reenvisioning of Theological Education'.

**22** Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in The Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 64.

**23** Lausanne Movement, 'The Cape Town Commitment: A Declaration of Belief and a Call to Action', 2011, II.F.4 < www.lausanne.

‘The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the Church.’

It is not primarily about what we are doing but about what God is doing, and then us getting in tune with his agenda. For this to be effective we need all of the so-called paradigms: a people who know and worship God and are thereby able to reflect adequately his character and his purposes, transformed individuals and communities who are able to be salt and light in the world, empowered and empowering leaders for a strong church that can best impact the world for God’s Kingdom, and a missional vision that reflects God’s own missional character.

The role of theological education is not merely to equip those preparing to serve *in* the church, but those called to serve *as* the church in the world,<sup>24</sup> to prepare people who are able to claim the whole of private and public life for Christ and his Kingdom.<sup>25</sup> Cronshaw<sup>26</sup> illustrates this holistic understanding by suggesting an integrative typological approach, in which he adds two further paradigms (‘Auburn’ and ‘Delhi’), and places ‘Jerusalem’ as the hub around which all other paradigms revolve.

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org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html > accessed 12 August 2013.

**24** Charles Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology: The Depth, Reach and Utility of Australian Theological Education* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009), 111-2.

**25** Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 231.

**26** Cronshaw, ‘Reenvisioning Theological Education and Missional Spirituality’.

## IV From Theology to Theological Education

It is beyond the scope of this article to give a comprehensive discussion of the movement from theological affirmation to pedagogical implications. However, as a step along the path, and as a small sample of the approach which needs to be appropriated, let me present a few suggestions. These all point to the need for a holistic and transformative approach to theological education which is both integrated and missional.

### 1. The Mission of God

The mission of God is the starting point of our identity and calling. The important thing is not what we are doing but what God is doing in this world. God’s creative and redemptive agenda is the consummate restoration of the good. In the revelation of his divine Triune character of love and holiness, and in as much as we are attuned to his nature, we are able to discover our true identity. God entrusts us to partner with him in the accomplishment of his mission—the extension of his *shalom* Kingdom.

The implications of such an affirmation for theological education are numerous:

1. Our shared understanding of the purpose of our institutions and programs should clearly express God’s mission and character. If our ‘Vision Statement’ is focused on our students or even on the church, then something foundational is missing. Yes, we want our students to learn and grow and we want strong churches, but these are merely means to an end—which is the acknowledgement of the Triune God

- and his Kingdom.
2. Theology proper (the study of the nature and character of God) should permeate the curriculum. In that our curriculum should help people discover what God is trying to do through them, we must ensure that students have a clear knowledge of his character and ways.
  3. On the path to facilitating the students' personal and corporate understanding and growth instructors need to be attuned to what God is doing in and through the learners in the class they are leading. As such prayer and listening to God are appropriate elements in the classroom.
  4. Leaders in theological education need to be aware of what God is doing in this place and at this time. If God is truly at work in this world and not simply a distant and inscrutable deity, then we need to be able to read the signs of the time (cf. Mt 16:1-3).
  5. God's missional character means that we must take context seriously. Curriculum cannot be generic but needs to be responsive to what God is seeking to do in the specific context in which the education is being delivered. There also needs to be flexibility in the curriculum such that it can respond to what God is doing today in response to the changing world over which he is sovereign. This would probably imply a shift in focus from the current tendency to focus on 'text to context' courses to an increasing number of 'context to text' courses.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, 103, 137.

6. The central missional message of the Scriptures is of a God who seeks to reconcile and restore. Consequently our curricula should give substantial space to training students to lead God's people in being restorative agents in this broken world. The theory and practice of peace-making should therefore be core to our curriculum. Moreover, in contrast to the highly competitive nature of much of the academy, theologically-grounded theological education needs to ensure that our educational institutions have in place quality processes of peace-making and conflict resolution that encourage and sustain hospitable community.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. The People of God

God has chosen to reveal himself through his people. Both in the Old and New Testaments the people of God are seen as an essential part of the accomplishment of God's mission. Probably the most articulate explication of this theological affirmation is found in Chris Wright's seminal *The Mission of God*.<sup>29</sup> Early in his text Wright summarizes his 'missional hermeneutic' as proceeding from the understanding that 'the whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's

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<sup>28</sup> Perry Shaw, 'A Welcome Guest: Ministerial Training as an Act of Hospitality', *Christian Education Journal*, Series 3, Vol. 7, no. 1, Spring 2011, 8-26; Davina Soh, 'The Motif of Hospitality in Theological Education: A Critical Appraisal with Implications for Application in Theological Education', PhD Dissertation, Asia Graduate School of Theology Alliance, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*.

people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation' (51).

Some possible implications of this affirmation for theological education would include:

7. A missional ecclesiology must undergird our programs and institutions. Both our students and the people whom they will subsequently serve need help in understanding their identity and calling as the people of God. Consequently both the classroom and non-classroom components of the curriculum need to retain a vision for a church that understands its calling to impact society.
8. Programs of theological education need to recognize their *parakletic* relationship to the local church. I recognize that there is definitely a prophetic aspect to impactful theological education. However, the theological affirmation of God's mission through his people necessitates the recognition of God's wisdom in choosing the local church as his agent—even when our natural tendency is to question God's wisdom in choosing the church. As such it is imperative that we listen to the local church and not just tell them.
9. A vision for an empowered people of God may entail a rethinking of our faculty recruitment policies. A highly qualified academician who is disconnected from church and society will be ill-prepared to prepare men and women for a church that impacts society. The most needful is a cadre of scholar-practitioners who have the intellectual, reflective, and instructional skills to train leaders in church and society for theologi-

cally-informed impact.

- 10 Theological education should serve the whole church—not an elite few. God calls people not just for religious vocations but for vocations in science, business and education.<sup>30</sup> A theological affirmation of the role of God's people in God's mission urges on theological education patterns and processes that empower the whole people of God to discover and live out their missional calling in family, community, education, health, politics, media, and finance.

### 3. Incarnation

Central to the Mission of God is the 'enfleshment' or 'incarnation' of his nature, character, and will—most perfectly in Jesus Christ, but also in his people. The character of the Triune God is of essence relational, and hence from the beginning he has reached out to make himself known in tangible and understandable ways. The *shalom* inaugurated through Christ's incarnation and redemptive work is both the salvation from sins and the model of what the life of divinity-become-humanity looks like.

Our fundamental nature is that we have been created in God's image but that image has been distorted by the fall. In as much as we reflect the character of God we rediscover our true identity. God chose to become incarnate in Jesus Christ. Consequently, while recognizing that Jesus came into a particular context and time, nonetheless we must see his life and teaching as pointing towards who we were

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<sup>30</sup> Cronshaw, 'Australian Reenvisioning of Theological Education'.

meant to be as teachers and leaders.

The implications of the incarnate nature of our message for our practices of theological education are legion.

- In that the message has always been ‘enfleshed’ in particular times and places, context must be taken seriously. Context drove Jesus’ teaching. Jesus’ teaching has been described as ‘incidental’ in that most of his teaching emerged out of specific events and people he encountered. Likewise Paul wrote to specific churches or people in specific contexts, and the particular needs of those churches and individuals were foundational to his theological reflection. All theology is contextual;<sup>31</sup> the question is whose context—Augustine’s? Luther’s? Calvin’s? or ours? Das<sup>32</sup> observes:

For a long time theological education has focused on training students on the core and essence of the Christian faith, essentially Biblical and Systematic Theology. It was believed that this, along with the skills of preaching, teaching and counseling, is all that a pastor needed to know to be effective. ... However God is perceived and understood through the lenses of one’s own culture, gender, social and economic status, life experiences, season of life, political ideology, and value system. Therefore theology has to translate the truth

about God into specific cultural, social and political contexts.

- Using stories is one of the most effective and appropriate means for incarnating the eternal message of God’s *Missio Dei* in the world. Jesus used stories as the foundation of his teaching. While recognizing that this was natural in a largely oral society, it was also a product of Jesus’ practice of seeing his ‘learners’ as whole people for whom the connection between text and context was an imperative. While Paul did not use story as much as Jesus did, nonetheless his commitment to embodied faith is consistent with a case study approach to theological education. Stories are an ideal educational methodology for driving learners to make connection between text and context. Local case studies are particularly relevant and significant.
- In Christ ‘the word became flesh’—not ‘the word became text’. While critical reflection on texts certainly has value, equally significant is the critical dialogue between text and life—what has often been termed as ‘reflective practice’.<sup>33</sup> Since the early nineteenth century theological education has been ‘landed’ within the humanities, alongside fields such as literature, philosophy, and history. The location of theological education within the humanities is seen clearly in the close parallels with these other fields in the traditional emphases in theological edu-

31 Stephan Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).

32 Rupen Das, ‘Can Theological Education Influence Society?’ < imeslebanon.wordpress.com/2014/03/06/can-theological-education-influence-society > accessed 6 March 2014.

33 Chris Argyris & Donald Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).



cation: biblical studies (literature), theology (philosophy), and church history (history). It is not surprising that in many cases the ‘professional’ component of preparation for ministry has often been separated out from ‘academic’ studies, sometimes being seen (either consciously or unconsciously) as peripheral or even irrelevant.

In light of the imperative of ‘enfleshment’, a more adequate location of theological studies would be with professional fields such as medicine, education, and social work. In these fields, while there are often studies in philosophy and ethics, there is a certain urgency that every element should be preparing more effective practitioners—whether they be better doctors, teachers, social workers, or the like. Elements drawn from the humanities and the social sciences are referenced only in as much as they serve to better prepare people for the task that lies ahead.

- An ‘enfleshed’ understanding of theological education would see the need to view intellectual knowledge as a step towards practising and applying the message. Jesus differed from the Pharisees precisely in that his teaching, deeply rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures, called for a life that reflects heart action in tune with God’s purposes.

The Great Commission to make disciples saw at its heart a teaching that led to obedience—not simply the knowledge of information. Whenever Paul writes theology, it is always followed by extensive application. In that the ultimate test of obedience comes not in the academy but in the field, it is crucial that a

close relationship be built between the theological school and the communities it serves.

- In recognition of our being created as whole persons, and not simply ‘disembodied information systems called brains’,<sup>34</sup> there needs to be a close interaction between intellectual excellence, heart formation, and practical application. The goal of Jesus’ teaching was ultimately for the hearer to enter into a relationship of love of God, ‘heart, soul, mind, and strength’ (Mk 12:30). Integration and integrity are related words, and likewise Jesus’ approach to the authentic life was always integrated and multidimensional—head, heart, and hands (cognitive, affective, and behavioural). In a similar ilk, Paul’s teaching always involved an invitation to a multidimensional relationship of love for God. An incarnational and authentic approach will see in every academic course reflection through formational and ministerial lenses. However, there will equally be an emphasis on profound biblical and theological reflection in the students’ formational and ministerial experiences.
- The quality of life of our teachers is important. Paul’s invitation to the Corinthians to ‘be imitators of me as I of Christ’ (1 Cor 11:1) is equally significant in the theological school. Gibson<sup>35</sup> has observed, ‘God is fun-

<sup>34</sup> Ted Ward, ‘The Teaching-Learning Process’, in M. Anthony, ed., *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 123.

<sup>35</sup> Drew Gibson, ‘Being Trinity’ < [teachingtheology.org/2012/08/01/being-trinity](http://teachingtheology.org/2012/08/01/being-trinity) > accessed 14 August 2012.

damentally relational. Our theological education is therefore most Christian when it is the same.' One piece of research<sup>36</sup> discovered that

... what most people coming into theological institutions desire is the opportunity to get to know their teachers personally, and learn from them in ways that will help them grow spiritually and minister effectively.... While as teachers we regard academic concerns as the most important, students are equally or more interested in the personal and practical implications of what they are learning.

If we are serious about nurturing Christian attitude and character, it will not occur through maintaining a formal emotional distance in the classroom but rather through a relationship of love in which we mentor and model a life of quality to those God has called us to develop as future leaders of his church.<sup>37</sup>

The above is simply a sample of how we might move beyond a typological understanding of theological education towards approaches that are shaped by theological affirmations. There are many other significant theological lenses that could be brought to bear on such a discussion: the Lordship of Christ, the *kairotic* experience<sup>38</sup> of living between redemption and consum-

mation, the *perichoretic* nature of the Trinity, the covenantal people of God as light and salt, cruciform living and leading,<sup>39</sup> to mention a few. Quality theological education would engage these and other theological affirmations as the starting point for building pedagogical understandings, rather than simply seeking theological justification for current practice.

## V Conclusion

Particularly in light of the global shift of Christianity from the West to the South and East, it is no longer adequate to evaluate theological education through lenses that have been shaped and designed in the West. While the paradigms suggested in the typologies of Kelsey, Edgar, and others may to some extent be helpful dialogue partners, if seen as discrete and/or normative they can become profoundly destructive to our endeavors.

In light of the fundamentally missional nature of our God, integrative and incarnational approaches to understanding theological education need to be embraced and encouraged. The time has come for the global non-western church to recognize 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 world of theological education and to affirm the possibility of alternative approaches to accomplishing our missional purposes.

36 Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 227.

37 Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, 72.

38 M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 2001).

39 Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

# Remind, Rebuke, Refocus: Three Correctives after Investigating Edwards's Use of 'known by God'

Rhys S. Bezzant

WHERE JONATHAN Edwards is known at all, the most common association is with a sermon entitled, 'Sinners in the hands of an angry God'. It has been anthologized often and mocked almost as frequently as portraying a God in whom no modern person could expect to believe. The image of a spider hanging by a thread over the maws of hell, its most identifiable and ostensibly pre-modern trope, is disconnected from the sermon's deliberate scientific moorings in Isaac Newton's modern understanding of gravity. Indeed, its carefully crafted pastoral application, which is overlooked, that God is not presently releasing us to perdition but instead is preserving our life from destruction, is designed instead to teach us grace.

This is not hell-fire preaching as traditionally conceived. What most contemporary readers fail to see is that Edwards preached this sermon on a hot summer's day, with great success it must be said, while an itinerant in a friend's church, but did not return to this style of preaching. It was the exception which has nonetheless determined his reputational rule. We

might be justified in thinking that, for Edwards, God is distant, unconcerned, capricious or taunting.

In this paper, shaped by the oft-neglected Biblical phrase, 'known by God' and written with the concerns of mainly biblical colleagues in mind, my goal is to recast our vision of Edwards, and reflexively to recast our own assumptions about epistemology, hermeneutics, and spirituality in the light of Edwards's insights, and thereby to remind, rebuke and refocus. Such a small phrase as 'known by God' nonetheless opens up major themes which shaped Edwards's worldview and ministry. These include the mind of God as the centre of all reality, the purpose of biblical commentary to expound the unifying themes of the Scriptures, and the goal of personal discipleship or spirituality as a personally transformative encounter with the Lord God himself.

Given Edwards's philosophical location in European discourse during the early Enlightenment, we might expect discussion of this phrase in his epistemologically saturated project. However, while this concept is everywhere,

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*Rev Dr Rhys Stewart Bezzant, ThD (ACT) is Lecturer in Christian Thought and Dean of Missional Leadership at Ridley College, Melbourne, a visiting Fellow at the Yale Divinity School and Associate Researcher at the University of the Free State Bloemfontein, South Africa. With a background in parish ministry, he is also Director of the Jonathan Edwards Centre, Australia. He is the author of Jonathan Edwards and the Church (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).*

it turns out also to be nowhere at all. By setting up this phrase as our interpretative lens, we will see the contours of Edwards's world and our own with more clarity.

## I Known by God as Metaphysical Reminder

### 1. Idealism and materialism

One of the most striking encounters in contemporary readings of Edwards is his commitment to philosophical idealism (perhaps immaterialism). This is the branch of metaphysical reflection which begins with the category of knowledge to work back to a defence for the existence of God, in whose mind all things exist and cohere. For Edwards, the motto, 'known by God', could be used as the philosophical foundation of all experience:

How is it possible to bring the mind to imagine? Yea, it is really impossible it should be, that anything should be, and nothing know it ... Supposing there were another universe only of bodies, created at a great distance from this, created in excellent order and harmonious motions, and a beautiful variety; and there was no created intelligence in it, nothing but senseless bodies ... I demand in what respect this world has a being, but only in the divine consciousness ... There would be figures and magnitudes, and motions and proportions—but where? Where else, but in the Almighty's knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Of Being', in *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (The Works of

By contrast, modern evangelicals, some of the most avid readers of Edwards's writings, have been profoundly shaped by Enlightenment assumptions of rationality, the possibilities of sense perception, and the missiological imperative of incarnation, which draw (unwittingly) from the well of Descartes or Locke or Hobbes. The idealist project sits uncomfortably with us.<sup>2</sup> Even if we do not go as far as Hobbes and make material existence the most real, we are prone nonetheless to pitch the material against the spiritual in a kind of unhealthy dualism.

It can be argued, however, that this is a minority report in terms of the history of Christianity. The idealism which Edwards represents has a fine, often Platonically inspired, pedigree. Snowden helpfully defines idealism in this way:

Philosophical idealism is the view of the world that holds that there is only one kind of ultimate reality, spirit or mind, and that matter is a mode of activity or manifestation of mind. It does not deny the existence of matter, but discovers and shows its true nature as a mode of divine activity.<sup>3</sup>

The Platonic thread in theological reflection has actually been a dominant concern in western Christianity, stressing as it does the ideal, or the world of

Jonathan Edwards 6; ed. W. E. Anderson; New Haven: Yale University Press 1980), *WJE* 6: 204.

<sup>2</sup> The tide turned against idealism in the twentieth century with the publication of G. E. Moore's *Refutation of idealism* in 1903.

<sup>3</sup> James H. Snowden, 'Philosophical Idealism and Christian Theology', *The Biblical World* 46/3 (1915): 152-158, especially 152.

forms, against which the things of this world are held to be, at best, approximations. This strand has highlighted the continuities between our experience of the world and the creative character of God, who has left his imprint on all that he has made.

In this philosophical mode, metaphysical assumptions about the existence of God have been defended in various ways, sometimes through appeal to atomism and physical causation, sometimes by arguing on the basis of logical deductions from the nature of being/existence, and on yet other occasions with respect to an understanding of mind and ideas.<sup>4</sup> This view has been mediated in the West most spectacularly through the writings of Augustine of Hippo, or Thomas Aquinas who said that ‘The knowledge of God is the cause of all things’.<sup>5</sup> Even John Calvin begins his *Institutes* with reference to the central category of knowing God and knowing ourselves.

This ‘whole Platonic and Augustinian tradition into which Edwards was born’ represents not an aberration but a well-attested participationist ontology evident in much Christian theological reflection.<sup>6</sup> Rupp agrees: ‘As a theological affirmation that the more like God a being is, the more ‘real’ he

is, this corollary stands in a venerable theological tradition.’<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Strengths and weaknesses

The idealist tradition has distinct advantages over its materialist competitors. It is, first of all, profoundly *personalist*, for the relationship between God and all that he has made entails some measure of continuity, within which knowledge as a subset implies our personal engagement with God and his engagement with us, given that we are both conscious beings. A rock cannot have knowledge in any commonly understood way.

In so far as this is true, philosophical idealism can claim to be anti-pantheist, for God’s knowledge of his creation assumes some kind of conscious distinction from his creation. Medieval thinkers debating the characteristics of God asked whether arbitrary freedom of God over his creation, or alternatively the consistent activity of God within the creation, constraining divine freedom, was primary. The appeal to an idealist metaphysic can to some degree address this tension, for if all things subsist in the mind of God, both divine freedom in relation to the creation and also order and consistency in acting within it are possible.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, philosophical idealism does not allow for a crude contrast

4 Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially 107-115 for an overview.

5 As quoted in McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 114.

6 Wallace E. Anderson, ‘Editor’s Introduction,’ in *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 6; ed. W. E. Anderson; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 81-82.

7 George Rupp, ‘The “Idealism” of Jonathan Edwards’, *Harvard Theological Review* 62/2 (1969): 209-226, especially 17.

8 See Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: University Press, 2003), 116-117 for further explanation.

or dualism to be posited between that which is physical and that which is spiritual, for all things, both material and non-material, find their existence dependent on the mind of God. Snowden again:

Idealism is emphatically a system of personalism ... it guards itself against the pit of pantheism that swallows up all personality and makes real religion impossible. And idealism equally affirms the knowability of God by finding him to be a spirit kindred to ourselves, and thereby it refutes agnosticism.<sup>9</sup>

For Snowden, idealism functions as a guiding theme in the Scriptural witness, and defends the unitary nature of the universe, presenting the creation and redemption of the world as providentially working towards the same ends, thus confirming the doctrine of divine sovereignty.<sup>10</sup>

Theological idealism has, however, not gone uncontested. Chief amongst its weaknesses is the notion that in this model the Creator and the creation are not sufficiently distinguishable. Codified in early Trinitarian debates, it was decided that the most theologically satisfying case for the relationship of the Son with the Father was to assert the Son's unbegottenness. He was consubstantial with the Father from eternity

past, and therefore eternally begotten. The Son could not be understood as belonging to the creation, which was the position taken by those supporting the Arian cause.

This separation of the divine from the creaturely had flow-on effects in discussions of Christology, where the Antiochene party asserted the contrast between the divine and the human in Christ, and the Alexandrians the closeness between them. Furthermore, idealism might suggest a kind of divine immanence, which would disallow apocalyptic rupture or inbreaking power, and so negate significant biblical themes. Medieval nominalism pushed back against the Platonically inspired commitment to idealist participative ontology, which seemed to devalue historical contingency, language, and the power of human agency.

### 3. Edwards and idealism

Edwards's idealist thought appears early in his oeuvre, especially evident in his scientific writing, where the phrase, 'known by God', and cognate terms take a central role. His essay, 'Of Being' is of particular note. Writing in 1721, Edwards begins his metaphysical investigations with questions of the first order.

He begins with a conclusion: 'that there should absolutely be nothing at all is utterly impossible', and makes a case for the necessity of being based on the concept of space, implying solidity and resistance, which are relational terms. If space is the irreducible minimum, he can aver: 'Space is this necessary, eternal, infinite and omnipresent being ... space is the very thing that we can never remove and conceive of

<sup>9</sup> Snowden, 'Philosophical Idealism and Christian Theology', especially 154-155.

