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Introduction:

Articles with a Long Shelf Life

Although I have greatly enjoyed guiding the *Evangelical Review of Theology* into its new era as a freely available, open-access journal, there's one area where I hope to see more improvement. We are publishing interesting and useful articles from all over the world, but I wish that more world-class thinkers wanted to write for the World Evangelical Alliance's primary journal. I would like to see evangelical leaders value *ERT* as one of the best ways to reach a global audience.

Perhaps this issue will advance that vision, because it contains some articles that should remain in circulation for a long time.

The first article, by Andy Messmer (editor of the forthcoming Spanish-language version of *ERT*), is longer than what we usually publish, but it is so coherent, significant and easy to follow that I saw no good reason to break it into two parts. Andy traces, across four major time periods from the early church to the present, what Christians have said about the ideas of biblical inspiration, authority and inerrancy. I hope this essay will become a valuable, widely read resource for evangelicals everywhere.

Glenn Davies, a recently retired Anglican archbishop from Australia, offers a succinct, compelling, scripturally grounded explanation of the continuity in God's administration of law, grace and required obedience across both the Old and New Testaments. When someone claims that the two testaments must not have come from the same God, here is your answer.

Dennis Petri, as international director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, is one of the world's most important voices on persecution of Christians. His article on Christians in Cuba provides valuable insight into a country where believers have lived under constant restriction and risk of bureaucratic harassment for so long that it seems normal to them.

WEA deputy secretary general Peirong Lin shares an eye-opening, heartfelt message on how theological reflection shapes her daily life as a woman and a migrant now living in Europe.

Two articles contribute enlightening Global South perspectives. Ebenezer Blasu and Joshua Settles consider how attitudes toward mission have changed and how they still need to change as Africa becomes arguably a more Christian continent than Europe. D. Apostle, responding to the eschatological speculations that arose when India suffered a locust invasion last year, compares this modern experience to the one described by the prophet Joel. Finally, James Reiher probes the background of Paul's letter to Philemon and its contemporary applicability.

To expand our capacity to attract high-quality articles, I have wanted to share my role with someone more closely connected to theological education than I am. We have found a great candidate: Francis Jr. Samdao, a pastor and seminary teaching fellow currently completing his ThD in the Philippines. I expect to continue reviewing submissions and copyediting articles as part of my service to the WEA.

Happy reading!

— Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

Paul Was a Religious Extremist Too

Thomas Schirrmacher,
WEA Secretary General

As an evangelical theologian, I affirm that the ‘evangel’, God’s gospel of love and forgiveness, is the sole message of hope for this world. Because God loves this world, we can hope to overcome not only individual but also structural hatred. Through the gospel, not only private enemies but even opposing groups and warlords can achieve reconciliation and justice.

The New Testament demonstrates this by highlighting the conversion of one of the leading religious extremists in first-century Jerusalem. We can easily forget that Paul’s conversion involved not just a personal transformation but a major shift in his view of the relationship between religion and violence.

Before his conversion, Paul believed it was God’s will for him to persecute followers of Jesus with the power of the state and of his religious communion, and even to stone them. Thus he took part in the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, who (like his master Jesus Christ) said, ‘Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they do’ (Acts 7:60).

After his conversion, Paul viewed his former violent behaviour as the clearest expression of his sinful heart and acts (Gal 1:1–3; Phil 3:4–9; 1 Tim 1:13). Instead of killing others, he now was willing to become a martyr for his faith—as he eventually did—without using force to defend himself. His only defence was his personal witness to the gospel.

Interestingly, *Paul never blamed his extremism on Jewish religion or theology, or on his Jewish upbringing or affiliation; rather, he blamed it on his own sinful heart.* He had committed the greatest sin possible and therefore was the first among all sinners (1 Tim 1:15), not worthy to become an apostle (1 Cor 15:9). Paul explained that he had misunderstood God before his conversion and that he had misused and put to shame the name of God as a Jew. He said it was not the Jewish faith but his own heart that made him an extremist and murderer.