<sup>10</sup> Snowden, 'Philosophical Idealism and Christian Theology', 156. See also Miklos Vetö, *La Pensée de Jonathan Edwards* (Ouverture philosophique; Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 82, and William Wainwright, 'Jonathan Edwards', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition; ed. E. N. Zalta; <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/edwards/>; 2012), section 2.2.

its not being ... I have already said as much as that space is God.<sup>11</sup>

Foundational reality is not material in this scenario:

It follows from hence, that those beings which have knowledge and consciousness are the only proper and real and substantial beings, inasmuch as the being of other things is only by these. From hence we may see the gross mistake of those who think material things the most substantial beings, and spirits more like a shadow; whereas spirits only are properly substance.<sup>12</sup>

Knowledge, not materiality, defines substance, posing a significant challenge to Aristotle's views of metaphysics.<sup>13</sup>

Edwards's thinking in 'Of Being' is extended in the set of miscellanies of 1723 entitled 'The Mind,' where knowledge involves the *quality* of a relationship between ideas, not just the relationship itself: 'Knowledge is not the perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas, but rather the perception of the union or disunion of ideas, or the perceiving whether two or more ideas belong to one another.'<sup>14</sup> Knowledge is essentially relational and necessarily aesthetic.

Mindful of challenges to idealist philosophy, pursued by Thomas Hobbes for example, Edwards provides

some disclaimers:

When we say that the world, ie, the material universe, exists nowhere but in the mind, we have got to such a degree of strictness and abstraction that we must be exceedingly careful that we do not confound and lose ourselves by misapprehension ... Though we suppose that the existence of the whole material universe is absolutely dependent on idea, yet we may speak in the old way, and as properly and truly as ever: God in the beginning created such a certain number of atoms, of such a determinate bulk and figure, which they yet maintain and always will ...<sup>15</sup>

He does not wish to undermine the traditional metaphysical system which generated agreement concerning Trinitarian relations in the fourth century, but does want to bolt onto it new conceptions of idealist ontology. Indeed, Edwards ultimately appeals to intra-Trinitarian relations to explain the creative power of God and the world as an 'extension of the intra-Trinitarian life'.<sup>16</sup>

In Edwards's mind the creation is not something ephemeral and worthless but profoundly known and valuable.<sup>17</sup> Nor is he falling prey to an

<sup>11</sup> Edwards, 'Of Being,' *WJE* 6: 202, 203.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, 'Of Being,' *WJE* 6: 206.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, 'Editor's Introduction,' *WJE* 6: 83.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'The Mind,' in *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 6; ed. W. E. Anderson; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 385.

<sup>15</sup> Edwards, 'The Mind', *WJE* 6: 353-354.

<sup>16</sup> Kin Yip Louie, *The Beauty of the Triune God: The Theological Aesthetics of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series; Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 155.

<sup>17</sup> Note the value of experience of the created order in Edwards's *Personal Narrative*: Jonathan Edwards, 'Personal Narrative', in *Letters and Personal Writings* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 16; ed. G. S. Claghorn; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

unintended pantheism, because in Edwards,

the relation between God and the world is construed as a relation between a creative volition and its immediate effects. Edwards' model is not a whole and its parts, or a substance (a bearer of properties) and its properties, or an essence and its accidents, but agent causality.<sup>18</sup>

The imposition of the category of will enables sufficient distinction between Creator and creation. All of these insights are part of contemporary debate on Edwards's philosophical commitments, in which the writing of Miklos Vetö serves as adjudicating voice:

Even in their most idealist or pantheistic occurrences, Edwards makes continual recourse to Biblical material, and this cannot be seen as literary artifice alone. Edwards appears to confess a continuity between God and the creation, but paradoxically this continuity results from an extreme contrast. It is precisely because the creature is nothing and useless in itself, that it appears so submissive before him and in uninterrupted continuity with him.<sup>19</sup>

Being known by God is at the heart of the epistemological project that Edwards undertakes, aware that he is swimming against the tide of philosophical materialism. It is certainly a biblical phrase, but it represents much more than a biblical concept, positioning him in a sequence of leading think-

ers, many of whom but not all were Christian, whose philosophical commitments now appear to us as strange.

It is unfashionable to adopt this metaphysic, but commentators and theologians have also been negligent in expounding constructively upon its possibilities. Edwards, the fountainhead of much of evangelical theology and experience, provides us with a reminder of the value of the notion of being 'known by God' and its significant part in the story of Christian philosophy.

## II Known by God as Hermeneutical Rebuke

Edwards's ministry as philosopher launched his popularity in the mid-twentieth century, and his ministry as revivalist sustained the interest as the twentieth century closed. However, at the dawn of the new century the focus of academic work on Edwards has shifted to his work as pastor and preacher. Each week he preached up to three times, whether in his home church or as an itinerant elsewhere, and of his regular responsibilities it was working closely with the Scriptures in writing and teaching that took up most of his time.

His early exegetical work on the book of Revelation, designed for his own personal use and conceived as one of his first attempts at exegetical notebooks, was one of the first volumes published in the twentieth century Edwards renaissance.<sup>20</sup> The more

<sup>18</sup> Wainwright, 'Jonathan Edwards' section 2.3.

<sup>19</sup> Vetö, *La Pensée de Jonathan Edwards*, 81. Translation mine.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 5. Edited by Stephen J. Stein; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).



substantial volumes in the Yale edition dealing with his broader biblical reflection, for example *The 'Blank Bible'* and *Notes on Scripture*, have by contrast only recently seen the light of day.<sup>21</sup>

In these volumes we see detailed and sustained reflection on biblical texts, although many of his miscellanies published elsewhere also expound a verse or phrase, even if they are not ordered according to their place in the biblical canon but chronologically after the sequence of composition. Edwards's extant sermons, which number approximately twelve hundred, are the chief evidence for his scriptural commitment and were the chief point of access for believers in Edwards's day to his biblical hermeneutics.

### 1. Known by God—in exegesis

Perhaps surprisingly, in all this voluminous work, the stand-alone phrase, 'known by God', is sparsely attested. Of the eleven scriptural occurrences of this phrase listed by Rosner,<sup>22</sup> Edwards makes no comment in *The 'Blank Bible'* on the Old Testament references except when commenting on 2 Samuel 7:20, where he parallels the theme of God knowing his servant with God's electing his servant.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The "Blank Bible"* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 24; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 15; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Brian S. Rosner and Loyola M. McLean, 'Theology and Human Flourishing: The Benefits of Being "Known by God,"' in *Beyond Well-Being: Spirituality and Human Flourishing* (eds. M. Miner, M. Dowson and S. Devenish; Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 71.

In reference to the New Testament occurrences, Edwards comments on the Greek of 1 Corinthians 8:3 without any substantial explanation; when dealing with Matthew 7:23 and 25:12 he picks up the theme of foreknowledge and points us to cross-references; and in relation to 1 Corinthians 13:12 does not address the theme of knowledge at all, but deals more thoroughly with the phrase, 'in a glass darkly'. Effectively, in *The 'Blank Bible'*, the few comments on the phrase 'known by God' mean something akin to election.

In his other major compilation of exegetical comments, *Notes on Scripture*, the story is not very different. Edwards equates 'known by God' with foreknowledge or election in Jeremiah 1:5, or with God's care for his people in the wilderness when treating Hosea 13:5. An added nuance is provided when expounding Galatians 4:8-9, connecting 'known by God' with the theme of adoption, and when commenting on 1 Corinthians 13:12, the theme taken up is not 'the glass darkly' but the allied thought of 'seeing' God.

In these two major sets of writing, when he does make any comment at all, Edwards connects the phrase, 'known by God', to doctrines of grace without any particular pastoral or philosophical framework for application.

### 2. Known by God in sermons

When seeking out sermons on these same texts, we are not much more enlightened. Edwards's approach to homiletics takes up the Puritan pattern of distilling a biblical passage into a single line doctrinal statement which is explained in relation to that theme throughout the Scriptures, and is in

turn applied to personal or congregational needs, called 'improvements'. The overall dramatic sequence therefore moves from the eternal Word, to temporal systematic distillation, then to very present needs, providing a structure that is designed to create something personally powerful, not merely logical or beautiful.<sup>23</sup>

This homiletical tradition means that, though Edwards might have preached from a biblical text in which the phrase 'known by God' appears, that does not necessarily mean that he would expound the phrase itself as might be expected from an expository sermon in contemporary homiletics.

Edwards preached a series from Matthew 25:12 in which the phrase appears in the negative ('Truly I say to you, I do not know you'), though his interest does not focus on the theme of 'known by God', but rather on the evidence for true or false religion, visibly demonstrated. He preaches a series of sermons on 1 Corinthians 13, known now as *Charity and its Fruits*, but these formally stop short of including verse 12, and their concern is the eschatological ethics of love. Edwards does preach a sermon on 1 Corinthians 13:12, sustained over three preaching units—perhaps three weeks—but here the theme is summarized by the doctrine:

The extraordinary influences of the Spirit of God, imparting immediate revelations to men, were designed only for a temporary continuance while the church was in its minor-

ity, and never were intended to be stately upheld in the Christian church.<sup>24</sup>

Turning to Edwards's sermons based on Jesus' words to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3, we might expect some comment on the theme of 'known by God', for Jesus several times says to the people of those churches that 'I know you....' In *The Dangers of Decline*, preached as an election day sermon in 1730 and based on Revelation 2:4-5, Edwards emphasizes human responsibility, but does not make Jesus' knowledge of his church a sustained theme, except in so far as that knowledge is a prelude to their indictment!

The same is true of sermons preached from Revelation 3:5, 3:15, 3:20, where references to knowledge in Edwards's treatment almost exclusively concern our wrong knowledge of God, not his knowledge of us, elective or damning.<sup>25</sup> Jesus' critical words to the seven churches are taken up by

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit are Inferior to Graces of the Spirit', in *Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 25; ed. W. H. Kinnach; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Sermon on Revelation 3:15', in *Sermons, Series II, 1729* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online 44; ed. Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University); Jonathan Edwards, 'Sermon on Revelation 3:5(a)', in *Sermons, Series II, 1731-1732* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online 47; ed. Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University); Jonathan Edwards, 'Sermon on Revelation 3:20 (a)', in *Sermons, Series II, 1734* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online 49). It should be noted that other manuscript sermons of Edwards on Revelation 2 and 3, which are not yet published, are not consulted here.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson H. Kinnach, 'Edwards as Preacher', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (ed. S. J. Stein; Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 105.

Edwards to reinforce his own timely appeal to the church in Northampton to take responsibility for its life before God.

So the theme of 'known by Jesus' is barely more illuminating in his sermon corpus than the phrase, 'known by God'. Though my investigations of his use of the word 'known' are not exhaustive, they are nonetheless indicative of a relative paucity of concern for the phrase under consideration.

### 3. Mission and biblical authority

It would therefore be easy to conclude that Edwards was not sufficiently modern in his exegetical labours, for he does not concern himself in the first instance with 'the minute details of exegesis'<sup>26</sup> that have come to characterize contemporary writing of commentaries. Also he does not devote himself to the reconstruction of background conditions for a text, which in modern commentary often assumes diversity of historical origins or editorial hands, especially pertinent in commenting on Old Testament texts.<sup>27</sup> He maintains a commitment to Puritan-style preaching and pre-critical method, based on Ramist logic, theological supernaturalism and distilled doctrinal thematics, which makes for significant lacunae along the way.<sup>28</sup>

The chief witness to Edwards's traditional hermeneutics is seen in his commitment to read the Scriptures in a redemptive-historical fashion, which highlights the unity of the divine purposes, into which the individual believer has been called. Edwards highlights the 'overarching thrust of the Scriptures' and emphasizes 'the core doctrines of the Christian faith in a world changing due to Enlightenment challenges'.<sup>29</sup> His own use of typology pushed this view further, arguing not just for a unity in the Scriptural deposit, but the power of the natural realm to convey the unitary purposes of God as well as his Trinitarian character.<sup>30</sup> All reality eloquently speaks of the divine.

We should note, however, that this is only one side of Edwards's approach to the Scriptures, namely the homiletical. He does indeed want to engage with the thought of the Enlightenment for intellectual, apologetic and missiological reasons. In so doing he wants to take his place in debates of his own day in order to deny critics of the biblical worldview the possibility of 'calling into question the historical authenticity of the Bible' which would then 'effect a cultural disestablishment of their society's foundational narrative, and thereby the hegemony of its religious institutions'.<sup>31</sup> Edwards

<sup>26</sup> David P. Barshinger, *Jonathan Edwards and the Psalms: A Redemptive-Historical Vision of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 375.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas A. Sweeney, 'Edwards and the Bible', in *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America's Theologian* (ed. G. R. McDermott; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 70.

<sup>28</sup> Kinnach, 'Edwards as Preacher', 122.

<sup>29</sup> Barshinger, *Jonathan Edwards and the Psalms*, 375.

<sup>30</sup> Sweeney, 'Edwards and the Bible', 75.

<sup>31</sup> Robert E. Brown, 'The Sacred and the Profane Connected: Edwards, the Bible, and Intellectual Culture', in *Jonathan Edwards at 300: Essays on the Tercentenary of his Birth* (eds. H. S. Stout, K. P. Minkema and C. J. D. Maskell; Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), 41.

does engage Enlightenment debates on epistemology and offers a plausible appreciation and critique, but these are conducted carefully, for they will have far-reaching social implications.

As Brown suggests, 'Deists and other skeptics were particularly keen to employ the results of the emerging field of biblical criticism in their attempts to undermine the Bible's social authority.'<sup>32</sup> It remains true nonetheless that Edwards would rather choose to modify scientific applications in order to defend biblical authority than to allow biblical authority to be compromised through capitulation to modern categories or assumptions.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. Modern and pre-modern

On occasions, his appropriation of the discourse of the Enlightenment is clearer to see: 'The epistemological supremacy of the 'fact' permeates his biblical commentary.'<sup>34</sup> Edwards kept a notebook called 'Defense of the Authenticity of the Pentateuch as a Work of Moses and the Historicity of the Old Testament Narratives'.<sup>35</sup> Edwards is not providing the kind of exegetical notes that we might demand of him, but this does not mean that in his own

day he was obscurantist or unconcerned about textual detail.

Also, in preaching, Edwards reflects a modern trajectory. Kimmach, the doyen of interpreters of Edwards's homiletics, makes the point:

Edwards characteristically expresses the implications of his concepts in a radical, personal idiom which can only be described as Romantic rhetoric ... Edwards presents a very individualized experience that is not frequently found in Puritan or Neoplatonic writing.<sup>36</sup>

While the infrequent connections he makes between the phrase, 'known by God', and the doctrines of grace are probably not surprising, the bigger surprise when we look through the lens of 'known by God' is to discover an Edwards who inhabits a liminal world on the cusp of the modern when it comes to exegesis. We look into his world but as much as we may squint, we do not see the reflection of our own. In his hermeneutics and homiletics, Edwards is a modern thinker with pre-modern sensibilities.<sup>37</sup>

Our investigation of the phrase, 'known by God', in Edwards offers an exegetical rebuke as well as an epistemological reminder. He may not atom-

<sup>32</sup> Robert E. Brown, 'The Bible', in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (ed. S. H. Lee; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 92.

<sup>33</sup> William M. Schweitzer, *God is a Communicative Being: Divine Communication and Harmony in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology London: T&T Clark, 2012), 106-111.

<sup>34</sup> Brown, 'Sacred and the Profane Connected', 41.

<sup>35</sup> See Sweeney, 'Edwards and the Bible', 65 for more on this.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson H. Kimmach, 'Frightful Inspiration, Sweet Elevation: The Application of Homiletics by Jonathan Edwards, Jonathan Mayhew, and their Successors of the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee* (ed. D. Schweitzer; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 210, 211.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas A. Sweeney, 'Edwards, Jonathan', in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (ed. D. K. McKim; Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 399.

ise linguistic or textual concerns in the way we have grown accustomed to expect, but instead he assumes systematic and existential unities within his exegetical work, which we have grown accustomed to ignore.

### III Known by God as Spiritual Refocus

God's knowledge of his creatures is a primary category in Edwards's idealist metaphysics. His handling of the Scriptures reflects a particular moment in historical development, where he is open to critical questions but ultimately committed to defending Scriptural authority and harmony. From the perspective of both philosophy and hermeneutics, then, God and the unity of his purposes are central to Edwards's labours.

In this section, we build upon these foundations and find in Edwards's understanding of glorification related in the beatific vision a further application of the theme of being known by God, which in the end is an eschatological category.

#### 1. The beatific vision

He makes the connection between being known by God and eschatological reality in one of his earliest known sermons from the period in New York, and in another preached around thirteen years later in 1733:

But the dwelling in such a glorious place is but the least part of the happiness of heaven. There is the conversation with saints: with holy men of old, Moses, Job, David, Elijah, etc.; with the prophets [and] apostles, and besides that, with the

man Christ Jesus who was crucified for mankind at Jerusalem. Neither is that the chief thing, the Beatific Vision of God: *that* is the tip of happiness! To see a God of infinite glory and majesty face to face, to see him as he is, and to know him as we are known; there to be admitted into the most intimate acquaintance with him, to be embraced as in his arms: this is such a privilege as Moses himself could not be admitted to while on earth. The vision and fruition of God will be so intimate and clear as to transform the soul into the likeness of God.<sup>38</sup>

But when we get to heaven, if ever that be, there we shall be brought to a perfect union with God. There we shall have the clear views of God's glory: we shall see face to face, and know as we are known. There we shall be fully conformed to God, without any remains of sin: "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." There we shall serve God perfectly. We shall glorify him in an exalted manner, and to the utmost of the powers and capacity of our nature. Then we shall perfectly give up ourselves to God; then will our hearts be wholly a pure and holy offering to God, offered all in the flame of divine love.<sup>39</sup>

The *textus classicus*, which expounds the theme of being known by

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'The Value of Salvation', in *Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 10; ed. W. H. Kinnach; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 324.

<sup>39</sup> Edwards, 'True Christian's Life', *WJE* 17: 437.

God eschatologically, is 1 Corinthians 13:12, upon which this quotation is based. Here Paul makes an explicit connection between our knowledge of God, which is still fragmentary, though it will be complete at the culmination of history when God's knowledge of us is experienced fully. Using Paul's illustration of a mirror, Edwards unpacks the nature of this spiritual knowledge, which is partially clear to us now, but one day will be grasped without distortion and without mediation, for we shall see God 'face to face'. Being known by God now has its climax in our personal and visual encounter with him later.

In this world, according to his *Notes on Scripture*, our vision of God is mediated by the structures of ministry, though it will in the end be grasped immediately:

And herein the sight that the saints have of the glory of Christ in this world, differs from that sight that the saints have in heaven; for there they see immediately, face to face, but here by a medium, by an intervening looking glass, in which the glory is but obscure in comparison of the immediate glory seen in heaven.<sup>40</sup>

Edwards, using Moses as his counterpoint, makes the connection that seeing God is for the next world: 'It was not face to face, which is reserved for the heavenly state (1 Corinthians 13:12), but it was God's back parts.'<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in *The 'Blank Bible'*, Edwards makes use of 1 Corinthians 13:12, but not so much to comment upon the rela-

tionship between knowledge and vision in heaven, as to reinforce the accommodated vision of God we have in this world.<sup>42</sup>

## 2. The God who knows us

Edwards however, takes it a step further. He asks the more fundamental question: if we are known by God, who is this God who knows us? The answer is that any knowledge of God, including knowledge of God appropriated spiritually in his immediate presence in heaven, is through union with Jesus Christ by his Spirit:

there is no creature [that] can thus have an immediate sight of God, but only Jesus Christ ... God converses with them by voluntary manifestations and significations of his mind ... by impulses of his Spirit; and this also is by Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Edwards's account of the vision of God requires reflection on the Father's knowledge and love of the Son, and our union with Christ. Edwards wrote in an unpublished sermon on Romans 2:10:

They being in Christ shall partake of the love God the Father [has] to Christ, and as the Son knows the Father so they shall partake with him in his sight of God, as being as it were parts of him as he is in the bosom of the Father.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Edwards, *WJE* 24: 1055.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Misc. 777', in *The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. 501-832)* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 18; ed. A. Chamberlain; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 428, 430.

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Edwards, '373. Unpublished Sermon on Romans 2:10 (December 1735)', in *Sermons, Series II, 1735* (The Works of Jonath-

<sup>40</sup> Edwards, *WJE* 15: 321.

<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *WJE* 15: 221.

Strobel writes: 'It is within the person of Christ, the true mediator between God and humanity, that believers can now see and be seen, as they know and are known.'<sup>45</sup>

When appealing to Christology or adoption to establish God's knowledge of us and our knowledge of him, Edwards is not merely fine-tuning theological niceties, but wants to defend the value of the beatific vision to hold together apologetic and ethical commitments. It of course functions first of all to promote a Reformed theocentric agenda:

Motivated by a spiritual foretaste of beatific vision rooted objectively in Holy Scripture, Edwards projected the major unifying theme of his life and works—the glory of God—against the backdrop raised by the man-centred moral philosophers of his day, and against a rising Arminian tide.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. The life of love

But secondly, being known by God functions as a theological canopy for our own ethical participation in a life of love. Being known by God cannot remain, in Edwards's casting, an individual or intellectual aspiration for the

last day, a vision designed to promote solitary contemplation as some medi-evals might have suggested. It impacts our understanding of discipleship even when we can see only in a glass darkly.<sup>47</sup> Given the sustained theme and significance of 1 Corinthians 13, Strobel summarises both the link between sight and knowledge, and the link between sight and love:

Our knowledge of God in regeneration is somehow connected to the knowledge of God in glory ... a point not often attended to, is that our knowledge of God is connected to our being known by God. This is the thrust of the latter half of that verse. 'Face to face' knowledge, therefore, is not simply a depiction of proximity, but of relationality. Relational knowledge entails knowing as you are known, and this is the kind of knowledge we are presented with here. Knowledge of God is not knowledge of an object, but is personal knowledge—knowledge available within a relationship of love ... The beatific vision is the vision of love, and as such, it is both knowing and being known in love. The fruit of this is that the believer will know himself or herself as the one who is beloved of God.<sup>48</sup>

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an Edwards Online 50; ed. Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2015), L.44v-45r.

<sup>45</sup> Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology Volume 19; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 143.

<sup>46</sup> David C. Brand, *Profile of the Last Puritan: Jonathan Edwards, Self-love, and the Dawn of the Beatific* (American Academy of Religion Academy Series No. 73; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 1-2.

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<sup>47</sup> Bauckham, Richard J. 'Vision of God'. Pages 710-711 in *New Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright. Leicester: IVP, 1988, see especially 711.

<sup>48</sup> Kyle Strobel, 'A Spiritual Sight of Love: Constructing a Doctrine of the Beatific Vision', *Union* <[www.uniontheology.org/resources/bible/biblical-theology/a-spiritual-sight-of-love-constructing-a-doctrine-of-the-beatific-vision#\\_ednref4](http://www.uniontheology.org/resources/bible/biblical-theology/a-spiritual-sight-of-love-constructing-a-doctrine-of-the-beatific-vision#_ednref4)> accessed August 2015.

The vision of God at the last day motivates us towards godly living, in so far as we begin to conform ourselves to that reality as a token of our place in the purposes of God,

of which the transforming experience of regeneration and sanctification in this present life is the spiritual dawning ... such a life is an expression, albeit an imperfect one, of the heavenly from which it radiates.<sup>49</sup>

Our experience of God now and our awaited future experience are 'not utterly unrelated'.<sup>50</sup> Edwards writes:

We should follow Christ in the path that he has gone; the way that he traveled in was the right way to heaven. We should take up our cross and follow him. We should travel along in the same way of meekness and lowliness of heart, in the same way of obedience, and charity, and diligence to do good, and patience under afflictions. The way to heaven is an heavenly life. We must be traveling towards heaven in a way of imitation of those that are in heaven, in imitation of the saints or angels therein, in their holy employments, in their way of spending their time in loving, adoring, serving, and praising God and the Lamb.<sup>51</sup>

We should endeavor continually to

be more and more as we hope to be in heaven, in respect of holiness and conformity to God. We should endeavor to be more & more {as we hope to be in heaven}, with respect to light and knowledge, should labor to be continually growing in knowledge of God and Christ, and divine things, clear views of the gloriousness and excellency of divine things, that we come nearer and nearer to the beatific vision.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4. Present implications and continuities

Being known by God in Edwards, a theme refracted here through his exposition of the eschatological goal of the vision of God in glory, mediated by Christ, has present implications, for being known by God, even without idealist assumptions, gives shape to our spiritual experience and our theological confidence. In the personal vicissitudes of life and the socially fragmented experience of late-modern capitalism, being known by God assumes an approach to all reality which allows for continuities between this age and the next when we will be completely transformed. The ultimate vision of God provides some measure of anticipated integration for our identity now.

For Edwards, the ultimate knowledge of God, knowing and being known, focuses on the beatific vision, which is also the moment of the believer's greatest joy. Being known by God in Christ functions as the basis for our

<sup>49</sup> Brand, *Profile of the Last Puritan*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 301.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'The True Christian's Life a Journey towards Heaven', in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 17; ed. M. Valeri; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 433.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, 'True Christian's Life', *WJE* 17: 434-435.



joy in Christ,<sup>53</sup> for joy is a concomitant of glory:

In rejoicing with this joy, their minds were filled, as it were, with a glorious brightness, and their natures exalted and perfected: it was a most worthy, noble rejoicing, that did not corrupt and debase the mind, as many carnal joys do; but did greatly beautify and dignify it: it was a prelibation of the joy of heaven, that raised their minds to a degree of heavenly blessedness: it filled their minds with the light of God's glory, and made 'em (sic) themselves to shine with some communication of that glory.<sup>54</sup>

The theme of being known by God in Edwards's writings has shown us here by way of the beatific vision a concept which is necessarily Trinitarian, ethically fruitful, and personally satisfying. We are known by a God who has embraced us in his life, and has empowered us in our living.

#### IV Focus on God's Purposes

Edwards saw his role in eighteenth

century terms as inverting the theological trend towards Arminianism and defending the primacy of God in creation and redemptive history. Some have maintained that Edwards prioritized subjective experience of religion, focusing on 'Christ in us more than Christ for us'.<sup>55</sup> However, sustained engagement with the theme of known by God, in philosophical reflection, exegetical assumptions, and eschatological hope, might suggest at least some qualification of Ortlund's claim. In fact, being known by God in this set of observations highlights God's unitary purposes irrespective of my affections.

We are reminded of Edwards's idealism, rebuked by his sense of Scriptural coherence, and asked to refocus on his vision of God in Christ, which has sadly become blurry in much evangelical spirituality. While the phrase, 'knowing God', is associated with spiritual growth in common evangelical patois, it is no less true that the challenge of being 'known by God' operates as a spiritual reality check.

Edwards provides resources for biblical scholars, systematic theologians and pastoral practitioners to reflect on their own assumptions and aspirations, and thereby to enrich their own scholarly reflection. Edwards starts a conversation that reminds, rebukes and refocuses us, so that we might start everything with God.

<sup>53</sup> Dane C. Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Theologians on the Christian Life; Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 77.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 2. Edited by John E. Smith; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 95.

<sup>55</sup> Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 179.

# Towards a Theology of Human Identity

## Competing Identities: Imagining and Inventing new Identities

Samuel Jayakumar

AT TIMES MEN AND WOMEN construct their identities intentionally and at other times they allow external forces to shape their sense of self. It is agreed that we need positive and healthy identities to order our lives. It seems that one's identity is the essence of one's being. If so, is it necessary to establish absolute identities? For humans, questions such as, Who am I? Who are we?, relating to personal and communal identities matter most.

Human identity is embedded in culture, and culture is influenced and shaped by one's faith, ideology, ethnicity and religion. People are often naturally self-centred, so that individual identity is important for them. What is the essence of 'will for identity'? Is it only a preference of self to the other, or is it something more than that? What kind of identity do humans want to nurture and what kind of communities do humans want to create? Why are identities asserting themselves as dynamic forces? While there are many

kinds of human identity, this paper will deal with it in relation to religion and culture.

As far as India is concerned, currently *religion* and *culture* are the two forces that contribute to formations of *Indian and Christian identities* more than other factors such as caste and ethnicity. However, in India caste and ethnicity are included in the religious cultural systems.

Even so there may be various options available for the Indian masses in the formation as well as transformation of their identities. This paper will examine how humans as individuals/persons have the capacity to continue to imagine and invent new and positive identities in relation to religious or spiritual and cultural ethos.

### I The Complexity of Human Identity

Human identity is very complex. While modern science can explain human

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Rev. Dr. **Samuel Jayakumar**, PhD, (Oxford Centre for Mission Studies), was a cross-cultural missionary to North India before he became Principal of Madras Theological Seminary & College (MTSC) of the Evangelical Church of India (ECI). He is currently Director, Evangelical Theological Academy, a Unit of MTSC, Chennai, India. His doctoral dissertation focused on the impact of the gospel on the Indian Dalits, and he has published Mission Reader: Historical Models for Wholistic Mission in the Indian Context (2002) and Renewal of Mission in India: A Historical Perspective (2008).

identity based on the theory of evolution, religions cannot. Science reduces the human being to its anatomy. Anatomy itself is an act of dividing anything, corporeal or intellectual for the purpose of examining its parts. As a result, in the modern scientific age there are many reasons and opportunities for people to lose their identities as individuals.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, materialism considers human beings as composed of nothing more than material components. Our intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects are products of our material nature, acting according to the rules of physics and biology. As a result humans are not responsible for their behaviour, nor are they distinguishable from the other forms of creation. Therefore, one has no dignity or inherent worth. Materialism unlike religion does not address the issue of human dignity and destiny.

However, one's physical relationships—bodies, food, clothing, housing, as well as geography, determine one's identity. Likewise one's family, friends, community, government, managers and co-workers as well as enemies also contribute to one's identity. Modern science as well as materialism cannot exclude these factors.

Even so, Semitic religions do not advocate evolutionary theory for understanding humans or the world. Almost all religions treat humans as individual persons with unique personalities and characteristic features. In religions humans are significantly important beings compared with other living beings.

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1 This is a complicated issue in the context of organ transplantation, etc.

In some religions, such as Judaism and the Christian faith, the human being is considered as the crown of creation. In Hindu religions such as Saivism and Vaishnavism, humans have unique identity with God.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, in all religions, humans are considered not to have evolved, but to be created and sustained by a personal God. A human being is a *person*, which is an idea deriving from the concept of the existence of a personal God, and is therefore capable of making conscious moral choices.

Names given to human beings at the time of birth or at a later period are part of culture and religion. Among the Hebrews, names were not taken for granted because one's name was supposed to reveal one's personal character. The first human was named Adam and this particular word indicates the human as a being created from material; a dustling, or earthling.<sup>3</sup> Also, it is believed that the name of a person or thing was closely related to its essence. Thus Esau and Jacob were named at their birth. When parents give a child a name, they are also making a confession about their hope for who their child will become. In this way, the name carries with it some identity for the child.

Moreover, because for the Hebrews

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2 But there are exceptions. In some eastern religions such as Brahminical Hinduism and Vedantic monism humanity merges into the divine. Atmans (humans) emanate from Braman so that in some way they will reunite with that supreme being.

3 Adam is the Hebrew word for 'man'. It could be ultimately derived from Hebrew '*adam*', meaning 'to be red', referring to the ruddy colour of human skin, or from Akkadian '*adamu*' meaning 'to make'.

a name is so profound in its meaning, a *change* of name is very much the same thing as a change of personality or character. Thus Abram becomes Abraham and Sarai becomes Sarah; Jacob becomes Israel and Saul becomes Paul. Names given to persons have inherent benefits. They include psychological, spiritual, legal, religious, and ethnic aspects.

It takes time for people to discover who and what they are. For instance, for the most part in India, the Bahujans (the majority of the people) are given an identity by the dominant elitist religious discourses arising from Hindu Vedas such as Manusmirthi as we shall see below. Similarly, the Government of India reinforces the caste identity of individual persons through its *identity policy and politics* such as reservation.<sup>4</sup>

Religion and culture provide people with some sort of psychology for understanding their selfhood. Identity from the psychological perspective relates to self-image, self-esteem, and individuality which include gender identity, how an individual views him or herself both as a person and in relation to other people. Thus, from the perspective of psychology, 'identity' refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self.<sup>5</sup> However, the understanding of who we are and what we are is for the most part shaped by a psychology informed by culture and religion.

In contexts such as that of India,

culture and religion overlap. While cultural identity is the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as one is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture, in India groups could refer to people groups, castes, clans, tribes, extended families, *kulam* and *kothrams*. Culture refers also to the religious customs, rituals, practices, languages (sacred/secular), values and world-views that define social groups, such as those based on nationality, ethnicity, region or common interests. Therefore for Indians, cultural identity such as Dalit, Dravidian, Aryan, etc are important for people's sense of self and how they relate to others.

The current concept of national culture is a construct. Nation-states for the most part believe that a strong 'cultural identity' can contribute to people's overall well-being. It is assumed that cultural identity based on ethnicity is not necessarily exclusive, because people may identify with more than one culture, especially in the globalized urban western contexts.

It is suggested that such inclusive cultural identity is an important contributor to people's well-being. 'Identifying with a particular culture makes people feel they belong and gives them a sense of security. It also provides access to social networks, which provide support and shared values and aspirations.'<sup>6</sup> However, it is also recognized that strong cultural identity expressed in the wrong way can contribute to barriers between groups.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> L. D. Jenkins, *Identity and Identification in India: Defining the Disadvantaged* (London, Routledge, 2003), 180.

<sup>5</sup> M.R Leary and J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>6</sup> *The Social Report, Ministry of Social Development* (New Zealand, 2010). (An Internet Article) <http://socialreport.msd.govt.nz/documents/the-social-report-2010.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *The Social Report*, 2010.

It is argued that national identity is *an illusion* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. This is especially true of India—nations within a nation. India is truly a multinational federation like the USA, so that this vast nation could be called ‘the United States of India’. But everyone is free to imagine and invent their own caste, clan and people-identity.

## II Inventing New Identities in Modern India

India is a grand mosaic, comprising numerous ethnic communities, speaking different languages, and practising different faiths and ideologies. The creation of Indian identity began only during the British rule, and this newly developed identity became ‘strong’ only after Independence. The Indian national identity was nurtured after the manner of European nation-state identities. As far as European States were concerned, it was the new nationalism that contributed to the emergence of such language and race-based identities in Europe.

Similarly, in India the cultural nationalism, *swadeshi*, played an important role in the construction of Indian identity. For the Europeans it was not too difficult to form such nation-states and nurture-identities because most of the nation-states had only one language and only one culture which was an advantage for them. However, for Indians, there are numerous disruptive factors such as culture, language and religion.

India as a nation-state is defined by its Constitution. India adopted a constitution which defines the nature and the functions of state, the rights citizens enjoy and the role of the executive and judiciary. Constitutional sanctions maintain secularism. Thus India is a political construct—a political identity created for nurturing oneness in spite of the realities of the numerous otherness.

Yet, for the most part, Indian people are individually as well as collectively conscious of their racial and religious identities, such as Dravidians, Aryans, Sikhs, Parcheesi, Hindus, Muslims and others. As a result we have the Hindu Mahashaba and its sister organizations, like the Muslim League, which all nurture religious, racial and cultural identities.

As we shall see below it was the European ideologists as well as some of the missionary scholars who discovered new identities for various people of India, especially for the Aryans and Dravidians. There were two different projects: one was the Orientalists School of Calcutta and the other was the Madras School of Orientalists trying to invent identities for various peoples, researching into language, culture and religions.<sup>8</sup>

### 1. The Orientalists’ invention of Aryan cultural identities

The Orientalists’ invention of Aryan racial theories has contributed to competing identities among the vast

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion see M. Rajive and A. Neelakandan, *Breaking India: Western Interventions in Dravidian and Dalit Faultlines* (New Delhi: Amaryllis, 2011), 1-10.

majority of the Indians until today. In India modernity was a project initiated and controlled by the British Raj with the aim of maintaining its own rule through people educated by them and loyal to them. They aimed at shaping Indian culture according to their understanding of modernity, by judging it to be both corrupt and pre-modern.<sup>9</sup>

One such project was the Calcutta School of Orientalism headed by William Jones (1746-1794) who is viewed as the founder of British Orientalism and one of leading figures in the history of modern linguistics. Later Max Muller (1823-1900), who studied the 'Aryan family of languages', in particular Sanskrit literature and Vedic culture, led another project. His translation (and publication) of the Rigveda in English 'conferred a boon upon Brahmins for which they are eternally grateful'.<sup>10</sup>

These activities resulted first of all in the objectification and use of Indian languages as instruments to understand, appease and control the people of India; secondly in the construction of history of the relationship between India and the West, to classify, order and locate their civilizations on an evaluative scale of progress and decay; and to incorporate India into universal

history. Thirdly, it involved the patronage of Brahminical religion, culture, traditions, institutions, etc.<sup>11</sup>

It was obvious that the Raj was committed to preserving, reviving and consolidating the dominant native traditions (culture, language and religion) and upon this ideological commitment the whole empire stood. R.E. Frykenberg examines the nexus that existed between the colonial Raj and the Brahminical Hindus. For him 'the Raj forged its grand all-embracing imperium out of earlier imperial institutions and ideologies... of the still earlier Hindu structures...'<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, Indologists such as Max Muller contended that the Aryans were a branch of the Indo-European race and Sanskrit was an Indo-Aryan language, related to the languages of the West. The Aryans invaded India around 1500 BC, conquered the indigenous people, and established Vedic culture which became the foundation of Indian culture. These conclusions encouraged the Brahminical Hindu nationalists to press forward to establish their *Sanatanadharm*a, an abiding, spiritual, primordial civilisation which became their unifying principle. 'From here, it was easy for nationalism and nationalist historiography to take on a religious turn, identifying these realities with the Hindu religious past—Hindu understood as a monolithic conception'.<sup>13</sup>

9 S. Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion: Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*, (Oxford: Regnum & Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 361. Cf. Vinay Samuel, 'Modernity, Postmodernity and Ethnic Minorities', *Transformation* (October, 1993), 14.

10 'From the Secretary of the Adi-Brahmo Samaj of Calcutta', (May 28, 1875) in *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Muller edited by his wife in two Volumes*, Vol.1 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1902), 488.

11 B. S. Cohn, 'The Command of Language, and the Language Command', in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies, IV, Writings on South Asian History* (Delhi: OUP, 1985), 316.

12 Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 91.

13 Felix Wilfred, 'Whose Nation? Whose His-

When the British established political superiority over all other European rivals in India, they tried also to establish intellectual superiority over all other European countries with regard to understanding India. Even so, it was colonial policy to civilize and educate the elite (the Brahmins and upper-castes) which would arrest the decline of the great Indian culture so that 'difference' could be preserved. The British colonial Raj endeavoured to bring social change by reforming the native culture, but not the religion. The aim was to construct a civil society after the model of their nation-state by producing a caste elite who used the benefits of the Raj for them and knew that their position was secure because their religious foundations were not threatened.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, the colonial Raj sponsored Oriental studies that resulted in the renaissance of Brahminical Hinduism and Hindu nationalism and the emergence of several religious reform movements. Some of these movements were orthodox or counter-reform while others were modern and secular, purged of superstitious beliefs and customs. As Corrie Acorda has said, 'modernization and colonization are two sides of a pair of scissors. Whenever colonization cuts across a nation, modernization splits that nation's culture in two, the modern and the traditional.'<sup>15</sup>

Ambedkar could clearly see the results of the modernization that came through the colonialists. Leaving the poor and the oppressed classes behind, the Brahminical Hindu nationalists tried to build their empire with the help of the British.

The Brahmin believes in a two-nation theory. He claims to be the representative of the Aryan race and he regards the rest of the Hindus as descendants of the non-Aryans. This theory helps him to establish his kinship with European races and share their arrogance and their superiority. He particularly likes the part of the theory which makes the Aryan an invader and a conqueror of the non-Aryan native race. For it helps him to maintain and justify his lordship over the non-Brahmins.<sup>16</sup>

Firstly, the imagined historical claims of Hindutva were made much more possible within the modern forms of a colonial historiography that was constructed around the complex identity of a people, the nation-state.<sup>17</sup> Orthodox movements like the Arya Samaj made the people more and more traditional and orthodox. They produced the Hindu nationalists, V. D. Savakar, K. B. Hedgewar and Golwalkar, who framed the agenda of Hindutva, a way of life, which is at present forced on the people of this country.

Secondly, while the promoters of

tory?', *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXXII, No. 187, January, 2002, 64.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 227. Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, pp. 92, 249.

<sup>15</sup> Corrie Acorda, 'Tradition, Modernity and Christian Mission in Asia', *Transformation* (Oc-

tober, 1993), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Vasnt Moon (ed), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 7 (Pune: Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 80.

<sup>17</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'Claims of the Past: The Genealogy of Modern Historiography', in *Subaltern Studies Vol. VIII: Essays in Honor of Ranajit Guha* (Delhi: OUP, 1996), 2.

Hindutva co-opted the under-classes into their discourse for building their empire, they excluded them from democratic participation in the sphere of religion, economics, politics and so on. 'Nationalism' was a very subtle discourse which lacked moral foundations. Now the result is that Dalits and the backward castes want to quit Hinduism.

Kancha Ilaiah shows why he is not a Hindu:

I was not born a Hindu for the simple reason that my parents did not know that they were Hindus. ... My illiterate parents, who lived in a remote South Indian village, did not know that they belonged to any religion at all. People belong to a religion only when they know that they are part of the people who worship that God, when they go to those temples and take part in the rituals and festivals of that religion. My parents had only one identity and that was their caste—*kulam*: they were Kurumaas.<sup>18</sup>

Thus today the Dalits–Bahujans have begun to assert their identities in terms of their local religion and culture.

## 2. Dravidian racial consciousness and cultural identities

On the other hand, it was the nineteenth and twentieth-century Protestant Christian missionaries who introduced modernity (including the process of change and the resulting values) among the Dalits. As far as South India

was concerned, for the most part, the missionaries represented a well-educated middle class in the Victorian era when England itself was developing an increasing sense of national and imperial destiny. The country was becoming more and more part of the world.

Also, England was becoming a materially prosperous country as it grew in technological advancement and population. The general belief was that 'whatever the shortcomings of the past, today was good and tomorrow would be better'. According to Kitson Clark the increase in population, the industrial revolution, the religious awakening and the increase in literacy were some of the powerful forces that were at work in the community.<sup>19</sup>

However, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> it is wrong to identify the evangelistic work of the British missionaries as a mere colonial enterprise. European missiological thought and missionary methods were firmly rooted in the Christian traditions and heritage of that period. As in England, so in India, the Christian missionaries were concerned about 'civil life', 'morals' and 'virtues' (Christian character formation) among the Dalit converts. The missionaries, being influenced by the religious and intellectual currents of their time as well as out of sympathy and concern, were eager to spread the benefits of western civilization along with the gospel. They wanted Christianisation and civilization (modernity) to go hand in hand.

Being motivated by evangelical con-

<sup>19</sup> G. K. Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (London: Methuen & CO, 1962), 207.

<sup>20</sup> Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 151-153, 169.

<sup>18</sup> Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am Not A Hindu* (Calcutta, Smaye, 1996), 1.



cern, and the long tradition of learning and scholarship among the Church of England's clergy, Christian missionaries like Robert Caldwell and G.U. Pope, the pioneers of South Indian scholarship, gave a lead to a project independent of and even quite antithetical to the colonial government-sponsored projects.

Caldwell's foremost thesis was that the Dravidian languages, in particular Tamil, were independent of Sanskrit. The South Indian scholars who continued the research pioneered by the missionaries and came up with new perspectives on Tamil history and culture supported this thesis. This resulted in the emergence of Dravidian racial consciousness, cultural ideology and recently, Dalit consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

Like the Dravidian movement, Dalit movements were also an attempt to return to a former period of glory. Dalit consciousness premised on the question of Dalit identity—the question of their roots. Dalit scholars have traced the Dalit movements from a cultural point of view back to Dravidian culture and Tamil renaissance.<sup>22</sup>

However, it is important to note that, while modernity that came through the Raj helped the Brahmins and the upper caste Hindus, the mis-

sionaries empowered the poor and the oppressed communities to find dignity and identity by retrieving their history and heritage. In other words, while modernity that came through the British aided the Brahminical castes, modernity that came through Christianity assisted the Dalits.