Moreover, Paul did not say that as a Christian he would automatically become a peaceful, nice guy. Instead, he reminded his readers again and again that he had left religious extremism behind only by the grace of God and that only the same grace could continuously keep God’s love in his heart. ‘So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!’ (1 Cor 10:12). Paul knew that danger for the church comes more from our sinful heart than from the outside, and that out of the midst of church leadership come wolves that could kill the sheep (Acts 20:29–31).

May we continue to respond to today’s religious extremists with love, for ‘God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God remains in Him’ (1 Jn 4:16).

The Inspiration, Authority and Inerrancy of Scripture in the History of Christian Thought

Andrew Messmer

This article traces attitudes towards the Bible amongst leading Christian thinkers from the early church to the present, showing that (with some change in how the concepts have been understood) the church has generally affirmed the Bible's inspiration, authority and inerrancy ever since the formation of the New Testament canon. Organized into four major time periods, the article should be a valuable resource for all who wish to uphold the Bible's credibility.

The inspiration, authority and inerrancy of Scripture are three inter-related issues that have occupied scholars for centuries and are of crucial significance to Christian faith and practice. In this article, I examine the prominent views on these topics during four periods of church history—patristic, medieval, Reformation and modern—that coincide with major turning points in the church's understanding of Scripture. I treat inspiration as the relationship between divine and human authorship; authority as the relationship between biblical authority and other authorities such as tradition, bishops and councils; and inerrancy as what the church has said about Scripture's truthfulness.¹

The patristic era (2nd–5th centuries)

Some have claimed that the Bible's inspiration, authority and truthfulness were assumed rather than argued for in the early church, because there were no controversies that forced the church to articulate these doctrines clearly and systematically.² This is an overstatement. These issues were not as hotly debated as

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1 I use 'inerrancy' to represent the claim that Scripture does not affirm any falsehoods. As we will see in Origen's and Augustine's differing articulations of inerrancy, this definition is actually quite limited and allows room for significant hermeneutical differences.

2 See James Bannerman, *Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of Holy Scripture* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1865), 2:123; Geoffrey Bromiley, 'The Church Doctrine of Inspiration', in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 207.

other controversies such as the deity and humanity of Christ, but several factors forced the early church to reflect on Scripture.

When Marcion excised words from the New Testament to make it fit his theology, Tertullian responded by showing their importance. When Gnosticism claimed that some Scriptures were incorrect, unauthoritative and/or ambiguous, Irenaeus demonstrated the contrary. Montanists forced the church to think through the extent and mode of revelation. Origen's—and, to a lesser extent, Jerome's—work on textual criticism forced them to interact very closely with the biblical text. Such figures as Origen, John Chrysostom and Augustine carefully exegeted Scripture in their writing and/or preaching. And the authors of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed—which summarizes Christian belief in just 175 words in the original Greek—deemed the inspiration of Scripture sufficiently important to dedicate five words to it: '[the Holy Spirit] who spoke by the Prophets'. Thus, although we may not have as much information as we may like, neither are we left without anything.

Biblical inspiration

The predominant view of inspiration in the early church was what we now call divine dictation, meaning that God's Spirit was the only active agent in the writing of Scripture, with humans playing a strictly passive role.³ Their preferred illustration came from the world of music: just as a musician makes sound by plucking or blowing into an instrument, so the Spirit composed Scripture by 'plucking' or 'blowing into' humans.

This theory was not original to Christians; rather, it was a common view of inspiration in antiquity. For example, ancient Greeks understood Sibyls to be speaking on behalf of the gods in a trance-like state,⁴ and Jews such as Philo and the authors of 4 Ezra and Genesis Rabbah also understood the human agent to be passive in the process, at times even suggesting that the mind of the prophet was somehow absent when the Spirit overcame them.⁵

Thus, when early Christians such as Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras and Hippolytus of Rome spoke of inspiration, they tended towards a divine dictation theory, often employing the musical instrument illustration to help explain their view.⁶ Justin Martyr's testimony is illustrative:

For neither by nature nor by human conception is it possible for men to know things so great and divine, but by the gift which then descended from above upon the holy men, who had no need of rhetorical art, nor of uttering anything in a contentious or quarrelsome manner, but to present themselves pure to the energy of the Divine Spirit, in order that the divine spectrum [i.e. plucking] itself,

3 This view is not alien to how Scripture itself talks about inspiration in certain texts. Some interpret texts such as Num 24:13; 1 Sam 10:10–11; 2 Tim 3:16; and 2 Pet 1:21 in this way.