They were two different projects with two different motives. If the one was political, the other was Christian. Although the researches of Caldwell and Pope became a great advantage to the common people, the missionaries exhibited the spirit of universalism. They were supporters of neither the Aryans or non-Brahmins. As Burton Stein has pointed out, missionaries were simply the pioneers of Indian scholarship.<sup>23</sup>

The foregoing description suggests that in both cases modernity, as in the European renaissance, enabled the Indians (Brahmins and the non-Brahmins) to idealize their past (invent further histories and create new myths) for competing identities such as Aryan, Dravidian and now Dalit.<sup>24</sup> Though the non-Brahmins and the Dalits initially benefited from modernity, it was the Brahmins and the upper-castes who benefited most.

The colonial project that created the myth of Aryan racist Vedic culture is the base for the ideological platform

<sup>21</sup> With the help of the research initiated by the Christian missionaries, the oppressed classes invented histories for their own advantage. When an oppressed group seeks to throw off oppression, it seeks to 'invent' a history that glorifies its past as the first step in acquiring self-respect. Inventing histories are normal for people who are in Diaspora. (Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 42.)

<sup>22</sup> Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Burton Stein, *Essays on South India* (New Delhi: Vikas, Publishing House), 1975, viii.

<sup>24</sup> 'Modern man invents himself and valorises the new in a heroism of self-discovery and self-revelation. ... Modern man comes of age'. See P. Sampson, 'The Rise of Modernity' in P. Sampson, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (ed) *Faith and Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Regnum, 1994), 33.

called Hindutva-Hindu revivalism and cultural nationalism. As Anandhi has pointed out,

*The Brahminical Hindus* especially, the Hindu communalists are tactfully utilizing the ideological resources of the modernizing nation state to mobilize the so-called Hindus in the name of 'national culture' and ascribe a homogenized content to the notion of citizenship. In this process, they erase and suppress the multiple identities of various religious and ethnic groups. ... The modern state ... constructs identities, which simultaneously exhibit the temptation to return to the so-called traditional glories of the nation and the drive to go further into modernity.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore she contends that,

In India, the process of nation-building, the nationalist movement and the subsequent creation of a modern nation state—all of which drew inspiration from an Orientalist discourse which allowed the Brahminical ideology to co-opt efforts to reform Hinduism—were premised on the perceptions of India as a single aggregate, a so-called 'traditional' community-society. Subsequent modernizing efforts too went hand in hand with the institutionalization of tradition and the instrumental use of traditional symbols and myths.<sup>26</sup>

Thus among the Indians, there is a continued struggle between the Dal-

its and the non-Dalits in order to establish their identities, while they are collectively challenged by the forces of modernity.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen briefly, Hindutva is a new form of monoculture which has resulted from orientalist's discourse. It is a culture or way of life being constantly created, recreated and shaped by the forces of modernity.

The Dalits, being met with this particular challenge, waged a counter cultural movement by utilizing the Christian missionary output and other ideologies, such as Marxism and Ambedkarism. The present approach of the Dalit leaders is similar to the approach of the Brahmins and caste Hindus that promotes class division.<sup>28</sup>

The missionary project had a different aim so that the process of utilising modernity for the benefit of the Dalits was also altogether different. Christian missionaries did not aim at a counter cultural movement, but their activities were cross-cultural—not to confront other groups but engage with them. For missionaries, ethnic and national identity was not the proper way of shaping the identity of the Christians.<sup>29</sup> The dignity and worth of a person depended on what God had done in Jesus Christ for that particular person.

The discovery of self-identity and

<sup>27</sup> 'Modernity locates human identity immanently within the world and at the centre of the world; human beings are reflexively related to themselves in self discovery and insight.' Sampson, *The Rise of Post-modernity*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> For details see Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 362.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. 'Church and State and Nation Building: A Conference Report', Hong Kong, 1988, in Chris Sugden and Vinay Samuel (ed), *Mission as Transformation*, 459.

<sup>25</sup> S. Anandhi, *Contending Identities: Dalits and Secular Politics in Madras Slums* (New Delhi: ISI, 1995), 1 (Italics are mine).

<sup>26</sup> Anandhi, *Contending Identities*, 2.

self-worth as a child of God revealed in the Scripture was an influential factor in the formation of the new Dalit identity among those people with whom the missionaries worked. The invitation to discover such an identity in Christ provided fulfilment and security to the poor and the oppressed. Moreover, Dalit identity was shaped by the relationship with Christ and fellowship with fellow believers locally and universally.<sup>30</sup>

### III Religious and Cultural Identities vs Christian Identity

When people are in diaspora, they invent new identities for their survival and mobility. In the 19th century various depressed classes invented competing identities for their collective social advancement. They used cultural and religious idioms for constructing such identities.

The mass-movement Christians were no exceptions in this regard. For instance, among the languages spoken in India, Tamil was the first language into which the Bible was translated. As a result the Protestant Christians of South India who were predominantly from the outcastes began to regard themselves as *Vethakaramga*, the people of the Scripture. It was a kind of counter-cultural identity over against the existing Brahminical Hindu Vedic identity.

The outcaste communities who were once considered by society as polluted and fit for nothing, effectively utilized the biblical images such as 'new crea-

tion' and 'sons of God' to increase their self-worth and dignity which had been denied to them for centuries. For the outcastes the religious identity, that is, the association with Christ and fellowship with believers, had precedence over communal identity.

In a sense Christians have no exclusive or separate identity for themselves. They are supposed to nurture an inclusive mindset to create space for others. This involves a broadening of the mind, escaping from the ghetto mentality, nurturing a catholic or universal personality, and becoming a world-Christian, transcending culture and caste boundaries in order to join the main stream of Indian society). For the most part Christians try to maintain such integrated identity. Even so, resurgence of native religious pride, Christian religious sensitivity, patriotism, Christian publicity, and unity of Christians are some of the national concerns to be debated.

Due to centuries of socio-economic and political oppression, the Dalit communities of southern states such as Tamil Nadu, the Shanars and the Paraiyas, became a people who had lost their dignity and self-worth.<sup>31</sup> When the Dalits embraced Christianity they became, in the course of time, a dignified people provided with an awakened consciousness and a new self-identity, based on their new understanding of who they were in Christ Jesus through a progressive conversion experience.

The awakening of the Dalit con-

<sup>30</sup> Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 339.

<sup>31</sup> Though both communities were branded as untouchables, the Nadars were a somewhat less oppressed community than the Paraiyas, who were at the bottom of the Hindu social pyramid.

sciousness and formation of new identity was directed and energized by missionary-led Christian experiences such as church fellowship, sacraments, liturgy, adherence to the Scriptures and devotion to Christ. This seems to be an invariable element in the social transformation of the poor and oppressed communities of the Indian sub-continent.

Before conversion to Christianity the untouchables of Tamil Nadu had a poor self-image. For instance the Nadars and Paraiyas were described by the upper caste Hindus as untouchables, a polluting class, outcastes, *panchamas*, fifth caste, *Paraiyas*, *Shanars*, *Illapajathi*, lowest caste, *Kalla*, thieves, *panaiyeri*, palmyra tree climbers, and so on. They were identified as people who were not entitled to receive *mantras*, Brahminical prayers, and who were denied access to the *Vedas*, Scriptures. They did not worship Hindu gods, nor were they served by Brahmins or had any Brahmin priest at all.

Moreover they had no access to the interior of ordinary Hindu temples.<sup>32</sup> They had come to accept that they were nobody. They came to believe what they had been told so often: you are untouchables, fit only for slavery and servitude. These are examples of what created the negative identity which the Brahminical Hindu social order had given to the Dalits.

Furthermore, they were a people who could not secure profitable and dignified jobs. Unable to own land they were forced to be content with hard and sometimes dirty and degrading labour. They were illiterate because

they were denied education. This was always controlled by Brahmins and the upper castes.<sup>33</sup> They were forced to develop their own social customs and manners which were not consistent with the accepted social behaviour of the upper-caste society.<sup>34</sup>

The contempt and humiliation was legitimized by the Hindu Code of Law called *Manusmriti* which provided each caste with an identity. Manu wrote,

Give a name to a Brahmin which invokes in others the idea of reverence and respect; give a name to a *Kshatriya* which invokes in others valour and courage; give a name to a *Vaishya* which invokes in others the idea of wealth and prosperity; give a name to a *Sudra* which invokes in others the idea of contempt and humiliation.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, it is obvious that while all other castes were given an identity, the so-called *panchamas* or fifth caste were not given an identity at all in the Brahminical social order. Wherefore, if an untouchable tried to lead a life with human dignity and honour it would be looked upon as an act of rebellion, and an issue of law and order.<sup>36</sup> For instance, when Christian Nadar women

<sup>33</sup> See Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 4.2.4.

<sup>34</sup> L. K. A. Krishna Iyer, *The Tribes and Castes* (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1987), 68-69, 85, 277, 278. S. Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, (Madras: AES, 1991), 82, 83, 99, 100, 291, 297, 299, 300, 331, 304, 310. Cf. B. Basavalingappa, *The Emancipation of Scheduled Castes* (Bangalore: Nagasena Vidyalaya, 1991), 3.

<sup>35</sup> G. C. Houghton, *Manava Dharma Sastra* (Delhi: AES, 1982), 275.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Vasantmoon (ed), *Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, Vol.VII (Pune: Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 71.

<sup>32</sup> See Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 2.3.3,4; 5.4.

began to wear blouses like other women, the upper-caste men and women could not tolerate it and it became a matter of legal concern in society.<sup>37</sup>

In Tamil Nadu in regions such as Tirunelveli various untouchable communities turned to Christ in groups as a way of finding their corporate identity, since this important personality need was denied to them by the Hindu Brahminical caste-ridden society.

As Vinay Samuel has pointed out,

Christian identity is not confined to place or race. Our identity is to be as children of God—‘He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5). ... Thus a Christian response to those alienated from their identity is to bring them into relationships of wholeness. The foundation of this is the reconciliation of which the cross is a sign and the basis: ‘he himself is our peace who made the two one’ (Ephesians 2:4).<sup>38</sup>

Vinay Samuel goes on to say that God’s intention is to create one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace. In response to the hostility of ethnic barriers, Christians are to focus on wholeness and a new humanity through the power of the cross. For Vinay Samuel these are not words—they are a reality. The New Testament shows that Paul had seen it work as the age-old hostilities between

Jews and Gentiles were overcome in Christ.<sup>39</sup> William Storrar also shares a similar view.

The one new humanity in Christ is a community of unity in diversity, a holy nation made up of people of all nations who, in embracing their new identity in Christ, retain their social and cultural identities as Gentiles and lose only the oppression and distorting effect of sin and their separation from God’s covenant people (Ephesians 2:3). ... There is also a fundamental equality of all God’s people in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29), but that does not efface our identities as Jew or Greek.<sup>40</sup>

Missionaries taught their Dalit converts, who practised mutual untouchability and were hostile towards each other, to love one another by acknowledging the biblical truth that they were all the children of the one living God and saved by his only Son the Lord Jesus Christ. They taught their upper-caste converts, who were the traditional oppressors of the Dalits to comprehend the core of the gospel which says that, ‘what God has cleansed you call not unclean’.

The missionaries and the Christian community believed in the truth that all human beings are equally worthy of respect because they are created in the image of God. They took efforts to unmask and expose the falsehood of the Aryan racist myth of caste.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity* (Trivandrum: Seminary Publications, 1984), 77-97. R. L. Hardgrave, *Nadars of Tamilnad* (Berkeley: UCP, 1969), 65-70.

<sup>38</sup> Vinay Samuel, ‘Strangers and Exiles in the Bible’, *Transformation*, 12:2 (April-June, 1995), 28-29.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel, *Strangers and Exiles in the Bible*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> W. Storrar, ‘Vertigo or Imago?’, *Themelios*, 21:3 (April, 1996), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, 340-341.

Modernity represents a great assault on humanness in precipitating a crisis of identity.<sup>42</sup> The way the Christian mission tackled the identity crisis is important. It becomes a lesson to be learned by the Indian church.

#### IV Nationalism and Closed Identities

As H. Kohn has made clear, contemporary nationalism is a political creed that underlies the cohesion of modern societies and legitimises their claim to authority.<sup>43</sup> In India, since the 19th century, a variety of nationalisms emerged, particularly in the context of its interaction with the ideologies of the British Raj in general and Christianity in particular.

According to Vincent Kumaradoss, nationalism cannot merely be 'endowed with a monolithic, anti-colonial content' and there can be 'multiple histories of nationalism and colonialism', depending on the specific context. However, 'in the nationalist discourse the concept of "nation" and "nationalism" are invested with an aura of utmost sacredness, endowing nationalism with a monolithic anti-colonial and anti-Christian content'.<sup>44</sup>

42 Os Guinness, 'Mission Modernity: Seven Checkpoints on Mission in the Modern World', in Samuel and Sugden (ed), *Mission as Transformation*, 296.

43 H. Kohn, 'Nationalism' *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1968), 63. Quoted by Leela D'Souza, 'Ethnic Nationalism in India—An Appraisal', *VJTR* Vol.66, (January, 2002), 44.

44 Vincent Kumaradoss, 'Nationalism and Christianity in Colonial India', Unpublished Seminar paper, Mission Studies Forum (Bangalore, February 26, 2000), 1.

Not only in India but also in other Two-Thirds world countries, nationalism emerged in the context of British rule. As we have noted in the previous sections, the 'initiators' of the modernization process in these countries, particularly in India, were the colonizers—the British themselves who provided much of the infrastructure for the emergence of nationalism(s) of various types, both cultural and ethnic.<sup>45</sup> The modern Hindu nationalists' pride was invented to counter (Christian) western accusation of Brahminical Hinduism as an irrational religion and Brahminical caste Hindus as inferior people.

The Hindu nationalists claimed that the irrational elements of Hinduism, such as caste, child marriage and sati, were later additions to Hinduism and the true Hinduism of the past was free from such practices and was indeed rational.<sup>46</sup> They sought to revitalize and regenerate as well as reinvent the so-called Hindu *sanantan* culture ('abiding' primordial civilization) as a way of re-establishing Hindu Brahminical imperialism so as to suppress other religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians. But they achieved it in the name of 'resisting colonialism' and now they do it in the name of opposing westernization and globalization.

The cultural nationalists glorified the ancient past and developed several myths for their own selfish advantage. Three of them are noteworthy:

First of these myths is the belief that Indian society reached a high water-

45 Leela D'Souza, *Ethnic Nationalism in India*, 38.

46 Kumaradoss, *Nationalism and Christianity*, 8.

mark, the golden age, in ancient India, from which it gradually slid downwards during the medieval period, the period of decay and foreign rule and continued to slide downwards till the revivalist movements made partial recovery but that the real task of reviving the past glory and civilization still remains.

The second myth arose out of the necessity to prove that India of ancient past—the golden age—had made the highest achievements in human civilization. But this was not obviously true in material civilization, cranks who talk of atomic bombs and aeroplanes in ancient India notwithstanding. Therefore the myth grew that Indian genius lay in ‘spiritualism’ in which respect it was superior to the materialistic West.

The third was the Aryan myth, which was a copy of the Anglo-Saxon myths, (*but it was originally invented by two Brahmins, namely Manu and Kaudillya*) and it was the Indian response to the white racialists’ doctrines. This was the myth that Indian people were Aryans and that the pure Indian culture and society were those of an Aryan, Vedic period.<sup>47</sup>

This sort of cultural nationalism became a precursor to the later development of Hindu ethnic nationalism

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<sup>47</sup> Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra, *Communalism and the writing of Indian History* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1981), 45-47. Quoted by Kumaradoss, *Nationalism and Christianity*, 8-10. Italics are mine.

led by Savakar,<sup>48</sup> Hegdewar and Gollwalkar.<sup>49</sup> While the Hindu view highlighted the glory of the ancient past, it ignored at the same time the rich heritage of other people groups, such as the Dravidians and the Tribals, which then resulted in the hatred of minorities.<sup>50</sup>

As Ramanathan points out, the state of Orissa today witnesses such a mass consciousness in its naked form.

The construction of the ‘others’ is more or less complete and the ghettoisation and consequent change in the behaviour of the weaker sections further aggravates this social common sense. The motivated political formations controlled by cultural organizations keep doing this all the time in the society. They advocate that India can be kept secular only if its Hindu identity can protect India. Thus, by decrying that the Hindu identity is endangered, they set the stage for violently destroying others who are deemed to be their enemies. As a net result, gullible people are turned into unruly gangsters, who indulge in violence in the name of religion.<sup>51</sup>

It is a psychology of ‘will to purity’ similar to the Freudian ‘will to pleasure’, which is a dangerous principle destroying others. It is aimed at the

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. R. A. Ravishankar, ‘The Real Savakar’, *Frontline* (August 2, 2002), 17.

<sup>49</sup> P. M. Manohar, ‘Political Challenges and Mission Perspectives’ in W. S. Milton Jeganathan (ed), *Mission Paradigm in the New Millennium* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 306.

<sup>50</sup> Melwin Pereira, ‘Hindutva and Hatred on Minorities’, *Social Action*, Vol.50, No.3 (July-September, 2000), 303ff.

<sup>51</sup> P. Ramanathan, *Contributing Factors for Orissa Violence*, an article emailed to author.

destruction of religious and cultural identities of others who have no place in the land. The pathology of purity for the majority considers minority as a cancer for the rest of the society. It has often resulted in a routine of cultural or ethnic cleansing that has been happening in India as well as many other parts of the world.

Volf describes it as 'politics of purity'; the blood must be pure, the territory must be pure, the origins must be pure, the goal must be pure: 'plurality and heterogeneity must give way to homogeneity and unity'. The will to purity contains a whole program for arranging our nations and worlds. This sort of 'social arrangement'—uniformization—is another consequence of globalism which tries to control further proliferation of differences—an approach to the problems of identity and otherness.<sup>52</sup>

However, this may result in a civil war as predicted by Kancha Illiah. Recently he wrote that, 'the Indian nation is on the course for a civil war; a civil war that has been simmering as an undercurrent of the caste based cultural system that Hinduism has constructed and for centuries'.<sup>53</sup>

52 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 20,21,57,74,75. See Arjun Appadurai, 'Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization' in Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere (ed), *Globalization and Identity: Dialects of Flow and Closure* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 305ff.

53 Kancha Illaiah, *Post-Hindu India: A Discourse on Dalit Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution* (New Delhi, Sage, 2009), ix.

## V Memory and the Christian Identity

Memory often provides us with an identity—who we are and what we are. However, we are not just shaped by memories; we ourselves shape memories that shape us. Remembering is the gathering of fragments because we have deliberately forgotten certain aspects of the past.<sup>54</sup>

As Volf has pointed out, 'memory defines the identities of Jews and Christians. To be a Jew is to remember the Exodus. To be a Christian is to remember the death and resurrection of Christ.' A memory, such as the Lord's supper, shapes identity by drawing worshipers existentially into the sacred past. In fact it reactualizes the story of Christ—his passion, death, resurrection become the story of every Christian.<sup>55</sup>

Also it is a collective and communal memory; individuals do not remember alone, but as members of a group.

As Christians, our wounded self is healed, which takes place when we remember therapeutically. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, we remember so as to learn from the past. Christians live in God and in their neighbours. Christians do not construct their identity or re-invent it by using the past, but they draw their identity from their faith relationship with God. But God does not take away our past; he gives it back to us—we are people forever healed and reconciled.<sup>56</sup>

54 Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 21, 24-25.

55 Volf, *The End of Memory*, 97-98.

56 Volf, *The End of Memory*, 198-201.



# A Biblical-Theological Response to the Problem of Theodicy in the Context of the Modern Criticism of Religion

Rolf Hille

When Eugen Gerstenmaier, former president of the German parliament, theologian, and passionate game hunter returned to Bonn, Konrad Adenauer, former German chancellor, asked him, 'Where have you been this time?' The reply: 'In Africa'. 'And what did you do there?' The answer: 'Hunted lions'. 'How many did you take down?' 'None', to which Adenauer responded: 'Well, that's quite a lot for lions.' In a similar way, one could ask me: 'What are you working on?' The answer: 'On the problem of theodicy'. 'How many answers have you found so far?' The answer: 'None'. Then, 'Well, that's a lot for theodicy.'<sup>1</sup>

Certain problems are apparently of such a nature that few definitive an-

swers are expected for them, but, rather, they have the function of holding open a fundamental and irrefutable question. In these contexts, then, it is some achievement not to settle for the existing status quo of the reality, but, rather, to become more deeply aware of the problem which the self-contradiction of human life includes in itself *coram deo* (before God).

One can state what the problem is, and frame the question of justifying God, intensifying it in different ways, such as: 'How can a good and just God allow suffering in the world?', or, from a different perspective, 'Why do evil people prosper?' The critical point in each lies in the empirically obvious disparity between morality on the one hand, and the experience of fortune or misfortune on the other. The imbalance shown can, of course, also be interpreted as an anthropodicy if, in the context of relating human activity and one's resultant condition, the connec-

1 Related by Odo Marquard in Willi Oelmlüller (ed.), *Theodizee-Gott vor Gericht?I* (Munich, 1990), 102 (a loose translation from the German).

**Rolf Hille**, PhD (Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich), was a lecturer and student advisor of Albrecht-Bengel-Haus in Tübingen, 1989-1995, principal, 1995-2009, and now directs its doctoral supervisory program. He was Chair of the WEA Theological Commission 1996-2008, and since 2009, Director for Ecumenical Affairs of WEA. From 1993-2013. He is also an honorary Professor in Systematic Theology at Freie Theologische Hochschule Gießen (FTH); he was also chairman of the Fellowship of German Evangelical Theologians and has authored many theological publications.

tion to God is negated. But, the problem of theodicy gets its full weight, historically as well as systematically, in pointing to those attributes which are associated with God in the Jewish-Christian tradition and which are apparently not compatible with reality as it is experienced.

The criticism of religion, then, which began in Europe with the Enlightenment era produced a wide spectrum of very different bases for atheism. For example, there was the denial of God in the name of the autonomy of reason or the empirical sciences. Then there was atheism which appealed to psychology or political-economic emancipation. Yet, no form of the denial of God has worked as effectively even until the present as the apparently insoluble conflict between God's goodness and omnipotence and the evils of the world.