4 David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 36–38.

5 Philo of Alexandria, *Who Is the Heir*, 265; *Special Laws* 1:65; 4:49.; 4 Ezra 14:22, 37–47; *Gen. Rab.* 8:8 (Moses must write down what God dictates, even though he may have reservations).

6 Justin Martyr, *Exhort. Greeks*, 8; Theophilus of Antioch, *Auto.*, 2:9; Athenagoras, *Plea*, 7, 9; Hippolytus of Rome, *Christ and Antichrist*, 2.

descending from heaven, and using righteous men as an instrument like a harp or lyre, might reveal to us the knowledge of things divine and heavenly.⁷

However, others such as Augustine articulated a somewhat more nuanced view. Although Augustine adamantly affirmed that God was the ultimate author of Scripture, he understood humans to be active in the writing process as well.⁸ Thus, on one hand he could say that the Lord used the gospel writers ‘as if they were His own hands’,⁹ yet on the other hand he stated that each writer ‘believed it to have been his duty to relate what he had to relate in that order in which it had pleased God to suggest to his recollection the matters he was engaged in recording’ and that thus the Spirit ‘has left one historian at liberty to construct his narrative in one way, and another in a different fashion’.¹⁰

Clearly, Augustine attributed an active role to humans in the inspiration process, even if this role was subordinate to the Spirit’s guiding. This view has come to be called the concursive theory of inspiration.¹¹ Augustine’s theory would remain influential in subsequent eras, although there would be disagreement over the relationship between the two agencies.

Biblical authority

The patristic testimony regarding biblical authority as it relates to other authorities such as tradition, bishops and councils is rather complex, with some arguing for multiple authorities—perhaps even equal to Scripture—and others giving a privileged position to Scripture.

On one hand, many believed that apostolic tradition, bishops’ teaching and conciliar statements were authoritative, perhaps even as authoritative as Scripture itself. Regarding apostolic tradition, their argument was primarily a phenomenological one: the universal church (or at least their local church) maintained certain beliefs and practices—for example, making the sign of the cross and praying towards the east—that were not found in Scripture and thus must have come from another source, namely unwritten tradition handed down by the apostles.¹² Jerome’s language summarizes the position well: ‘Don’t you know that the laying on of hands after baptism and then the invocation of the Holy Spirit is a custom of the Churches? Do you demand Scripture proof? You may find it in the

7 *Exhort. Greeks*, 8 (trans. ANF 1:276). Throughout this essay, I have used the well-known series ANF (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*) and NPNF 1 and 2 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1 and 2) for many of the patristic citations.

8 This ‘thicker’ view of inspiration, shared by several patristic authors, may have come as a reaction against the Montanist claims that their prophets dictated messages from God. See Matthew Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria’s Trinitarian Theology of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 78ff.

9 Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels*, 1.35.54 (trans. NPNF 1 6:101).

10 Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels*, 2.21.51–52 (trans. NPNF 1 6:127).

11 This view is not alien to how Scripture itself talks about inspiration in certain texts. Some interpret texts such as 2 Sam 23:2; Matt 15:4//Mk 7:10; and Lk 1:1–4 in this way.

12 Roman Catholics and especially Eastern Orthodox see Scripture and unwritten tradition as two components of one source of authority, which they call Tradition.