Man's complaint against God's seeming failure in the world has been taken up before the forum of critical reason in philosophy and literature under the topic 'theodicy' since Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz' work, *Essays on Theodicy: On the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil (ET)*, was published in Amsterdam in 1710. Leibniz sought to resolve the problem in terms of the creation by an omnipotent and omniscient God of the 'best of all possible worlds'.

However, in more modern times, Bernhard Gesang, in *Angeklagt Gott (God on Trial, 1997)*, comes to the following conclusion: 'The complaint lodged against God is proven to be baseless in the truest sense of the word, as there is every indication that

the accused has been absent during our entire trial proceedings.'<sup>2</sup>

With this, then, the question of theodicy necessarily flows into an anthropodicy, which is taken up no less passionately and intensely and which cannot be brought to any more satisfactory an answer. Yet, because human kind is proven to be of a hopelessly religious nature, the problem of theodicy which is supposedly overcome arises again and again despite modernity's adoption of atheism. In a pointed turn on the phrase about the future of boxing champions, 'They never come back', one must say, then, in view of the question of theodicy, 'They always come back'.

### I Human Existence as the 'Scream' in the Face of Evil

The theodicy problem is marked by the collision time and again of human longing for happiness with the reality of evil in the world. It is expressed in a very basic manner in the cry of man before God and against God.

The Norwegian artist Edvard Munch gave clear expression to this primeval anthropological moment in his painting, 'The Scream': a young woman is standing on a bridge on a sunny day and some pedestrians are leisurely walking around close by her. All in all, it would be a harmonic world of colours and light if it were not for this very deep cry which tears into the picture with sheer horror. The oversized disfigured face of the young woman develops into one single cry which dominates

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<sup>2</sup> Bernhard Gesang, *Angeklagt Gott* (1997), 180 (a loose translation from the German).

the entire scene, the cause of which remains hidden from the observer and possibly even from the affected herself.

As perplexingly distant and undefined as the cry seems in this radical threat to the individual, it confronts us concretely as a cry which rings throughout world history. The slaves of the Egyptian pharaohs let it out, as did the peoples who were laid low by the chariots of the Assyrians. One hears this cry in the Medieval torture chambers as well as in the concentration camps of Auschwitz and from the victims of Hiroshima. In view of the cry which resounds throughout history, the present generation is simply left with the feeling of relief as if they have just barely escaped and survived.

Yet, Munch's impressively depicted cry is becoming increasingly ominous in that it prevails all over the world today. Our globally networked media society is constantly confronted with this cry in view of natural disasters, accidents, wars and expulsions. In this way, a highly problematic apathy arises towards suffering. Personal distance from the misery conveyed by the media is the only apparent escape from the massive amount of suffering. Of course, the cry then becomes unavoidable if it meets the individual in direct interpersonal communication and thereby either penetrates one's ear as the suffering of one's neighbour or as suffering affecting one personally which pierces one's own heart.

As long as the cry is articulated and not muffled because of despair or apathy, the 'why' question arises concerning the reason for evil. As soon as this cry is experienced as an existential crisis, it provokes the question of meaning in the form of the 'wherefore' question.

Both ways of looking at the problem lie at the heart of the question of theodicy. In this way the forms which evil takes concretely in the world, which must be looked at and carefully distinguished philosophically, overlap one another in daily life.

Classical philosophy has defined evil in a threefold form: first as physical pain and emotional hurt, then as suffering from wickedness, that is as moral evil, and, finally, as the all-compassing event of the radical finality of all existence, that is, as metaphysical evil. In Munch's painting, it is not simply the artistic openness and the frightening undefined nature of the cry that makes one uneasy. In its deep dimension, the cry doesn't allow itself to be defined by philosophical terms, that is, 'defined or limited', here in the literal sense, and thus controlled.

## II The Origin of Evil in Western Tradition

In western philosophical tradition one can find two quite different understandings of the origin of evil: the one is the Greek idealistic weakening of the power of evil by reason of metaphysical-ontological dualism. The other is the Jewish-Christian radicalizing of the morally evil in the theological contradiction between divine holiness and human sin, or, the omnipotence of God and human freedom.

Greek idealism sees the essential cause of all evil in material reality. On the basis of a theoretical system of dualism of soul and spirit, on the one hand, and body, on the other hand, Greek philosophy, influenced by Platonism, presumes that good befits the intellectual being in the actual sense,

while the material world is bad in and of itself. The soul is bound in the prison of the body and is freed only by death, that is, by the decay of the body. Materialism, then, is not only the sickness that leads to death physically, but, even more so, metaphysically, because in it and through it all the bad in life and in the world arises and becomes active.

According to Plato, and especially according to Plotinus, being is structured in a hierarchy. Therefore, the world of ideas possesses a qualitatively high degree of being, while the material world suffers from a lack of being. Evil (the bad) can thus be described as a '*privatio boni*' (a lack or deficiency of the good); it has no independent reality of its own. Evil is thus defeated morally through contempt for the physical, i.e., through asceticism and apathy, and, in some instances, through a libertinism which disregards the body.

Metaphysical evil is thereby ultimately overcome when the soul or the spirit itself influences our thinking because participation (*methexis*) in the divine makes the soul immortal as an indivisible entity of being. In terms of ideas, the philosophical approach of idealism manifests a great number of parallels to the Buddhist understanding of the world and its way of religious, psychological self-redemption.

In fundamental contradiction to this philosophical concept is the view of Jewish-Christian tradition regarding the explanation for evil, which primarily argues in a theological way. It does not see the dualism of good and evil ontologically, because the creation as a material reality, is originally and essentially good. The contrast, however, is more of a theological nature because evil exists in the form of the Satanic

and the sinful in absolute opposition to the holy and just God. The roots of evil lie thus in the 'moral'; physical and metaphysical evil grows, then, out of the morally evil.

In order to understand the mystery of evil, personal and not ontological categories are therefore needed. What is the relationship of anthropological freedom to the sin of human kind? And how should one relate theologically the omnipotence and providence of God to the self-responsibility of man? Evil is understood as the proud rebellion of the creature against his Creator. Because of human sinful rebellion God has put not only people, but also the entire natural order under a state of curse and decay. Creation, which was very good, has become the fallen world (Gen 3).

Overcoming evil and therefore, the plan of salvation, must then also begin with overcoming sin in order to bring God and human kind into renewed personal fellowship. Salvation can come neither from the intellectual or moral capacity of people because they are totally corrupted by sin. Salvation is, rather, an external act of the grace of God which has come to human kind through Christ.

This is the reason why the problem of theodicy in Christian theology is not the question of the acquittal of God before the tribunal of human reason. Instead, according to basic biblical teaching, it is the theological problem of the justification of the sinner *coram deo* (before God).

### III Theodicy in the Course of a Syllogistic Process and Philosophical Speculation

Philosophically, the problem of theodicy first becomes a pressing issue when the idea of a personal God who, by definition, embodies absolute good, must be communicated rationally in the context of evil in the world in which we exist. The first precise statement of the problem of theodicy is found in the writings of Epicureus, who presents specific premises and conclusions in syllogistic variants.

God either wants to do away with evil and cannot, or, he can and does not want to, or he cannot and does not want to, or he can and wants to do so. So, if he wants to and cannot, he is then weak, which is not true of God. If he can and does not want to, then he is mean, which is also alien to God. If he does not want to and cannot, then he is weak as well as mean and is therefore not God. Yet, if he wants to and can, which alone is fitting for God, where then, does evil come from; why does he not take it away?<sup>3</sup>

The existential cry of the sufferer has developed into the logical problem of the philosophy of religion.

With the 18th century European Enlightenment, the conflict over the righteousness of God sharpened through the complete emancipation of philosophy from theology, or, reason's becoming autonomous from revelation's claim to authority. It is not surprising that,

with the changes brought about by the Enlightenment, the topic of theodicy gained increasingly explosive force in the context of the criticism of religions. If, for western Christendom, the question of the justification of man before God had become the central challenge at the latest by the Reformation, so the tables of the court proceedings are now turned so that God is being charged before the judgment seat of reason.

At first, though, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz approaches the topic in his work on theodicy from the viewpoint of the 'pious Enlightenment' prevalent in Germany. That is, Leibniz, on the rational basis of the critical case against God, tries to decide in God's favour. Leibniz' understanding of theodicy is based on the conviction that two true statements cannot contradict one another. Scientific knowledge and philosophical insights are compatible with the revelatory truths of Christianity. Therefore God's foreknowledge could be reconciled with the spontaneous, yet not arbitrary freedom of man, and the fact of the creation of the world with the ills of the world. For this our world would not exist as the best of all possible worlds if God had not created any world at all. God intended the good and only permitted evil.

The fact is worth mentioning that, in view of the further discussion of the problem in the 18th and 19th centuries which used Leibniz as a starting point, the problem of theodicy is even treated by Leibniz himself from two contrasting positional perspectives: first of all, as criticism of the traditional theistic question: '*Etsi deus est, unde malum?*' (If God exists, where does evil come from?), and then also as atheism's query: '*Etsi deus non est, unde bonum?*'

<sup>3</sup> Epicureus, *Overcoming Fear*, (quoted and translated freely from the German translation, Zurich, 1949, 80)

(If God does not exist, where does the good come from?)' The last-mentioned aspect, which, however, is very essential to the matter at hand, was largely replaced in later philosophical discussion by the momentum of the critical approach to religion.

While Voltaire only satirically ridiculed the line of argument posited by Leibniz, Immanuel Kant took Leibniz' position seriously in his work 'Concerning the Failure of All Philosophical Attempts to Solve the Theodicy Problem' (*Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee*). However, he came to the conclusion:

The outcome of this legal case before the court of reason is the following: That all previous attempts at solving the theodicy problem do not achieve what they promise, namely, to justify moral wisdom in the world government against the doubts which can be made against it from that which experience in this world lets one know.<sup>4</sup>

In his '*A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*', Bertrand Russell points out importantly that, in his attempt at the theodicy question, Leibniz had fallen into a self-contradiction between his own logic, on the one hand, and his metaphysical presuppositions, on the other hand.<sup>5</sup>

The Hegelian system presents a final solution to theodicy which has been highly effective and positive in

the history of philosophy. In the dialectic self-development of the absolute spirit, God, as the dynamic principle of all reality in a universal synthesis, is the eschatological completion of the immanent process of history. Therefore, the necessary evils at work in the process of history are justified in view of the goal of the apotheosis of the world. Yet, the leftist Hegelians, Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx have already negated the theodicy of the great idealist in their efforts to 'turn (Hegel) upside down from head to toe', and replaced it by a radical atheistic criticism of religion.

#### IV The Heightening and Intensification of the Theodicy Problem in Modern Literature

The course which the theodicy question has taken in the history of western philosophy and literature, however, makes one thing quite clear: the topic gains its relevance and power not so much from rational discourse but rather from the very acute experience of suffering. In view of its contingency, it provokes again and again (in increasingly intensified form in the bold advancement of modern history) the question of the why and wherefore of evil.

Because a satisfactory answer, coherent in itself, to the case of the justice of God is not recognizable in view of the rational insoluble questions of philosophy and theology (*aporia*), the literary and artistic portrayal of the problem has gained in power, intensity, and influence. Yet, in 1713, Leibniz was still able to respond to Duke Anton Ulrich in boundless optimism: 'Nobody can imitate our Lord better than a writer of beautiful novels.' God is the

<sup>4</sup> Translated freely from the German edition of Kant's Works, (*Immanuel Kant, Werke*, ed. By W. Weischedel, Darmstadt, 1983, vol. 9, A 210'.

<sup>5</sup> Bertrand Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (London, 1900).

brilliant writer and world history is his literary work.

The contingency of world events arises from an artistic spirit which the human reader can understand only in part at first, yet, who, according to his brilliant idea, is necessarily beautiful. That the world story, instead of being beautiful, could also become a horror story, is clear in the change during the Modern Age from Enlightenment optimism, especially in view of the catastrophes of the 20th century. The experiences of suffering of the modern world with its technologically-based wars of annihilation, mass escapes, and expulsions as well as the mass liquidation of ideological opponents have allowed the purely intellectual quest for a philosophically-based theodicy to become a bloodless abstract idea.

Instead, a literary solution to the problem in the form of tragedy has increasingly been brought into the foreground. Examples of the intensification of the problem of theodicy in literature can be given by referring to a few titles which have contributed much to the understanding of human suffering, based on their excellent ability to leave a lasting impression: F.M. Dostoyevsky's '*The Brothers Karamasov*' with the key statement that the tears of a single innocent child are enough to 'shake the universe'.<sup>6</sup> Georg Büchner's question in '*Danton's Death*' has become a classic: 'Why do I suffer? This is the rock of atheism.'<sup>7</sup> In the post-war period,

Wolfgang Borchert's play, 'Standing Outside the Door'<sup>8</sup> became extremely effective as an atheistic charge levelled at the 'storybook loving God' of theology. Finally, Albert Camus' novel, '*The Pest*'<sup>9</sup>, should be listed in this very brief catalogue as a prime example in which Dr. Rieux battles against becoming accustomed to suffering and despair because of suffering. The theological drama sparked by the outbreak of a pestilence is fought out in the dialogues between Dr. Rieux and Father Paneloux.

In fact, the literary form of the problem in poetry and prose texts not only makes it clear that the problem of theodicy has continually intensified in the Modern Age, but also that the sensitivity of contemporary man to suffering has grown. Odo Marquard talks about a 'princess on the pea' syndrome in this context; i.e., in spite of a real reduction of suffering through modern medicine and technology, the remaining 'rest' of suffering is experienced as even more difficult and more painful.

With the ideals of the French Revolution of 1789, which were put into practice for the first time in the New World, i.e., in the United States of America, people began to understand themselves no more primarily in terms of their duties and obligations, but in terms of their rights. And so the 'pursuit of happiness' is declared and demanded as a self-evident human right in the American Declaration of Independence.

<sup>6</sup> F.M. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamasov*, translated freely here from the German translation, Munich, 8. edit., 1987, 330.

<sup>7</sup> Georg Büchner, *Dantons Tod, Werke und Briefe* (München 7 Ed., 1973), (a free translation from this work), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Borchert, 'Draußen vor der Tür' (Reinbeck 30. Ed., 1967) (also loosely translated).

<sup>9</sup> Albert Camus, *The Pest* (Hamburg 1995), a loose translation from the German translation.

## V A Biblical-Theological Discussion of the Problem of Theodicy

Corresponding to the philosophical and literary attempts to solve the problem of theodicy, there is an effort in theology which is every bit as intensive and comprehensive. Some of the basic elements of biblical theology will be presented in what follows, after which the exegetical findings can be helpfully applied to the discussion of theodicy within the context of various approaches to solving this issue.

### 1. Creation

According to biblical understanding, the condition of the relationship of humankind to God is mirrored in the physical reality of the world. The reality of original fellowship with God, as was given in the protological condition of humankind, corresponds to the paradisiacal condition of the world. With the fall of the human race, not only the inner condition of people was changed, but sin also effected a curse-laden upheaval in the entire condition of the cosmos. The world becomes a place of trouble, pain, and death. Out of moral evil grows the physical and the metaphysical evil as well. Ethics and *physis* (nature) stand in a fundamental relationship of correspondence. With the fact of the Fall, the announcement of punishment by the Creator: '...but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die' (Gen 2:17) becomes a world-defining reality, which Paul later sums up in the statement: 'For the wages of sin is death ...' (Rom 6:23).

Every theologically meaningful dis-

ussion of the problem of theodicy must start from this context. Therefore, the simple philosophical syllogisms which conclude with atheism as a logically proven fact from the failure of theodicy are too short-sighted. At first glance, the argument of philosophical logic seems to be compelling: God is good, but the world is bad. Therefore, God cannot be omnipotent, etc. God is omnipotent, yet the world is bad. Therefore, God cannot be good.

In the tradition of Jewish-Christian theism, the attributes 'good and omnipotent' are indispensable for the doctrine of God. Because, in the context of philosophical reason, they apparently cannot be brought into harmony with the fallenness of the world, God's nonexistence is concluded. However, the flaw in the reasoning of this philosophical process lies not in the formal completion of syllogisms, but in the theologically inadequate premises. Goodness and omnipotence are indeed indispensable characteristics of God, yet, the problem of theodicy deals more essentially with the attributes of God's holiness, his wrath upon sin, and thus, his judgment of the world. From a Christian standpoint, the theodicy question can start only from the problem of the so-called moral evil. As soon as one takes physical or metaphysical evil as the starting point, one ends up only with the inner logic of an *aporia* or atheism. The facts presented here do not in any way mean a simple theological solution to the problem, but simply a change of the circumstances before which the entire complex of the topic stands.



## 2. Torah and covenant

At the beginning of Israel's history, the revelation of the Law stands centrally with the formation of the people through the Exodus as well as the wilderness wandering and the possession of the land. The Torah as good instruction is, at first, a gift, then a task:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers (Psalm 1:1-3).

Life is successful when the people hold to the covenant of the Law. Blessing and curse are decided by faithful obedience:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known (Deut 11:26-28).

Even the promise of land in the future is shaped in terms of the splendours of the Garden of Eden. Israel is to be a place and a fellowship of blessing in the midst of the peoples. An essential characteristic of the covenant is the unbroken connection of Israel's personal fellowship with her God and the fullness of life and joy which grows out of it. The inner holiness of this relationship to God is mirrored in

the successful life and external happiness. The wisdom of the heart opens up a wide horizon of well-being for the people:

For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path (Prov 2:6-9).

Israel is tempted when this certainty and wisdom for life which is centred on the Torah falls apart. Job, the righteous man of God, suffers unimaginable misery and therefore his friends call in question his integrity and faith. Does some deep sin lie concealed beneath his apparent piety? Asaph asks a similar question in Psalm 73. Why do the ungodly prosper?

For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence... . This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning (Psalm 73:3-6; 12-14).

The absurdity of the world's situations seems to lead to faith in God's justice and faithfulness. Just how deeply Israel is shaken by this irrita-

tion of the connection between conduct and welfare even into the time of the New Testament is made clear by the portrayal of the catastrophic events reported on in Luke 13:1-5:

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish (Luke 13:1-5).

Noteworthy here is the sceptical inquiry about the guilt of the victims. Even today, the charge against those responsible remains indisputably necessary. Who is the architect responsible, whose tower collapsed and caused such a terrible accident? Doubtless Pilate, who had praying pilgrims cut down is a corrupt powerful politician who really ought to be tried for war crimes. This way of dealing with guilt needs no special justification. But, even among the victims, who first appear innocent prey to an accident, it must be asked, by reason of the inner logic of the connection between conduct and welfare, why these particularly were affected by disaster and death. Moreover, in characteristic fashion, the question of guilt (sin) is raised even there in an inquisitorial sense where the individual quite obviously is incapable of any sin (guilt). This aspect is talked

about in detail in the meeting between Jesus and the man born blind:

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned', said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life' (John 9:1-3).

It is clear from these biblical passages that Israel understood there to be an unswervingly valid correlation between piety and happiness in life on the one hand, and sin and destruction on the other hand. If this divinely ordered framework was disturbed, these kinds of events not only provoked the question of the guilt of the evil doers, but also of the victims. If the victim was incapable of guilt, then one looked for the deed which brought the curse among the parents or other relatives.

If the connection between sin and suffering could not be made clear and evident, then the form of the problem of theodicy typified in Job developed into the familiar form seen in the Old Testament. One held fast in faith and obedience to the God who was faithful to the covenant (*'emunah*, faithfulness). Therein lay, though, the temptation and, on the contrary, also the way to overcome it.

### 3. Justice and suffering

The insoluble problem for Old Testament faith lies in the question of divine justice in view of the suffering of the righteous and the good fortune of the ungodly. Jesus takes here a fundamentally different position, when he says: 'I tell you, no! But unless you repent,

you too will all perish' (Luke 13:5). Beside this intensification of the problem of guilt is the other side of the same coin in the answer to the problem of the man born blind, namely, the assuring promise: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." (John 9:3).

Paul brings Jesus' completely revolutionary way of looking at it into the context of a strict systematic form of argument. With very legal precision, the apostle makes clear in the first three chapters of Romans that Jews and Gentiles have both fallen short of God's righteousness. Therefore, every human being, without exception, stands under the curse of the Law and has been given over to the wrath of God's judgment which brings death.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ... (Romans 3:22-23).

Even very high moral achievements are not able to break through this connection between guilt and ultimate welfare. The classic starting point for the Old Testament question of theodicy is placed into a completely new light by the absolute radicalization of sin in the New Testament. For as the Romans passage makes clear, there is no one who suffers because they are innocent. All the good fortune of the ungodly turns out to be a terrible deception in view of coming eternal damnation. The only thing meaningful for time and eternity is salvation in Christ which is offered to the sinner as a free

gift of grace through the preaching of the gospel. From this perspective, the demand of theodicy, i.e., the acquittal of God before the tribunal of man, is a manifestation in itself of the total godlessness of the sinner. For the sinner cannot claim any special rights before God, but, rather, is totally dependent on God's pardon and justification. The New Testament's call to repentance is ultimately about turning away from theodicy to the justification of the sinner *coram deo* (before God).

#### 4. The right to happiness

The modern demand for theodicy implies yet another aspect, which is worthy of discussion in the context of the radicalization and universalization of sin. The attempt undertaken by theodicy to justify (or acquit) God *coram homine* (before man) contains, namely, the conviction, among others, that man would like and is willing to accept the rule of God over his life if God were proven to be good and omnipotent in allowing life to go well for man. According to this, then, the happy and fortunate person would be the believer who would not be tempted by atheism. Good fortune in life on this earth is, according to this understanding, the precondition for faith.

Yet, this hypothesis, which is so often held, especially in the Modern Age, is already flawed by the fact that people who are outwardly happy and societies that are wealthy are in no way more open for faith than those who have to struggle with the miseries of the world and terrible situations in life. However, this fact does not only agree with general observation of the world, it is also firmly anchored in the basic

framework of the Bible regarding the history of salvation.

The requirement of happiness as a precondition of a spontaneously positive experience of God was already given protologically in the Garden of Eden as the starting point for humanity. Any supposed case for theodicy in the pre-fall state is erroneous and unfounded. Yet, even under the conditions of the paradisiacal bliss, the creature is seen as receptive towards the tempter and rebellious against his creator.

A corresponding mirror image of this is true for the eschatological announcement of the millennium. The Revelation to John depicts a situation in which the conditions and effects of the Fall are limited, and the Law of Christ is valid for humanity. The basis for the problem of theodicy is thus eliminated. Yet, even this ideal establishment of the world, including knowledge of all the negative historical experience of preceding human history without God, is not able to immunize man against renewed Satanic temptations, but, instead, leads to new suffering on the way to a new Fall.

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time... . When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the

earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore (Rev 20:1-3; 7-8).

Overcoming disaster, and thereby coping with the problem of theodicy, cannot therefore begin with mankind's right to happiness. All measures to deal with external harm and the hindrances to human existence, even through special divine miraculous deeds, can have only temporary significance over against the fundamental restoration of the relationship to God. The portrayal of the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12 is instructive in connection with this.

The expectations of the sick man as well as those of his four friends and all present are directed in anxious excitement towards the miracle worker from Nazareth. Yet, instead of speaking the healing words: 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home', Jesus says to him: 'Son, your sins are forgiven' (v 5). Jesus' priorities are quite obviously different from the horizon of expectations of his hearers.

First, the basic cause of sin must be removed, and only then does the healing of physical handicap make any sense. The reversal of the theodicy question is likewise emphasized in this Gospel story in the question of the justification before God by the forgiveness of sins. The solution of the 'question of guilt' is clearly placed before the 'question of power', as Karl Heim briefly explained in his theological work, 'Jesus, Culminator of the World'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Karl Heim, *Jesus der Weltvollender* (Hamburg, 3. Ed., 1952), 35-52 (a loose translation from the German).

## 5. Sovereignty of God

If one considers that, according to the biblical understanding, *hybris* (pride) is the fatal root of sin, then the demand for theodicy moves biblical understanding once again into a completely different light, in view of the sovereignty of God. Only the creator is absolute in his will; the creature, even with his gift of reason, remains completely dependent on and in relation to him. People cannot claim any 'rights by nature' for happiness from the creator, but, rather, are invited to entrust themselves to God's goodness and thus to respect God's lordship and affirm it in trust.

Despite the anthropological privilege of being created in the image of God, the infinite difference between the creator and the creature is firmly held to throughout all the Bible. Theodicy as a legal entitlement against God is *superbia* (arrogance) and is thereby the sin of *katexochen* (willfulness, the very nature and origin of sin). It is no surprise, then, that the conflict of Eve with the serpent bears all the basic marks of an attempted theodicy. Still, on the other hand, the exalted self-revelation of God to Job, sorely confronted by the theodicy question, is not given simply as an argumentative self-justification by God, that is, as a theodicy made good on by God, but, rather, as the sovereign claim to rule made by the autonomous Creator.

Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: 'Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand (Job

38:1-4).

At the end of the dialogue is not the theodicy of God, but Job's confession of sin and his humbling before God.

Then Job replied to the LORD: 'I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 'You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:1-6).

The historical-theological basis for God's autonomous freedom, which finds its expression in the free selective action of God, stands in a direct analogy to that based on the theology of creation. The history of Israel is the permanent model and theological paradigm for this fact, which Paul briefly develops in Romans 9-11:

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion (Rom 9:14f.).

Although Israel's path is marked by divine punishments and visitations and they cried for theodicy long before Auschwitz, the apostle emphasizes with Isaiah 1:9: 'It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."' (Rom 9:29). Even for Israel as a whole repentance, not theodicy, is what is required. The-

odicy will take place first at the end of all of Israel's ways in history in the sense of an eschatological doxology, in same way as a *donum super additum* (a gift beyond what might expect). 'Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!' (Rom 11:33).

Theodicy, understood biblically, is shown as an act of grace of God's sovereign lordship of history, which is never charged for, but is granted as a gift. This eschatological perspective of divine grace is thus now valid beyond Israel for all of world history in as much as this allows itself to be brought into the covenant of God as the history of salvation for all peoples.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' (Rev 21:1-4).

In view of this hope, the longing for theodicy becomes the motivating factor for the question: 'How much longer?'. This moving power can be seen in Job and also among the martyrs depicted in Revelation. In this sense, the question of theodicy, as an antidote to un-

rest in the light of the eschatological expectancy ('not yet'), gains a positive and legitimate task. By reason of the salvation which has occurred and the forgiveness of sins which has been received, faith waits for the culmination of salvation.

Put in philosophical terms, after moral evil has been overcome by God's free sovereign act, the definitive ending of physical and metaphysical evil must also begin by virtue of the promise. Yet, this eschatological resolution of theodicy is not defined by man, but, rather, freely granted by God. The lasting and rationally untraceable sovereignty of God is shown in this connection, indeed, in view of the twofold judgment of the world.

## VI Practical Theological Perspectives with the Framework of Christology

The dogmatic treatment of the theodicy question shown with the words of Scripture is foundational for the apologetic and doctrinal discussion, yet, it needs deepening with a practical-theological approach. The person who is suffering, even though a believer to whom redemption has been granted, is still tempted and therefore should receive reassurance in a special way. So in conclusion, there are still some essential spiritual aspects to this distasteful topic.

### 1. The fellowship of suffering

First of all, the Bible takes up the cry of the person who is suffering and takes it seriously. While it rejects the cool distant discourse of a purely intellectual case against God by pointing

to God's sovereignty and human sin, it still opens up a wide open space to the person who is pleading his case before God. Temptation is not brushed aside, complaint is not prohibited, doubt is not suppressed. Believers are, instead, invited to pour out their hearts before God. It is in this speechlessness of suffering that Job, the Psalms, the Fathers, and the prophets are able to grant one necessary speech. The confession and insight of Asaph in Psalm 73:16f is especially worthy of our attention in this regard: 'When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.'

There are two aspects which Asaph believes have helped him to find solid ground again in view of the depths of the questions of theodicy: besides the fact that Asaph is an excellent example of an honest complaint before God, he first points to the congregation assembled for worship. The fellowship of believers and persons praying gives the one in doubt strength and support. For the *homo incurvatus in se ipsum* (man bent over inwardly into himself) is not simply a theoretical construct of theological anthropology, but, rather, it has to do with the very relevant counselling situation and the danger in which a person who is tempted by doubt is found. It is because of this very crisis of faith and the unsolved question of life that this person is in danger of isolation and of falling out of the supportive fellowship of the people of God. Asaph's experience of faith stands against this as an invitation to celebrate the worship of God and to experience the presence of God in the assembly (church), even in spite of the seeming good fortune of the ungodly.

The other help that Asaph has received is the eschatological perspective which fundamentally relativizes the good fortune or misfortune in this world: '... and he saw their end.' Ultimately, the problem of theodicy with its apparent irregularities is not solved in a terms of current behaviour and well-being. It is only the view of the end, that is, of the eschatological fate, which reveals the evidence of God's justice.

The relativisation of all earthly situations and the orientation on the eschatological goal of life gives one the consolation of overcoming suffering and holding onto hope, as Paul writes in Romans 8:18: 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.' The reason for such hope, as far as Christians are concerned, has to do with the fact of salvation history that the new Creation, beyond the evil of this world, has already begun with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and has already been set in motion.

## 2. The distinctive perspective

With the opening of the christological horizon, we have touched on the distinctive perspective of Christian theology which is of central importance for the response to the question of theodicy, and which connects the systematic-theological aspect and the practical-theological approach together.

Ancient Greek teaching about God started from the apathy of the blessed gods towards all human conditions. Islam means submission to the destiny placed on one by Allah, i.e., the *kismet*. Hinduism and Buddhism seek

to overcome the thirst for life in order then to be able to enter Nirvana. An individual's right to personal welfare is negated in this. Therefore, Buddhism has neither the prerequisite nor the serious occasion for the theodicy question in its intensity or the struggle that goes with it.

In a unique way, God's personal assurance as a declaration of love for his people and as the promise of reliable faithfulness to his covenant is found in the Old Testament. The longing for theodicy in a specific sense first emerges through the good fortune of the ungodly and the suffering of the righteous. Within an anthropological framework, the New Testament not only points to the radicalness and universality of sin, it even emphasizes first and foremost the solidarity of the triune God with sinful, suffering man in the context of the doctrine of God.

In order to understand this, one has to take a careful look at the whole biblical context. The ominous thundering threat of the problem of theodicy is not more sinister in any place in Old Testament history than in God's command to the patriarch of faith, namely, to Abraham: 'Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.'" (Gen 22:2). Here the word of God's promise is pitted against the command of God to sacrifice Isaac, done as a rationally insoluble mystery which is as unfathomable as the problem of theodicy.

In the end, God himself solves the conflict with the promise:

and [he] said, 'I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you

have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.' (Gen. 22:16f.).

This sparing of one's only beloved son is taken up by Paul in his theological summary of salvation in Christ: 'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?' (Rom 8:32). God remains as sovereign Creator and Lord of history not apathetic to the world and to man. He is also not simply a transcendent power of destiny to whom one must submit. He is also not an impersonal sphere of all being in the sense of pantheism, in which the individual, forgetting joy and suffering, is lost to himself, but, rather, he is the loving Father who offers himself in the Son.

### 3. *CruX probat omnia*

God in Christ is a sympathetic God who suffers along with us. He bears our pains, suffers our sickness, and dies our death. In Christ, the theodicy question arises between the Father and the Son as the inner tension within the Trinity: 'And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"' (Mk 15:34). In the resurrection of the righteous one who dies in place of the sinner and who makes the ungodly righteous, the theodicy



between the Father and Son is finally then completed.

God in Christ is, in terms of dogma and in terms of counselling, the only possible answer to theodicy. *Crux probat omnia* (the cross proves everything). In it, the Christian, as a disciple of Jesus, has participation in his cross and lives from the power of his resurrection. Christian faith stands against the temptation and doubt active in this

world with the prayer and certainty of Paul Gerhardt, who penned this hymn, 'O Sacred Head, Now Wounded':

Lord, be my consolation; my shield  
when I must die;  
Remind me of thy passion when my  
last hour draws nigh.  
These eyes, new faith receiving,  
from thee shall never move;  
For he who dies believing, dies  
safely in thy love.'

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# Conceptions of Capitalism in Biblical Theology

Clive Beed and Cara Beed

PROMINENT EVANGELICAL scholar, Craig Blomberg has asserted that both capitalism and socialism are incompatible with biblical theology,<sup>1</sup> and that a biblical theology of economics favours neither system. Making a judgment on these matters depends on what is meant by capitalism and socialism, and comparing the findings with biblical understanding. This paper seeks to make this evaluation by reviewing the definitions of both systems, although only the capitalist side of the equation is scrutinized because, despite name claiming of socialism by some countries, it is doubtful whether it exists anywhere today.

The contention here is that variations within a capitalist structure are able to encompass most of the reforms Blomberg advocates. Further, the revisions to capitalism could also encompass most of what is termed socialism today, although not applying to wide-

spread state ownership of the means of production (the classical model of socialism). Finally, the paper argues that if both capitalism and socialism are rejected, it is unclear what is to replace them.

## I Definitions of Capitalism and Socialism

Capitalism is defined from the *Oxford Dictionary of Economics* as 'the economic system based on private property and private enterprise... all, or a major proportion, of economic activity is undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or organizations, and land and other material means of production are largely privately owned.'<sup>2</sup> This definition can be supplemented. Paul Williams in *The Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* defines capitalism as entailing 'the private ownership of the means of producing wealth and the

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, 'Neither Capitalism nor Socialism: A Biblical Theology of Economics', *Journal of Markets and Morality* 15 (2012), 207-225.

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<sup>2</sup> John Black, Nigar Hashimzade, and Gareth Myles (eds.), *A Dictionary of Economics* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

exchange of goods and services, land, labor, and capital via markets.<sup>3</sup> The market-based nature of capitalism is highlighted in this definition, an element missing from the *Oxford* definition.

Robert Benne in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* emphasizes the role of the price mechanism in competitive markets, a feature omitted from the *Oxford's* specification. For Benne, the price mechanism 'provides the dominant mode of making economic decisions' with 'nongovernmental ownership of the means of production; economic freedom to enter and exit the market.'

A further feature that could be incorporated in definitions of capitalism is the role of state regulation and welfare availability. Bottomore<sup>4</sup> describes these features as welfare capitalism. The *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* defines capitalism similarly to the *Oxford* above, but includes the feature that economic activity is intended to make profit.<sup>5</sup> No definition of profit is offered, and it is possible to think of some economic activity within capitalism not profit-making, however defined, such as not-for-profit companies, like trusts, charities, foundations, and coopera-

tives.

These definitions of capitalism can be summarized as follows:

- Private ownership of the means of production.
- Market exchange is the means to access goods and services.
- Prices are the arbiters in market exchange.
- Participants in the market can freely enter and exit it.
- The state oversees all these processes.

Some of these features have to be qualified because exceptions exist to their operation. For example, all means of production are not privately owned, some are state-owned. Access to some goods and services can be via direct distribution from the state, and from not-for-profit companies.

Abercrombie *et al* define socialism<sup>6</sup> as involving common ownership of the means of production, with economic activities planned by the state and a minimal role for the market in the allocation of resources. The importance of private property was expected to decline under socialism. The *Oxford Dictionary of Economics* saw socialism with society's resources employed 'in the interest of all its citizens, rather than allowing private owners of land and capital to use them as they see fit'.<sup>7</sup>

Gauging the 'interest of all its citizens' has long generated contentious debate about socialism. That socialism is marked by 'common control or ownership of the means of production, dis-

3 Paul Williams, 'Capitalism', in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (eds. Joel Green, Jacqueline Lapsley, Rebekah Miles, and Allen Verhey; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 115.

4 Tom Bottomore, 'Capitalism', in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (eds. William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore; Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 61-62.

5 Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, Bryan Turner, 'Capitalism', in *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* 5th ed. (London: Penguin, 2006), 41.

6 *The Penguin Dictionary*, 362.

7 *A Dictionary*, 418.

tribution, and exchange<sup>8</sup> is a common theme in definitions of socialism. The collapse of communism has presented even more disagreement about how socialism might be instituted.<sup>9</sup> Given that operational examples of socialism are few and far between, the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* contains no definition of socialism, but does of capitalism.

In summary, no unanimity exists in definitions of capitalism and socialism. So open-ended are some of the definitions above that the notion of capitalism could accommodate to a definition of socialism. That 'economic activity is undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals' (capitalism) is consistent with the economy's resources being used 'in the interest of all its citizens' (socialism).

## II Why Biblical Theology Contradicts Capitalism and Socialism

### 1. Capitalism and socialism

One reason is that capitalism and socialism 'were not the economic systems of the biblical worlds'.<sup>10</sup> However, given the definitions of capitalism above, the economic system of Jesus' world can be construed as conforming to at least some features of capitalism. It was based on private property and

private enterprise. Market exchange was the means to access goods and service, free (non-slave) participants in the market could freely enter and leave it, prices were the arbiters in market exchange, and the state oversaw some of these processes.

As the *Oxford Dictionary* put it above, a major proportion of economic activity was 'undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or organizations, and land and other material means of production [was] largely privately owned'. Economic structures in Jesus' Palestine approached those of the definition of capitalism above,<sup>11</sup> even though the term had not been invented. This is not a popularly held view that usually believes Jesus' Palestine to have been pre-capitalist.

One objection to the affinity of economic characteristics in Jesus' Palestine to capitalism is the notion that economic activity at that time was of a zero-sum nature characterized by limited goods. The idea that economic activity in pre-industrial Jesus' time was of this nature does not take away from its capitalistic characteristics.

As Malina has employed the notion of limited good and zero-sum game,<sup>12</sup> it means that as the rich became richer, it was assumed that less wealth would be available for everybody else because wealth increments were not generated or distributed uniformly; they accrued

<sup>8</sup> Duncan Forrester, 'Socialism', in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. John Macquarrie and James Childress (London: SCM, 1986), 595.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Bottomore, 'Socialism', in *The Blackwell Dictionary*, 619.

<sup>10</sup> Blomberg, 'Neither Capitalism', 208.

<sup>11</sup> K. Hanson and Douglas Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 95-100, 104-105, 111-116.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2001), 89-90, 97-100, 231-234.

disproportionately to the rich. However, Malina does not have a great deal of evidence for this occurring in Jesus' Palestine. He cites a number of unexplained biblical references, and a series of rhetorical questions about them. The conjecture remains hypothetical.

An alternative reading is by Longenecker<sup>13</sup> who marshalled data showing that wealth-generation, thereby enlarging the pool of goods, was occurring in Paul's 'time. Even if Malina's assertion were true, its occurrence still accords with the definition of capitalism above. What it does not accord with is an additional feature that might be listed for capitalism, its ability to generate wealth.

But even if this is true of capitalism, the rich can still get richer and the poor lag further behind. They all enjoy some increase in wealth, the pool of goods increases, everybody's living standards rise, although in different degrees, but the rich gain greater wealth increments than the poor.

All this may not be vastly dissimilar from how the process of capitalism operates in the less developed world today. Blomberg accepts the limited goods view, suggesting that most people in Jesus' time 'were convinced that there was a finite and fairly fixed amount of wealth in the world to which they would ever have access in their part of the world so that if a member of their society became noticeably richer, they would naturally assume that it was at someone else's expense.'<sup>14</sup> This is how the process of exploitation has

always been defined.

In all likelihood, most poor tenant peasant farmers in less developed countries today think like this. Their landlords gain a disproportionate share of any wealth increment created, unavoidably at the peasants' expense. Since the peasants represent the majority of world population, one could say this is the prevailing mindset of most people in the world, not unlike the situation prevailing in Jesus' time. Just as in today's less developed countries,

the tiny number of extremely wealthy persons in each of the various biblical societies from the united monarchy onward derived much of their wealth through purchasing or foreclosing on the property and possessions of the poor, especially when the indebted could not repay their loans.<sup>15</sup>

This situation may resemble how the rich accumulate part of their wealth in much of the contemporary less developed world where rich landlords own most farming land.

It is possible also that the limited goods notion typifies the mindsets of poor people in advanced capitalist countries today. They cannot afford everything they need, or perceive they need, to function adequately in the society in which they live. To them, goods are in limited supply. The poor look at the lifestyles of the rich and see them engaging in consumption totally beyond their comprehension. If the poor compare their own condition with the rich, they may well think that the rich have obtained their riches by exploit-

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13 Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

14 'Neither Capitalism', 208.

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15 'Neither Capitalism', 209.

ing the rest of society.

Exploitation is not a term commonly applied to capitalism outside Marxist analysis, but non-Marxist definitions suggest its contemporary relevance. Wertheimer explains that exploitation occurs when one person/group takes unfair advantage over another.<sup>16</sup> For *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought*, exploitation occurs when 'one group or individual is structurally in a position enabling them to take advantage of others'.<sup>17</sup> Finally, *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* construes exploitation as to take advantage of other people.<sup>18</sup> Obviously, subjective judgment is needed to establish when 'to take advantage of' occurs, and when it is unfair. To what extent exploitation, so typical of economic relations in Jesus' time, occurs in contemporary capitalist society is a matter for debate.

Another argument Blomberg proposes against the existence of capitalist features in Jesus' Palestine concerns taxes. Taxes paid to the Temple treasury and to Rome have been estimated at 30-50 percent of people's incomes. Blomberg interprets this as reflecting 'the beginnings of socialism'.<sup>19</sup> But he had not posed taxation rates as a cri-

terion bearing on socialism. In Blomberg's definition of socialism, there is no mention of taxation. It can just as well be said that 30-50 percent income tax rates characterize many capitalist economies today. In this case, the tax rate factor does not tell against capitalist features either now or in the past.

Inferences that might be drawn from Blomberg's assertion that 'capitalism and socialism were not the economic systems of the biblical worlds' depend on what the Bible is regarded to be. If the implications from biblical exposition relate only to the historical periods during which the Bible was constructed—not involving capitalism or socialism — its message is time and culture bound.

Many Christians would not regard this to be the case. To them, normative teaching from the Bible is intended to apply trans-temporally and transculturally, despite the difficulties of doing this. Numerous Protestant (and Catholic) theologians have pointed out that the Bible reveals normative guidelines or principles applicable to all societies.<sup>20</sup> The question confronting Christians is to what extent these norms are achieved and achievable in present societies.

Thus, when Jesus advocates assisting the poor, this is meant to be the practice in all times and places. The normative principle that should characterize all economies is that the poor

16 Alan Wertheimer, *Exploitation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10.

17 Susan Himmelweit, 'Exploitation', in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought* 2nd ed., ed. William Outhwaite (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 227.

18 A. Shaikh, 'Exploitation', in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* vol. 2, 2nd ed., eds. Steven Durlauf and Lawrence Blume (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 249-251.

19 'Neither Capitalism', 209.

20 John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); Marcelo Sorondo, 'For a Catholic Vision of the Economy', *Journal of Markets and Morality* 6 (2003): 7-31; Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

are to be helped to a lifestyle not vastly inferior to some norm prevailing in the society in question. The biblical ethical principle intended to apply universally is rectification of the lot of the poor. A complementary biblically derived norm might be that all able-bodied people who so wish should be provided with paid work sufficient to support themselves and their families. Christians can discuss among themselves how these objectives might be pursued in contemporary society.

## 2. Equal treatment

A second reason why biblical theology might contradict capitalism and socialism is that scriptural texts 'supporting one or the other system, are relatively evenly distributed between the two'.<sup>21</sup>

### a) Capitalism

Biblical texts supporting capitalism can be found, such as 'private property is enshrined as a fundamental good', specifically applying to Israel as it enters the Promised Land. Concomitantly, theft of possessions was prohibited, thereby implying their private ownership.<sup>22</sup> Just as rich people exist in capitalism, so they did in the Bible. God-fearing rich people are acceptable to God, such as Abraham, Isaac, Job, David, Solomon, and Esther.

At the same time, all these examples were from pre- or post-Mosaic Law times, rather than during the Mosaic Law period, brief as that was. Examples post Israel's entry into the Promised Land are few, such as David

and Solomon, or Zacchaeus and Joseph of Arimathea in Jesus' time. Except for the last, these were called by God to manage their wealth differently. Paul in 1 Timothy 6:17 explains how the rich are to behave, not praising their existence.

The righteous rich were few in number after Mosaic Law times. They were required to 'give a substantial portion of their assets away, especially to help the poor'. This is because 'God is very concerned that everyone has the opportunity to acquire some property'.<sup>23</sup> More than just 'some' property is in question. Families needed enough to be able to function adequately in the society in which they lived.