Acts of the Apostles. And even if it did not rest on the authority of Scripture the consensus of the whole world in this respect would have the force of a command.¹³

Arguably the most celebrated example of this posture appears in Basil of Caesarea's *On the Holy Spirit*: 'Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us "in a mystery" by the tradition of the apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force.'¹⁴

Regarding the authority of bishops and councils, Ambrose stated that 'neither death nor the sword can separate me' from the Council of Nicea; Leo the Great affirmed, 'My respect for the Nicene canons is such that I never have allowed nor ever will the institutions of the holy Fathers to be violated by any innovation'; the eastern bishops present during the first Council of Constantinople (381) charged the western bishops to accept the Nicene Creed of 325; and the definition of Chalcedon (451) endorsed the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople.¹⁵

On the other hand, many viewed Scripture as more authoritative than the authority of tradition, bishops, councils and even angels. Their arguments follow, in ascending order of importance. First, some speak so highly of Scripture as to give the impression that it plays a unique role in the church's life, arguably reflecting what Protestants would later call *sola Scriptura*.¹⁶ Second, comments by authors such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Basil of Caesarea and Augustine demonstrate that 'tradition' was not uniform but rather pluriform, and occasionally self-contradicting. They recognized that arguments based on competing ecclesiastical traditions led to a stalemate, and their solution was that, at least in these cases, tradition should be set aside and Scripture should be used as the only source.¹⁷ Third, some argued that the

13 Jerome, *Against the Luciferians*, 8. In this text, Jerome specifically mentions post-baptismal laying on of hands and invocation of the Holy Spirit, triune immersion, postbaptismal drinking of mixed milk and honey, standing in worship on the Lord's day, ceasing from fasting on Pentecost, and 'other unwritten practices'.

14 Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 27:66–67 (trans. NPNF 2 8:41–42), who then specifically mentions the following practices: making the sign of the cross, prayer towards the East, the invocation prayer for the Eucharist, blessing of the water and oil at baptism, anointing of oil at baptism, triune immersion, renunciation of Satan and his angels at baptism, standing in prayer on Sundays, confession of the faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and doxology 'with the Spirit' instead of 'in the Spirit'. Origen similarly argued for infant baptism based on unwritten tradition (*Comm. Rom.* 5.9.11). John Chrysostom expressly endorsed unwritten tradition, but without specifying its contents (*Hom. 2 Thess.* 2:15). Augustine mentioned the liturgical observance of Holy Week, Christ's ascension, and Pentecost (*Ep.* 44.1, although he says that this could also have come from 'plenary councils').

15 Ambrose, *Ep.* 21.14 (trans. NPNF 2 10:428); Leo the Great, *Ep.* 119.3 (trans. NPNF 2 12:86); letter from the eastern bishops to the western bishops in the year 382 (reprinted in Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1:25–30); definition of Chalcedon (reprinted in Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:84).

16 Hippolytus of Rome, *Against Noetus*, 9; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.16; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomius*, 10.4; *On the Soul and the Resurrection* (two places; above human reasoning); Optatus: *Against the Donatists*, 5.3; Augustine, *De unitate ecclesiae*, 4.7.

17 Irenaeus, *Con. Her.* 3.2.1; Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle* 189 (to Eustathius), §3; Augustine, *Answer to Maximinus*, 2.14.3.

New Testament writings were more important than tradition and custom. For example, Cyprian of Carthage, in his ongoing dispute with the bishop Stephen of Rome, denounced the raising of tradition to the same level as scriptural authority and famously quipped that 'custom without truth is the antiquity of error.'¹⁸ In this instance, a bishop of Carthage felt free to challenge the bishop of Rome based on scriptural teaching, a fact which should not go unappreciated.

Fourth and most importantly, some of the church's most influential figures explicitly taught that Scripture is above other sources of authority. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote:

For concerning the divine and holy mysteries of the Faith, not even a casual statement must be delivered without the Holy Scriptures; nor must we be drawn aside by mere plausibility and artifices of speech. Even to me, who tell thee these things, give not absolute credence, unless thou receive the proof of the things which I announce from the Divine Scriptures. For this salvation which we believe depends not on ingenious reasoning, but on demonstration of the Holy Scriptures.¹⁹