In the Mosaic Law, property was to be redistributed regularly to its original configuration (the Jubilee). Every forty-nine years, land holdings were to be reassigned to those families which were allocated on Israel's entry into the Promised Land. This was necessary to maintain the private property basis of the economy. This property was the capital with which each family worked to maintain economic independence and sustained their function as a coherent unit.

The economy would work well only if each family had sufficient capital to enable them to maintain its economic independence. In the Mosaic Law, more than 'some' property was restored to each family — all of it was. Each family was intended to maintain the assets it originally had, designed to maintain its economic independence.

The conservative evangelical economist, Brian Griffiths draws the fol-

<sup>21</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 209.

<sup>22</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 209.

<sup>23</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 209.

lowing inference from these requirements to present-day capitalism (that he supports vigorously). Contrary to Marx's analysis, if the Mosaic Law 'had been applied it would have been impossible for "labour" to be in conflict with "capital"'. But the laws were not practised throughout history so that capital became owned 'by a few, but the majority were without access to that capital, other than being hired on the labour market. This was precisely the situation which the property laws of the Pentateuch were designed to prevent.'<sup>24</sup>

Subject to the constraint that all families have sufficient access to capital to ensure their economic independence, as Griffiths suggests, the Mosaic Law requirements could operate consistently with capitalism. This does not occur under present day capitalism. For instance, a measure of asset poverty for the US in 2001 shows that 27% of people did not have assets that could tide them over three months.<sup>25</sup>

The matter, therefore, is whether a capitalism could be envisaged consistent with the reasonably even distribution of means of production envisaged by the Mosaic Law. Means relating to the sphere of production by which greater evenness in the distribution of capital could be pursued are canvassed later.

Another feature of contemporary capitalism Bloomberg suggests is contrary to biblical views is payment of interest on borrowed money. The Mosaic

Law specified that interest was 'never to be charged on a loan extended to a fellow Israelite'.<sup>26</sup> Who are the modern day equivalents to 'fellow Israelites' is mooted below. But, first it is worth noting that interest was not listed by Bloomberg as a feature of capitalism or socialism. Therefore, deciding whether interest should be payable today does not require resolution to favour either system. But should interest be charged, and would capitalism be able to function without it?

In pre-monarchical Israel, Bloomberg points out that loans were 'used to help the poor gain at least basic sustenance levels of existence'. However, maintaining the reasonably equal distribution of land (capital) would probably be a more effective way of supporting the poor. In a capitalist economy aspiring to the Law's orientation, interest could be avoided, despite its usually being viewed as necessary to encourage economic development. Bloomberg believes that 'capitalism would have barely moved beyond its most rudimentary stages without the liberal extension of loans repayable with interest'.<sup>27</sup>

To what extent is this valid? Consider how a process of economic development might have worked if the Mosaic Law principles had been followed. Surpluses beyond need could be paid into a common fund (a bank). Those wanting to engage in innovative practices (consistent with God's direction) would use this fund to facilitate their new enterprise. If they wanted additional funds for their enterprise, they would go back to the bank that would lend it to

<sup>24</sup> Brian Griffiths, *The Creation of Wealth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 57.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Wolff, *Poverty and Income Distribution* 2d. ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 120.

<sup>26</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 210.

<sup>27</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 210.



them (all things being equal). No interest would be charged on this loan.

The bank would become part owner of, and investor in, the enterprise. As and if the enterprise flourished, the entrepreneurial family would pay back their loan to the bank. At the same time as this process occurred, the other principles of the Law would ensure that the entrepreneurial family did not become excessively rich compared to the norm of the society.

This practice is not vastly dissimilar from ways in which a number of modern organizations inside capitalism provide capital to fund entrepreneurial activity. These include JAK Banks, some micro-finance agencies, like Kiva, and some Islamic banks, that do not charge interest on their loans.

The JAK Cooperative Bank (Sweden) does not aim to make a profit, but balances its deposits and loans without the payment of interest, meeting its costs through members' fees and a loan repayment fee. On this basis, loans are cheaper than through conventional banks. Local Enterprise Banks, part of JAK, are in process of being established for specific loan purposes, such as an ecologically friendly slaughterhouse. JAK has grown rapidly since its establishment in Sweden in 1965, currently having 38,000 members, with regular JAK schools, and 350 volunteers spreading the word.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Margrit Kennedy with Declan Kennedy, *Interest and Inflation-Free Money* Rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1995). Other models for contemporary interest-free lending are in Paul Mills, 'Finance', in *Jubilee Manifesto*, eds. Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 204-206.

Israelites could charge loans to foreigners (Dt 23:20). Blomberg accepts this provision as applying today, especially on commercial loans, both in general, and to foreigners.<sup>29</sup> But in the New Covenant, as foreigners became part of the body of Christ, we might infer from the Mosaic Law that Christians are the new fellow Israelites. If this is the case, interest would not be charged on loans between Christians.

However, Jesus goes further in Luke 6:35 in condemning interest outright. Perhaps an objective for Christians, therefore, would be to persuade people in general to omit interest on loans, or to make interest rates very low. In this situation, Blomberg's complaint concerning international loans would not have less weight. He laments 'the enormous stranglehold that massive indebtedness on loans *with interest* has on the poorest countries of the world'.<sup>30</sup>

The criterion of interest on loans from the developed to the less developed world is probably not the major motivation in international lending. International governmental and non-governmental agencies could make loans on the basis of participating in the profits and losses of the projects to which their loans were directed.

## b) Socialism

What now of socialism? Blomberg interprets some of the Mosaic Law provisions discussed above as supporting socialism. These include the allotment

<sup>29</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 210. This position is challenged by Bruce Ballard, 'On the Sin of Usury: A Biblical Economic Ethic', *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (1994), 210-228.

<sup>30</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 210; original emphasis.

of land texts, and restriction of production texts (Sabbath, sabbatical year, Jubilee). However, these texts are consistent with a capitalist system based on 'private property and private enterprise' with 'a major proportion of economic activity undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or organizations, and land and other material means of production largely privately owned'. This structure was what the Mosaic Law aimed at, subject to the qualifications of land allotment and restriction of production.

The relevant Mosaic Law texts do not necessarily contradict capitalism. Blomberg observes that in the Mosaic Law, 'the laws of the market were not to be the be-all and end-all of human existence'.<sup>31</sup> Again, this does not have to suggest socialist tendencies, for there are many capitalist economies where 'the laws of the market' are restricted. These include the United States where controls exist on wages, working conditions, prices, standards for goods, land development, and environmental effects of business. Christians do not universally agree on the nature of these controls, but their existence does not constitute socialism as defined here.

Likewise, 'give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread' (Prov 30:8) can be compatible with capitalism, as can 'giving to a common treasury or fund to be redistributed to the poorest and neediest in their midst'.<sup>32</sup> However, it is arguable that this latter provision derived neither from the Mosaic Law nor from

Jesus' or Paul's teachings, but from its one occurrence in Acts. Certainly, Mosaic Law capitalism was intended to ensure family economic independence, but not mainly through mere philanthropy, charity, benevolence, and generosity, insufficient in themselves. Economic independence was to be earned through remunerated employment.

The Mosaic Law instructed well-off people to apply their surpluses to assist the poor. Blomberg puts it that 'as long there are some who have too little to live even a minimally decent life, the surplus of the rich shows that they have too much and that they should redistribute it by giving it away to those who most need it'.<sup>33</sup> This statement does not go far enough in showing what the Mosaic Law taught. As it stands, the statement implies only a redistribution of assets.

The Mosaic Law required work effort by the poor in return for the asset redistribution. The poor needed to work to achieve their self-sufficiency. It is not stretching its inference too far today to suggest that jobs should be provided for the poor, organized by the rich, something that could be practised in a capitalist economy.

For the rich to use their surpluses in this manner would be a non-coercive exercise. No compulsory government action is involved. Although this might not depict how the rich do employ their surpluses in capitalism, it does seem possible for the Christian rich to do so. They are people who have business acumen, given that over 74% of very rich people in the US own businesses.<sup>34</sup>

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31 'Neither Capitalism', 210.

32 'Neither Capitalism', 211.

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33 'Neither Capitalism', 211.

34 Edward Wolff, 'Recent Trends in House-

Blomberg does not go down this track, instead observing that the lot of the poor improved in advanced 'democracies with mixed economies', excluding the US.<sup>35</sup>

Probably, a mix of factors was instrumental here, such as the process of economic development and redistributive government taxation. However, these were features achieved in developed capitalist economies, not socialist ones. It is stretching the case too far to attribute improvement in the plight of the poor in these countries to 'Christian and democratic socialism'.<sup>36</sup> Welfare capitalism was responsible for it, in which Christian influence has been instrumental.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Helping the poor

A third suggested reason why neither capitalism nor socialism accords with biblical theology is that 'neither system necessarily helps the plight of the involuntarily poor, disabled, widow or orphan, or numerous other vulnerable and marginalized people.'<sup>38</sup> This objection does not have great sway. Blomberg had contended that 'the plight of the poor was alleviated even more... in democracies with mixed economies', compared with former Soviet bloc

countries.<sup>39</sup> That is, these economies had taken action to alleviate the lot of the poor.

These mixed economies include Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who are said to have 'implemented more socialist mechanisms than in the United States'.<sup>40</sup> Yet Europe and the others are capitalist countries by our definition. Recall this is a system

based on private property and private enterprise... all, or a major proportion, of economic activity is undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or organizations, and land and other material means of production are largely privately owned.

None of the four regions cited as 'mixed economies' falls outside this definition.

'Socialist mechanisms' is not a term contained in Blomberg's definition of capitalism or socialism, or in any of the other definitions cited above. Recall that Blomberg had defined socialism from the *Oxford Dictionary of Economics* as 'the idea that the economy's resources should be used in the interest of all its citizens, rather than allowing private owners of land and capital to use them as they see fit'.<sup>41</sup> He acknowledges that taxonomies of socialism exist, such as market socialism, planned socialism, and participatory socialism, but the mechanisms by which these variations might be attained are not discussed, nor do examples exist of economies run on this basis today.

Some commentators think that

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hold Wealth in the United States: Rising Debt and the Middle-Class Squeeze', *Working Paper No. 589, The Levy Economics Institute* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2010), 18.

35 'Neither Capitalism', 211.

36 'Neither Capitalism', 211.

37 Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

38 'Neither Capitalism', 212.

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39 'Neither Capitalism', 211.

40 'Neither Capitalism', 211.

41 'Neither Capitalism', 207-208.

where the term, 'market socialism' was used in the past to describe the experience of Eastern European countries immediately before the collapse of communism, it was a misnomer. In Brus' view, the experiences implied 'the abandonment of the concept of socialism as a grand design'.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Blomberg admits diversity in capitalist systems.

But the blanket claim of 'more socialist mechanisms' in the favoured capitalist countries,<sup>43</sup> needs explanation. For instance, how these mechanisms relate to the idea of using the economy's resources 'in the interest of all its citizens, rather than allowing private owners of land and capital to use them as they see fit' needs further explanation. Welfare and state-regulated capitalism may be the order of the day in advanced capitalist countries today, but it is debatable whether they have adopted 'more socialist mechanisms'.

#### 4. Track record

A fourth reason for rejecting capitalism and socialism is that 'the actual track record of modern economies' does not support socialism or capitalism, 'apart from the mitigating effects of Christian values'.<sup>44</sup> 'The mitigating effects of Christian values' is not something explored by Blomberg. He observes a litany of 'government-run ameliorations' to 'a pure market economy', but does not show that they stem from 'the mitigating effects of Christian values'. Perhaps Medicare and Medicaid were

developed under the influence of Christian values, but Blomberg does not demonstrate the connection.

This same hiatus applies to the numerous state-mediated measures he lists. Perhaps all the 'government-run ameliorations' could occur only in a capitalist society that had become sufficiently wealthy to be able to sustain them. That the 'stunning economic growth' achieved in 'East Asian countries' depended on 'even more regulations and interventionist measures from the state than their western counterparts' does not take away from the fact that these were and are capitalist economies, even though Christian influence might not be great.

Capitalist economies in the West and elsewhere seem capable of spawning all manner of readjustments affecting the economy, including those aiming to help the poor. Whether they do pursue the latter effectively is something to which Christian values can be directed.

The issue of the 'mitigating effects of Christian values' on capitalist economic development is still a matter of contention. Perhaps Blomberg is right, that in the West, Christian values did alleviate the worst excesses of capitalism. But they did not overthrow the capitalist system, nor did they seek to. On the other hand, Christian values might have pushed in the direction of encouraging beneficial change for the poor beyond that to which the capitalist system could accommodate voluntarily.

Understanding these issues underlies how Christians today could respond to the capitalist system. If 'capitalism simply promotes self-absorption and the illusory quest for self-

<sup>42</sup> Włodzimierz Brus, 'Market Socialism', in *The Blackwell Dictionary*, 363.

<sup>43</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 211.

<sup>44</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 213.

sufficiency',<sup>45</sup> the quest for Christians is to avoid such practices, and to promote an economy that devalues them.

### 5. Human depravity

A fifth reason for eschewing capitalism and socialism is that neither 'adequately acknowledges the depth of human depravity and sin that the Scriptures teach us remains in all human beings, even redeemed ones'.<sup>46</sup> While this reason is valid, it does not tell against capitalism or socialism. Even with depravity, capitalism (and socialism when it existed) still manages to function. Capitalism as it is practised, and socialism as it was practised, do not depend for their functioning on the non-existence of human depravity. Both systems function with it, as does any human action. Yet, it is probably impossible to assess which system 'takes more account of sin'.<sup>47</sup>

A comparison on this score between capitalism and socialism has little meaning today, given that socialism as defined both by Blomberg and other sources does not exist. This is despite the label being attached to some economic arrangements that do exist within capitalism, such as 'market socialism' in China, but this designation does not accord with the definitions of socialism canvassed above.

Any human system does not 'adequately acknowledge(s) the depth of human depravity and sin'. The more the system is influenced by secular influences seeking to operate apart from God, the more it will be subject to sin

and evil. However, it is up to Christians living and working within the system to assess how sinfulness might be mitigated, and to try and pursue this.

That total depravity prevails is no warrant for Christians to remain unconcerned about the costs (and benefits) of any economic system, or to acquiesce to their sinful condition. Capitalism is a humanly constructed system, held together by God's common grace enabling it to function as well as it does. Human depravity and sin infect all human action, but there is no biblical precedent for Christians to give in to it, sit back, and do nothing to try to improve the human condition.

Also, it seems a reasonable scriptural deduction that actions by redeemed people have the potential to conform more to God's preferences than those by the unredeemed. Nevertheless, redeemed people have to keep in touch with God as much as they can. This involves regular prayer, Bible study, and church participation that help counter the depravity to which humans are subject.

Blomberg raises all manner of hypothetical matters that could affect capitalism and socialism on the matter of good and evil. For example, one advantage capitalism might have is that it may provide checks and balances against anybody becoming too powerful. Blomberg thinks this applies decreasingly in a multinational and globalized world, so that 'the top politicians of a country can now become subservient to the business and media moguls'.<sup>48</sup> The responsibility falls on Christians to ascertain if this is true,

<sup>45</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 214.

<sup>46</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 214.

<sup>47</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 214.

<sup>48</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 215.

and also to determine how and whether biblical principles can be discerned to help counter the process.

According to Reformed theologian, Spykman, 'total depravity means total misdirection, complete disorientation'. Yet, even in the midst of the total depravity of humankind, 'God maintains the structures of his creation', by the process of God's common grace. But 'only God's grace can restrain total depravity' for 'in a fallen world God maintains the structures of his creation by his preserving grace'.<sup>49</sup> However, as Grudem points out, the term, 'total depravity' can be misleading; 'it can give the impression that no good *in any sense* can be done by unbelievers,'<sup>50</sup> to which could be added 'and believers'.

## 6. No clear winner

In summary, Blomberg claims that the 'five key themes' canvassed above from the entire sweep of the biblical material' do 'not lead to a clear winner'.<sup>51</sup> However, the notion of a clear winner has little validity because socialism does not exist today. Instead, each of Blomberg's themes contains a reasonable affinity with capitalism that is still beset with sinfulness.

Consider, now, an earlier exposition by Blomberg of how biblical themes relate to capitalism.<sup>52</sup> The first aligns

with capitalism, that 'material possessions are inherently good'. However, not all possessions are good, for sinful people produce goods that are evil. This leads into Blomberg's second theme, that possessions can 'lead to temptations to pursue great evils'. This can involve sinful possessions, but also an excess beyond need of possessions that intrinsically might not appear sinful.

Where and how this arises is a matter of judgment, connecting to Blomberg's third theme, that the process of being redeemed involves a transformation in the area of stewardship. Most of Blomberg's examples for this stewardship theme concern the need to help the poor, but stewardship transformation applies to diverse areas, such as how to live without an excess of riches, how to care for the environment, how to organize business firms and other such matters.

Blomberg's fourth theme is that 'there are certain extremes of wealth and poverty which are in and of themselves intolerable'.<sup>53</sup> This is called the principle of moderation, involving 'reduction of disparity between "haves" and "have-nots"'. 'These extremes cannot be quantified,' but contemporary capitalism does not measure up well on this theme. In many countries, disparity is wide and increasing. For the US, Wolff reported that the richest 20% of households owned 93% of non-home wealth in 2007, up from 91.3% in 1983.<sup>54</sup>

Modification to this degree of inequality would seem to be called for on

<sup>49</sup> Gordon Spykman, *Reformational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 322, 320, 321.

<sup>50</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 497; original emphasis.

<sup>51</sup> 'Neither Capitalism,' 215.

<sup>52</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> *Neither Poverty*, 245.

<sup>54</sup> Wolff, 'Recent Trends', 44.

the basis of Blomberg's fourth theme. Blomberg's fifth theme is that 'the Bible's teaching about material possessions is inextricably intertwined with more "spiritual" matters.'<sup>55</sup> Since people in capitalist societies probably fail to appreciate their relationship with God, capitalism underestimates this requirement.

Contemporary capitalist systems only partially conform to a number of the biblical themes raised by Blomberg in his earlier investigation. None of the themes unambiguously supports capitalism, but they suggest that Christians could modify capitalism toward biblically-based principles. Material possessions can be valued, but only while they do not have evil elements within them or are used for evil purposes. Present capitalism does not seem to encourage stewardship transformation.

Extremes of wealth and poverty within countries seem to be a common feature of capitalism that does not acknowledge the inherent connection between material and spiritual matters. These may not seem sufficient reasons for abandoning capitalism, but for restructuring it. Redeemed individuals, not governments, are the solution to this renovation of capitalism.

Blomberg's final reason for rejecting capitalism and socialism is that 'Biblical ethics... is first and foremost centered on God's people in community, known in this age as the church'.<sup>56</sup> Presumably, this means that biblical ethics are only secondarily aimed at the world. This proposition, that biblical

ethics is directed 'first and foremost' to the church, would seem to be overly restrictive as to whom Jesus directed his teachings.

Jesus aimed his teachings at the world, the crowd and multitude, as well as at his followers and disciples. Whenever Jesus performed healings, they were usually associated with teachings, and were directed to whoever was ill. There is no precedent in Jesus' teachings that they were intended only for the church. 'The second- and third-century-ancient Mediterranean church' recognized this intention in endeavoring to help the poor in general.<sup>57</sup>

Various contemporary theologians hold this view, even including the Catholic. For instance, the President of the Pontifical Academy of the Social Sciences, Marcelo Sorondo sought to 'demonstrate that the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church... contains those essential principles... which no economy, if it wants to be a good economy, can forget'.<sup>58</sup> This is a statement directed to the world, for no economy is excluded from it if it aspires to be a good economy. Fortunately, Christian programs today to help the ill and poor, and engage in other social action, work on the basis of helping whoever they can.

This is the operational criterion on which Christian welfare and aid agencies work. Christian-run hospitals, and programs to help the poor both in developed and less-developed countries function on this basis. Blomberg is 'sympathetic to the argument that the church should care for the poor

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55 *Neither Poverty*, 246.

56 'Neither Capitalism', 216.

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57 'Neither Capitalism', 216.

58 Sorondo, 'For a Catholic Vision', 7.

and needy of the entire land in which it finds itself,<sup>59</sup> but does not extend this argument to other aspects of the economy for which normative biblical principles might be discerned.

Blomberg approvingly points to contemporary reforms in capitalism encouraged by 'proponents of socialism',<sup>60</sup> citing worker-owned cooperatives as examples. 'Proponents of socialism' might well approve of these developments, but so do proponents of capitalism, such as the present Tory Prime Minister of Great Britain, David Cameron. Nor were worker cooperatives all instigated by 'socialists'. Indeed, sometimes socialist-minded unions in the past have argued against worker cooperatives, seeing them as making workers 'little capitalists'.

Consider the highly-efficient Spanish Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC), started in 1956, made up of 132 worker-owned cooperatives, straddling a range of industries from hi-tech to banking and retailing. This was started by a Catholic priest wanting to reform capitalism, not promote socialism as defined above and by Blomberg. As with the definition of capitalism Blomberg employs, the cooperatives operate on the basis of 'private property and private enterprise'.

Their members are private profit-seeking individuals, their organizations privately owned. It is incorrect to label these business forms as non-profit enterprises. They make profits to continue their operation. The difference from conventional joint stock company business is that the workers

own the firm.<sup>61</sup>

There is no flavour here of Blomberg's definition of socialism, of the economy's resources being used 'in the interest of all its citizens, rather than allowing private owners of land and capital to use them as they see fit'.<sup>62</sup> While the Mondragon cooperative owners of the firms do work together under the umbrella of the MCC, there are still 'private owners of land and capital' using them 'as they see fit', subject to the qualification of the MCC's guidance.

Blomberg recognizes that diversity in capitalist systems exists, but, once again, the source cited for this occurrence (Lane and Wood) gives little empirical detail as to how this diversity manifests itself among capitalist countries. The only real-world reference is to the emphasis on regionalization in Italy, although not to the firm types that occur within regions (such as a stress on cooperatives).<sup>63</sup>

If biblical theology does not favour socialism, Christians can envisage and operationalize reforms to capitalism that do accord with this theology. Return to Blomberg's example of worker cooperatives. The Catholic Church has long supported this form of firm organization, and its effects are most noticeable in Spain and Italy, two strongly Catholic-influenced countries.<sup>64</sup> Of

<sup>61</sup> Gregory Dow, *Governing the Firm: Workers' Control in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 57-66.