Similarly, Ambrose wrote, 'I do not wish that credence be given to us; let the Scripture be quoted.'²⁰ Jerome, commenting on Psalm 87 [*Vulgate* 86]:6, drew the following conclusion from the verse's use of the past tense ('who have been') as opposed to the present ('who are'): 'That is to make sure that, with the exception of the apostles, whatever else is said afterwards should be removed and not, later on, hold the force of authority. No matter how holy anyone may be after the time of the apostles, no matter how eloquent, he does not have authority.'²¹ John Chrysostom, commenting on Galatians 1:8–9, said that Paul included in this anathema himself, the other apostles and the angels, and that it applied to those who 'even slightly vary, or incidentally disturb' the gospel. He concluded his contrast between angels and the Scriptures by saying that 'for the angels, though mighty, are but servants and ministers, but the Scriptures were all written and sent, not by servants, but by God the Lord of all', and his discussion of the apostles by declaring, 'In the discussion of truth the dignity of persons [i.e., even of the apostles] is not to be considered.'²²

Augustine provides perhaps the most important patristic testimony. At one point in his dialogue with the Donatists, in response to their claim that they had the support of Cyprian of Carthage, whose life and doctrine were revered by both sides, Augustine stated:

You are wont, indeed, to bring up against us the letters of Cyprian, his opinion, his Council. ... But who can fail to be aware that the sacred canon of Scripture,

18 Cyprian of Carthage, *Ep.* 73[74].9 (trans. *ANF* 5:389); cf. *Ep.* 70[71].2–3; 72[73].13; 73[74].2, 3. In the specific context of this quotation, as well as in the general context of Cyprian's larger debate with Rome, 'custom' clearly refers to the tradition that Rome had been practising, and 'truth' to scriptural teaching.

19 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. Lect.* 4:17 (trans. *NPNF* 2 7:23); cf. 12:5.

20 *Sacrament of the Incarnation of Our Lord*, 3, quoted in David King and William Webster, *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 2001), 66.

21 Jerome, *Hom. Ps.* 18; see *The Homilies of Saint Jerome*, trans. Sister Marie Liguori Ewald (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 1:142–43.

22 John Chrysostom, *Comm. Gal.* 1:8–9 (trans. *NPNF* 2 13:8–9).

both of the Old and New Testament, is confined within its own limits, and that it stands so absolutely in a superior position to all letters of the bishops, that about it we can hold no manner of doubt or disputation whether what is confessedly contained in it is right and true; but that all the letters of bishops which have been written, or are being written, since the closing of the canon, are liable to be refuted if there be anything contained in them which strays from the truth, either by the discourse of someone who happens to be wiser in the matter than themselves, or by the weightier authority and more learned experience of other bishops, by the authority of Councils; and further, that the Councils themselves which are held in the several districts and provinces (*regiones vel provincias*), must yield, beyond all possibility of doubt, to the authority of plenary Councils (*plenariorum conciliorum*) which are formed for the whole Christian world; and that even of the plenary Councils (*plenaria*), the earlier are often corrected (*emendari*) by those which follow them.²³

Augustine's comments are important for at least three reasons. First, he places Scripture in a category by itself, superior to all other authorities.²⁴ Second, he makes the striking claim that even 'plenary' (i.e. ecumenical) councils can err and, indeed, had done so already by his time.²⁵ Third, he articulates a chain of authority, which ascends in the following manner: bishops, wiser people and more learned bishops, regional and provincial councils, ecumenical councils, Scripture.

Biblical inerrancy

In the patristic period, there was a consensus that the Bible was inerrant.²⁶ This can be demonstrated in four ways. First, as already noted, the church fathers generally believed that the Old and New Testaments were divinely dictated by God. This left little, if any, room for human agency, and since God cannot err, neither could Scripture. Second, they repeatedly affirmed that Scripture did not contradict itself. In fact, authors such as Augustine wrote painstakingly long and detailed treatises (e.g. his *Harmony of the Gospels*) to demonstrate that supposed biblical contradictions could be resolved.