<sup>62</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 207-8.

<sup>63</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 208; Christel Lane and Geoffrey Wood, 'Capitalist Diversity and Diversity within Capitalism', *Economy and Society* 28 (2009), 531-51.

<sup>64</sup> Clive Beed and Cara Beed, 'Work Ownership Implications of Recent Papal Social

<sup>59</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 216.

<sup>60</sup> 'Neither Capitalism', 216.



course, secular socialists have also worked for the development of worker cooperatives in these and other countries.

Consider the biblical justification for this. Assume that Jesus upheld the principles of the Mosaic Law as distinct from its details. Each family was provided with sufficient land (capital) in the Law to enable it to remain self-sufficient, as Griffiths above noted. From this conclusion the step can be taken to advocate workers having self-ownership and self-management over the capital they work with. Private ownership of property is retained, but those who make the capital available (shareholders), and those who do the work (workers) are one and the same.

Further, cooperatives have more even wage configurations than do conventional companies, helping to mitigate extremes of income and wealth in the society at large. Since the Mosaic Law and Jesus advocated decreasing intra-family material inequality, this is another way in which worker cooperatives meet biblical theology.

### III Conclusion

Tweaking the capitalist system rather than overhauling it is Blomberg's preference. Presumably, this means encouraging reform within capitalism. However, to do this in terms of 'a biblical theology of economics' requires guidelines from the Bible to chart the way forward.

One guideline for this path is to provide 'access to the means of produc-

tion for all who can work'.<sup>65</sup> Churches and Christian organizations have a vital role to play in this objective, including making micro-finance available for business purposes to the poor. Blomberg advocates this procedure, to encourage micro-finance for entrepreneurial effort within neighborhoods that can help mutually reinforce each other.<sup>66</sup>

Calling this 'a socialist' concept is somewhat exaggerated, for the idea has long been standard practice inside capitalist economies, especially in the less developed world. Even so, microfinance use currently does have problems. As Jo et al.<sup>67</sup> point out, microfinance interest rates are often excessive, and need biblical safeguards to avoid this.

Blomberg favors a system that 'lies somewhere between pure capitalism and pure socialism'. If advanced economies are the models, it is doubtful that 'pure capitalism' has ever existed in the last eighty years. All manner of government regulation puts the bridle on 'pure capitalism', which is not to say that existing regulation is the best way of heading toward a more 'balanced, responsible and compassionate system'.<sup>68</sup>

Reforms that can be instituted inside present capitalism, such as heightened private and government action to encourage self-employment, partnerships and worker cooperatives

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65 'Neither Capitalism', 217.

66 'Neither Capitalism', 217.

67 Haesue Jo, Hoje Jo, and Manish Pathak, 'Microfinancing, Interest Rate, and Biblical Safeguards', *Review of Business Research* 11 (2011), 59-67.

68 'Neither Capitalism', 217.

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Thought', *Review of Social Economy* 60 (2002), 47-69.

for the poor, are more useful in improving their lot than are welfare handouts.

These forms of business enterprise have greater evenness in remuneration levels than exist within joint stock companies. There are extremely unequal distributions of income and wealth in most capitalist countries today. Policies to encourage self-employment etc. run closer to the biblical mandate of reducing inequality—which does not mean pursuing equality. Fostering a

‘theology of enough’<sup>69</sup> is more likely to be attained where enormous differences in levels of wealth and income do not exist within the population.

Aspiration to possessions would be more comparable between different sections of the population, and, overall, dampened as purchase of luxury items slackened. If everybody had enough, there would be less ambition to strive for more and more.

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69 ‘Neither Capitalism’, 217.

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## Book Reviews

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**Revelation: A Shorter  
Commentary**  
G. K. Beale with David H.  
Campbell

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015  
ISBN 978-0-8-28-6624-9  
Pb., pp. 562, indices

*Reviewed by Derek Tidball, Visiting Scholar,  
Spurgeon's College, London.*

I'm always amused when academic commentators write massive tomes and pretend they are for pastors and preachers. Few church pastors have the time (or inclination) to wade through such voluminous contributions and the academic substructure which takes up a great deal of space is usually irrelevant in the local church. However excellent, G. K.

Beale's 1200 page plus commentary on Revelation was, which was published in 1999, it is a case in point. So his Shorter Commentary, the result of collaboration with pastor David Campbell, is much to be welcomed. Shorter still means 562 pages, but they are perhaps justified on Revelation!

What's different? This volume clearly has the pastor/preacher in mind. The section headings are shaped to serve homiletic purposes and each section is concluded with some brief reflections that could well serve as the basis for preaching. In this respect it is a bit like the New Interpreter's Bible, only to my mind the reflections are better anchored in the text. Gone are the copious references to secondary literature, the small print excurses, and some of the detailed discussion which would prevent many

from seeing the wood from the trees. From the start, the style of the commentary is one of succinct clarity, transparently setting out issues of interpretation and leading to persuasive conclusions.

The shorter commentary maintains the strengths of the longer work. Beale's exegetical skills, his comprehensive understanding of theology and massive awareness of the literature are all still evident. But they are disciplined and assume less of the reader.

The introduction is a model of succinct clarity. It sets out the interpretive stance of the commentary. Arguing against preterist, historicist and futurist views, the authors adopt a modified redemptive-historical idealist view, modified because Revelation works towards a climax and culmination of history in the return of Christ and final judgement, rather than merely symbolically representing recurring human experience. Helpful signposts are given about understanding its symbolic nature and use of numbers. The commentary on individual sections sets out the options but leads the reader to see Revelation 'as a symbolic presentation of the battle between good and evil' which has relevance for all time. Those who, like the reviewer, adopt this stance will welcome the commentary; others may think it falls at the first hurdle.

Taking the millennium (20:1-6) as an example, the commentary first sets out the need to interpret it in its immediate context and so to see it not as subsequent in time to chapter 19 but as referring to the age of the church. Alternative views are considered. Discussion, with sufficient but not too much detail, follows on the significance of 'And' (v. 1), the visionary nature of the passage and its OT background, especially in Ezekiel. This is followed by exegesis of the individual verses and then by helpful

reflections which are both spiritually enriching and homiletically suggestive. All this takes thirty pages.

No bibliography is included but the preface recommends fourteen commentaries, covering a range from academic to popular. I've used most of these down the years in my preaching on Revelation and would thoroughly endorse their value. But I think they are now likely to be replaced by this commentary as the single most useful commentary to possess and study.

I've never commented on a cover in a review before, but I confess I thought the current cover did the book a disservice. It was anaemic and had an understated font for the title. I hope this does not mean people will pass over it. They would be missing out on a gem. If you have only one commentary on Revelation and can afford this one, this is the one to get.

I wonder if someone is willing to cooperate with Dr Beale and do a similar slimming-down job on his *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker, 2011). That would be a real gift to pastors and teachers alike.

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**The Reality of God and Historical Method: Apocalyptic Theology in Conversation with N.T. Wright**  
Samuel V. Adams

Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015  
ISBN 978-0-8308-4914-7  
Pb., pp 293, bibliog., index.

*Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird, Australian Catholic University, Centre for Early Christian Studies, Brisbane.*

This book begins with a warning: 'NOBODY LIKES A BOOK ON METHOD.'

This is a book on method'. (15). Do not let that frighten you off because Professor Adams has produced a very interesting critique of N.T. Wright's epistemology as applied in his writings on the life and ministry of Jesus in the light of the worldviews of the various factions of Second Temple Judaism. The crux of the issue raised by Adams is the 'distinct epistemological position of Christian theology as determined by its unique object of knowledge: God revealed to us in Jesus Christ and God active in that knowledge' (213). This appears to be a much firmer base compared to Wright's epistemology of critical realism, a method that depends upon the perspectives—worldviews—of the people in and around the narratives, thus leaving him adrift on the sea of historical relativism.

To avoid that danger, Adams argues that God has provided a way in which Christian theology is determinate for a Christian theological epistemology. This is because it is based upon the continuing personal link of the church's relationship with Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit. It might be said that 'theology rules the waves'. What is most remarkable is what Adams has done to resolve the question of historical research: by his own confession he has given attention to the problem inherent *in* the historian: he has introduced a new subjectivity!

Adams is gentle with Wright, and as the subtitle indicates, has composed this work in contact or conversation with him. It is interesting to note that from time to time Adams mentions that Wright agrees with this or that suggestion that he has offered. Also, Adams indicates that he is not out to destroy Wright's work, but to improve it where he thinks he sees a weakness. This particularly applies when the focus is fixed upon the apocalypse of Jesus

Christ, his cross and resurrection. Here we see the other half of Adams' answer to historical research: the new objective reality, the 'irruptive apocalypse' of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wright is acknowledged as having noted the importance of this as a new worldview, but Adams wants to take it further, seeing it as 'a fracture in the continuum of history, a break a fissure...signals the beginning of new history, a new way of being in time...' (256). Many will find this section most interesting and I leave the reader to see how Adams develops this line of reasoning.

In the process of 'Furthering the Apocalyptic', the subtitle of Chapter 4, 'Christology and Creation', Adams addresses a number of conceptual problems relative to Christology and his main theme.

Here we find an excellent treatment of anhypostasia and enhypostasia, then of baptism understood as 'the pledge that the life the baptized will now live is a life of discipleship lived on the way to the cross' (150). This is followed by an extended discussion on 'Christology and Creation' where Adams sets out the gap between his and Wright's approaches to apocalyptic; basically, Wright considers it as an historical element of God's covenant faithfulness, whereas Adams sees it as a particular theology of history. This is a necessary prelude to the resolution of the issues in the final chapters.

Adams is meticulous in his attention to detail and every point he attempts to make is very closely argued. He leans upon the prominent theologians of the past, not blindly, but drinks discerningly from the fountain already in place. He turns to Thomas F. Torrance for some of the critical issues—a good choice in this reviewer's opinion—but not exclusively,

as testified by the 678 footnotes that support his work. As expected, the bibliography is extensive, with most of the major theologians of the last ninety years being included. An Author and Subject Index, and a Scripture Index complete an excellent tool for the serious reader.

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**Beyond Literate Western  
Contexts: Honor & Shame and  
Assessment of Orality Preference**

Samuel E. Chiang and Grant  
Lovejoy, eds.

Hong Kong: International Orality  
Network / Capstone Enterprises,  
2015

ISBN 978-962-7673-30-9

Pb., pp 220, annotated bibliog.,  
participant biographies, index

*Reviewed by Matthew Cook, Boone, North  
Carolina*

On the one hand, it was no flash mob or chance gathering which produced this book. Nor is this merely a compilation of conference notes. Rather, 62 experts gathered in 2014 at the Houston Baptist University to explore the interaction of the assessment of 'Orality preference' and 'Honour and Shame' cultural contexts. This book is not a compilation of those meetings; instead it is but one project which resulted from that consultation.

The book is edited by Samuel Chiang, former Executive Director of the International Orality Network (now president and chief executive officer of Seed Company, a member of the Wycliffe family of organizations) and Grant Lovejoy, IMB director of orality strategy (formally Preaching Professor at Southwestern

Baptist Theological Seminary).

This is the third book in the series by the same authors: *Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts* came out in 2013. *Beyond Literate Western Practices: Continuing Conversations in Orality and Theological Education* was published in 2014. The current work branches into this new area of Honor and Shame cultures even if there remains significant work on assessment of oral contexts.

*Beyond Literate Western Contexts* focuses on two elements: Part I: Honour and Shame and Part II: Assessment of Orality Preference. Part I starts with a couple of case studies which integrate orality with honour-shame realities better than the rest of the book. The next three chapters, W. Philip Thornton ('Honour and Shame in Latin American Culture'), Werner Mischke ('The Gospel of Purity for Oral Learners'), and Jackson Wu ('Rewriting the Gospel for Oral Cultures') push toward a reformulation of theological truths in honour-shame vocabulary to make it more finely tuned to non-western cultures. In fact, these three are contributing to a conference and network focused on orality from their perspectives as experts on the honour-shame tendencies of cultures.

Finally Jackson Wu (the third of the three chapters) makes explicit this practical reality but not logical necessity: 'I will assume the terms "honor-shame culture" and "oral cultures" interchangeably.' All of these authors assume that a highly oral culture will also greatly benefit from honour and shame vocabulary. Although I appreciate the contribution on honour and shame from these authors here and in other contexts, this identification may confuse readers into thinking that oral preference learners are not also influenced by fear-power vo-

cabulary or guilt-innocence vocabulary.

Part II swings the pendulum over to oral preference learners. It is not surprising that a conference organized by the International Orality Network would focus part of its work—and resulting projects—on oral techniques and uses. It was Charles Madinger (chapter 11) who was able to communicate the motivation of incorporating oral teaching techniques into our communication through this sport analogy: ‘Does the goalie lunge, the swimmer extend, the diver tuck, the golfer rotate, or the runner strike to their best potential?’ If we continue in traditional western literary techniques, then oral preference learners will continue to learn, grow, and respond to the word of God, but never at their full potential.

One gem of the book is chapter 16, ‘A Selected Annotated Bibliography Concerning Honor and Shame and Orality Preference Assessment’. Since the book is divided between the two topics: Honour & Shame and Assessment of Orality Preference, it makes sense that the bibliography would be divided also.

We do not find in this book the conclusion of the coalescence of two burgeoning fields, but rather the effort to have honour-shame studies and oral assessment studies point toward each other. There is more work to do. But for those who want to walk along with these experts to develop the interaction of these important fields, this book is the resource to read. As with any work with multiple authors, the quality and goal of each chapter are not identical. The overall value of the work, significantly increased by the summary chapters (6 and 15) and the bibliography, enable this to be a stepping stone for further integration of honour-shame and Orality in the future.

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**The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity**  
 Edited by Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong

University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015

ISBN: 978-0271066622

Hb., pp 312, bibliog., index

*Reviewed by Daniel Dangendorf, Cologne, Germany*

In view of the enormous impact of Pentecostal-Charismatic worship on worship renewal, this book offers a long overdue multi-disciplinary perspective on the role of music in Pentecostal-Charismatic worship. It combines contributions from theological, (ethno)musicological, historical and sociological perspectives. Small’s musicological concept of ‘musicking’ serves as a unifying leitmotif for the diverse explorative essays of this volume. Music is thus treated as an embodied social action.

The range and overall quality of contributions is remarkable. Many essays summarize results of the respective author’s recent doctoral research. Editors Ingalls and Yong manage well to arrange the essays in three sections, which highlight different aspects of Pentecostal musicking: ‘Healing, Renewal and Revitalization’, ‘Negotiating Traditions in Transition’ and ‘Media, Culture and the Marketplace’.

The first section surveys the role of music in renewal processes. Anthropologists Althouse and Wilkinson explore the importance of intensive embodied musical experience for the experience of transformative divine love in the practice of soaking prayer. McCoy addresses the seemingly neglected topic of

suffering in worship music and suggests that music from the Global South in particular addresses suffering by appealing to the materiality of salvation. Riches points out how the desire for reconciliation is expressed in indigenous Australian music. The functional diversity of music in renewal processes comes well to light in those essays.

The second section combines several ethnographic case studies, which deal with the role of music in negotiating traditions. An impressive example is Marshall's research on the worship of Navajo Pentecostals. It explores the tension between implementing native-language songs and cultural distinction. In the case of the Navajos, the similarity of native music and medicine-man chant impedes efforts to inculcate native Christian music. Evans examines how Hillsong inspires local musicians in Scandinavia to create their own worship music.

The third section pays close attention to the relation between the global music market and local worship. The impact of global brands such as Hillsong is discussed critically. Perkins asks whether the current industrial standardization and commercialization of worship music runs counter to 'making room for the Spirit's creative input' (237). His claim counters the observations made by Evans in Scandinavia, where Hillsong stimulates the production of local music. The term 'glocalization' aptly catches the inherent tension between local art and globally branded music, which is evident in several of the book's case studies.

The concluding and recapitulating essay by Yong explores the relationship between Pentecostal musicking and theologizing. According to Yong, the prevalent orality of Pentecostal theo-

gizing is reflected in its music. Thus he proposes a renewed focus on sound theologizing through song as a means to overcome the 'therapeutic existentialism' (282) inherent in many renewal movements.

However, to the reviewer it seems disputable, whether this can be achieved without borrowing uncritically from the 'theological repertoires of nonrenewal churches' (286). Yong's terminological distinction between 'renewal' and 'nonrenewal' churches raises some ecclesiological concerns and invites spiritual elitism, although this surely is not the author's intention at this place, since he still affirms a critical dialogue with nonrenewal churches.

Altogether, this book provides an impressively multi-faceted and diverse picture of global Pentecostal-Charismatic worship music. Its strength lies in the focus on descriptive-empirical observation. Normative theological evaluation is mostly left to the reader, although critical issues such as the influence of prosperity theology are given due attention. As so often when writing about music, an accompanying CD or even DVD would throw further light upon the realization of the manifold embodied musical practices around the globe.

The title is well-chosen, since contributors cover nearly all continents in their essays. However, Asia is underrepresented in this collection and one or two further case studies on worship music in Asian churches might have completed the global picture. Despite those minor criticisms, this book belongs on the shelf of any musician and theologian, who wants to understand seriously the manifold dynamics of music in contemporary worship.



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**Overturning Tables: Freeing Missions from the Christian-Industrial Complex.**

Scott A. Bessenecker

Illinois: IVP Books, 2014.

978-0-8308-3680-2

Pb, pp 201.

*Reviewed by Jim Harries, Kenya*

Bessenecker uses a pleasant readable style, peppered with stories about fascinating places around the globe, to take us on a challenging journey of reflection and self-analysis regarding Protestant mission structures in the western world. Humbly recognizing that he is himself a part of what he seeks to transform does not stop Bessenecker from putting in the knife, resulting sometimes in angry reactions to his proposals (25). While denigrating the West, Bessenecker commends the majority world as the model which the West ought to imitate and aspire to.

The Christian-industrial complex of managing mission is the main victim of Bessenecker's hammering. It has arisen, he tells us, as a result of contemporary mission movements having been born and nurtured in recent centuries as business corporations came into being. All too often money as bottom line comes to dictate the shape of mission activity. We need to get away from ways in which finance enslaves Christian organizational structures that should be promoting anything but a financially-oriented way of life.

Economic largess is as much a sin as is sexual immorality, Bessenecker suggests. Leadership being directed by other 'numbers' is just as bad, but extremely widespread, Bessenecker suggests. People are wrong to want

to evaluate missions on the basis of statistics of success: numerical growth, conversions, baptisms, time spent reading the Bible, you name it. These measures can miss what our heavenly Father is actually seeking to have—a loving relationship with his children.

As often with books like this, Bessenecker's critique draws one's heart into agreement. His points are valid, and well communicated, and his critique of the adherence of the church to modernism, secularism, capitalism and other -isms makes one want to stand with him in passionate agreement. Perhaps more difficult to accept are the solutions that he proposes. This should not surprise us; were solutions easy to find they would surely already have been found.

Bessenecker's experience of mission comes through his association with Servants. They do an admirable work of identifying with poor communities living in urban slums around the world. While Bessenecker draws heavily on his experiences of visiting servants living extremely sacrificial lifestyles, his experiences are short-term. Perhaps then the main weakness of this book is that it advocates for solutions to what is well known to the West (how the Protestant West runs mission) through imitation of and reference to much less well known poverty-stricken majority world urban contexts.

'This book [is about] the mainstream Protestant mission world I find myself in ... [and] also an attempt to describe another world ... outside the camp ... the margins ... [which] must become co-creators of a new season of mission' Bessenecker concludes (185). I recommend this book. I would plead with directors of Western mission movements to seek God's face and biblical direction to bring correction to weaknesses and

fallacies that Bessenecker brings to our attention.

I do not think that the majority world will simply emerge from the margins and effortlessly bring correction to our

structures. This book does not seriously engage issues being faced by the majority world itself. Let the West put its house in order. This book can provide stimulus and some insights to help to enable such.

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*Pathways and Patterns in History: Essays on Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Modern World in Honour of David Bebbington*, edited by Anthony R. Cross, Peter J. Morden and Ian M. Randall, (London/Didcot: Spurgeon's College/The Baptist Historical Society, 2015), ISBN 978-0-903166-43-0, Pb, pp 412, illus, index

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor, Evangelical Review of Theology*

As the sub-title indicates, this *Festschrift* is for one of the most recognized and productive voices in evangelical history today, Professor Dr David Bebbington (b. 1949). Quite apart from many important writings across a range of areas of modern history, the subject, who has spent all of his teaching career at the University of Stirling, Scotland (since 1976), is perhaps best known for his famous fourfold definition of evangelicalism coined back in 1989, biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, activism (known as the 'Bebbington quadrilateral').

The editors, all closely associated with the subject, have assembled 18 essays as well as their own introduction, a bibliography and an usual feature—an account of Bebbington's formative years in Nottingham, England, by his wife, Eileen, who has recently published a full-length biography of her husband. The essays are divided into three unequal sections, eight on Baptist studies, five on evangelicalism, and five on 'Socio-political studies', reflecting Bebbington's historical interests.

Those of the first section tend to be rather specialised (eg, Chapter 5: 'The annual tent meetings of the Suffolk and Norfolk Strict Baptists'), although chapter 9 is an interesting general discussion of Bebbington's own historiographical theories (as seen in his first major book, *Patterns in History* [1979]) illustrated briefly and expanded from the context of New Zealand Baptists.

The essays of the second section are also somewhat specialised, although the last two would have wider appeal amongst readers—the East African revival and British evangelical spirituality, and post-World War II evangelicalism in the United States.

In the final section, the first essay is of a wider interest (British and American evangelicalism around AD 1800), and the last even more so—'How evangelical Biblicism saved western civilisation'. One essay in this section also takes up another of Bebbington's great interests, W. E. Gladstone (1809-98), which in this case focuses on the great Christian politician's last days and his death.

This interesting and suggestive collection of papers which effectively honours its subject comprises a large number of pages (nearly 450 all told) but it would have been an even bigger volume if a kinder font size had been used, and if some of the long, multi-topic paragraphs had been split up more logically.