Third, the fathers affirmed directly that the Bible did not lie or contain errors. Here, however, we must note that not all agreed on what an 'error' was. For example, Origen stated that the Bible had superficial errors, but that God had put them there on purpose to force humans to seek the true, 'spiritual' sense of the passage.²⁷

23 Augustine, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists* 2.3 (trans. NPNF 1 4:427); Latin text from www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu.

24 Augustine does this on numerous occasions, such as *Ep.* 28; 82.

25 Augustine wrote this work around AD 400, by which time only a few 'plenary' councils had been held, and there was still debate over which councils should be deemed 'plenary'. Thus, it is difficult to understand what he meant by the claim that earlier plenary councils were 'often' corrected by later ones.

26 For texts and analysis, cf. the chapters by John Hannah and Wayne Spear in John Hannah (ed.), *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 3–65; the chapter by Charles Hill in D. A. Carson (ed.), *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 43–88; Andrés Messmer and José Hutter, *La inerrancia bíblica. Ensayo sistemático, exegético e histórico* (Barcelona: Editorial Clie, 2021), 75–117.

27 See e.g. Origen, *On First Principles* 4.2.9; 4.3.5; *Comm. John* 10:4, 15–16.

However, Origen insisted that these were not really errors, since the superficial interpretation of Scriptures was not its true meaning. In contrast, Augustine refused to admit even superficial errors and instead sought to reconcile the apparent errors he found in Scripture.²⁸

Finally, authors such as Eusebius of Caesarea, John Chrysostom and Augustine explicitly affirmed that the Bible was inerrant and infallible and that it was true in all its parts.²⁹ Augustine's letter to Jerome (*Ep.* 82), in which he discusses inerrancy, is a good summary of how the fathers in general understood the issue and, as we will see, exercised significant influence on subsequent formulations of the doctrine:

I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the [manuscript] is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.³⁰

The medieval period (6th–15th centuries)

Very few medieval sources directly treat the issues of biblical inspiration, authority and inerrancy, fewer than in the Patristic period. Robert Preus summarizes the situation:

One may range through thousands of pages of scholastic theology before finding any explicit or direct word concerning the divine origin, authority, or truthfulness of Scripture. Among the scholastics, doctrine concerning Scripture *per se* can be extracted only from their prolegomenous discussions, where they center attention primarily on questions of epistemology and discuss man's return to God, revelation, prophetic knowledge, and similar themes.³¹

Nevertheless, although the sources are scarce, they still permit us to sketch with broad strokes the church's understanding of the Bible during this period.

Biblical inspiration

The medieval period carried forward the two understandings of biblical inspiration that were put forth in the patristic era: divine dictation and concursive inspiration. As for divine dictation, the Church continued to see God as the (only) 'author' of Scripture. The Latin word *auctor* had several shades of meaning such as seller,

28 See e.g. Augustine, *Ep.* 28; 82.

29 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Prep. Gospel* 1.3.6, who uses the words 'inerrant' (*apseudes*) and 'infallible' (*adiapton*); John Chrysostom, *Hom. John* §68, who also uses the word 'inerrant' (*apseudes*); Augustine, *Ep.* 28; 82, who says, among other things, that the Bible is 'true' (*veritas*) 'in every place' (*ex omni parte*).

30 Augustine, *Ep.* 82.3 (trans. NPNF 1 1:350).

31 Robert Preus, 'The View of the Bible', in Hannah, *Inerrancy*, 366. In the West, aside from the brief Carolingian Renaissance, there was very little theological reflection until the 11th century, and it did not really begin to blossom until the 12th and 13th centuries; in the East, most of the theological debates were centered on liturgical issues (e.g. icons) and matters related to Islam.

author, founder, creator and/or originator,³² and thus each use of the word may not have carried the full force of what divine dictation implies, but the general tendency seems to have been in this direction.³³ Apparently this language goes back at least to the Fourth Council of Carthage (404), where the bishop was to be asked the following question at his consecration: 'It ought to be asked of him whether he believes God to be the one and the same author (*unum eumdemque ... auctorem esse Deum*) of the New and Old Testament, that is, of the Law, and of the Prophets, and of the Apostles.' This language became a fixed formula and was repeated several times throughout this period. The profession of faith sent by Leo IX to Peter of Antioch (1054) contained the phrase, 'I believe God, the Lord Almighty, to be the one author (*unum esse auctorem Deum*) of the New and Old Testament, of the Law and Prophets and Apostles.' The creed to which the Greeks subscribed in the second Council of Lyons (1274) read, 'We believe God, the Lord Almighty, to be the one author (*unum esse auctorem Deum*) of the New and Old Testament, of the Law and Prophets and Apostles.' And the decree *pro Jacobitis*, issued by the Council of Florence (1438), similarly stated, 'The most holy Roman Church ... professes one and the same God (*unum atque eundem Deum*) to be the author (*auctorem*) of the Old and New Testament, that is, of the Law, and of the Prophets, and of the Gospel, since by the same inspiring Holy Spirit both Holy Testaments were spoken, from which it receives and venerates the books.' Though not using the same language, Thomas Aquinas affirmed the same doctrine when he wrote, 'God is the author (*auctor*) of Sacred Scripture.'³⁴

As for concursive inspiration, John Wycliffe, who considered Augustine the 'foremost of all the doctors of Holy Scripture',³⁵ posited a threefold authorship of Scripture: God, Christ's humanity and 'their proximate scribe' (*eorum scribam proximum*), i.e. the human authors, whom he called the 'lowest author' (*infimum autorem*).³⁶ Nevertheless, Wycliffe also exhibited a strong tendency towards divine dictation, at times saying that human authors were 'only God's scribes or heralds' (*nisi scribe vel precones dei*). In relationship to the threefold authorship just noted, he affirmed that the human agent 'is not the author' (*non est autor*), since only God can be called the 'author'.³⁷

32 See Domino Du Cange et al., *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis* (Niort, France: L. Favre, 1883–1887); Leo Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

33 The following texts come from C. A. Campbell, 'The Authority and the Authorship of Scripture', *Ecclesiastical Review* 38, no. 2 (1908): 167–68. Campbell himself contests what divine 'authorship' traditionally has been understood to mean, but the patristic evidence combined with the conservative nature of the Middle Ages suggests continuity between the two.

34 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.1 a.10.

35 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:35. The English translation I have used is John Wycliffe, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, trans. Ian Christopher Levy (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 2001). By contrast, Anselm, Hugh of St. Victor and Robert Grosseteste are merely his 'abbreviators' (*On the Truth*, 1:38).

36 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:398; Latin text: Rudolf Buddensieg, *John Wyclif's De veritate sacrae scripturae*, 3 vols. (London: 1905), 1:398. Although I have not been able to find additional sources which discuss or develop the theory of concursive inspiration, Augustine's influence throughout the Middle Ages and the 'boom' of a modified version of concursive inspiration in the 16th century imply that this theory maintained support during the medieval period.

37 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:392, 398 (Buddensieg, *John Wyclif's*, 1:392, 398); cf. 1:402.

Biblical authority

It does not appear that many medieval writers wrestled with the relationship between biblical authority and other authorities. Thus, only a few texts can be included, some of which only indirectly address the issue.

On one hand, there was an assumption that Scripture and tradition spoke with one voice and that, in this sense, both were authoritative. The fact that influential figures such as Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas could indiscriminately cite either Scripture, the fathers, councils or even philosophy—either as an authoritative voice in favour of or against any number of doctrines—implies that they understood these non-biblical sources as carrying significant authority, perhaps equal to Scripture itself.³⁸

On the other hand, Scripture could also be spoken of as a unique authority. Thus, Anselm of Canterbury stated in his justly famous work *Why God Became Man*, 'If I say anything which is undoubtedly contradictory to Holy Scripture, it is wrong; and, if I become aware of such a contradiction, I do not wish to hold to that opinion.'³⁹ Similarly, Thomas Aquinas, contrasting Scripture with human reason and the authority of philosophers, wrote:

Nevertheless, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities as extrinsic and probable arguments (*extraneis argumentis, et probabilibus*); but properly uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures as an incontrovertible proof (*ex necessitate argumentando*), and the authority of the doctors of the Church as one that may properly be used, yet merely as probable (*probabiliter*). For our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to other doctors. [Aquinas then quotes from Augustine, *Ep.* 82.3.]⁴⁰

Most forceful is Wycliffe's testimony. He wrote his famous work on biblical authority, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, in 1377–1378, just after he had been condemned by the Pope for his comments on church–state relations, and during the so-called 'Great Schism' when the Western church had two rival popes.⁴¹ His comments can be divided into negative statements against church authority and positive statements about biblical authority.

As for negative statements, Wycliffe attacked church and/or papal authority. He claimed that 'the Church has proven herself deceptive, mistaken, and ignorant, not only in her judicial proceedings, but in other private points concerning the state of

38 Peter Abelard, *Sic et non*; Peter Lombard, *Sentences*; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*.

39 Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (eds.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 298.

40 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.1 a.8 (translation at www.logicmuseum.com). In his *Comm. John* 21.6, he similarly wrote, 'We should note that although many have written about Catholic truth, there is a difference among them: those who wrote the canonical scriptures, such as the evangelists and apostles and the like, so constantly and firmly affirm this truth that it cannot be doubted. ... The reason for this is that only the canonical scriptures are the standard of faith. The others have set forth this truth but in such a way that they do not want to be believed except in those things in which they say what is true' (translation at www.isidore.com).

41 The Great Schism shook many people's confidence in the church's authority, causing some of them, like Wycliffe, to look for authority elsewhere.

the Church, evinced in matters concerning the celebration of Easter, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and many other essential difficulties which remain unresolved.⁴² Wycliffe blamed the church's errors on the (pseudo-)Donation of Constantine, by which the church officially entered into worldly politics.⁴³ Interestingly, Wycliffe did not oppose the authority of the magisterium *per se*, but he rejected placing it on the same level as Scripture:

Nevertheless, I do not deny, but in fact concede, that it is lawful for bishops and Vicars of Christ to formulate statutes designed to help the Church. And whenever they do institute such statutes they ought to be accepted, unless they contradict other statutes or prove contrary to Holy Scripture. But I do think that it is clearly blasphemous to imagine that statutes of this sort, on the grounds that they are issued by the pope, might then claim equal authority with the gospel.⁴⁴

As for positive statements, Wycliffe exalted biblical authority over ecclesiastical authorities. Here is one example: 'Any part of Holy Scripture is of infinitely greater authority than any decretal letter. And this is clarified in the following manner: every decretal letter is the creation of some pope, the Vicar of Christ together with his subordinates. Every part of Holy Scripture, however, is immediately and proximately authorized by God; and thus the conclusion.'⁴⁵ Elsewhere he wrote:

God bestowed his own law completely through the scribes of the books of both testaments, and he commanded that nothing foreign to be added to it, and nothing be removed from it. How then can a person presume to place his own statements on a par with those bearing the authority of Holy Scripture? Lest he seem to be doing just that, he ought to adduce his statements from Scripture. Hence, those who compose so many decrees and decretal letters should never presume that they are of equal authority with the words of the Lord, inasmuch as they are his own, since this would be to declare blasphemously that they themselves are God.⁴⁶

At one point, Wycliffe went so far as to say—basing his argument on Galatians 1:8, 11–12—that the biblical authors were not authoritative in and of themselves, but only when God spoke through them: 'In fact, the statements of the authors of Holy Scripture are not authentic because they spoke them, but only insofar as God instructed them to speak in this way.'⁴⁷

Overall, Wycliffe seems to have followed the example of Augustine. He acknowledged and even endorsed the church's authority to promulgate decrees and statutes, but only to the extent that they helped the church, did not contradict Scripture and were seen as inferior to the authority of Scripture. This Augustinian–Wycliffian view of the relationship between biblical authority and other authorities would become the typical Protestant position during the Reformation.

42 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:407.

43 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:395; 2:130. The so-called Donation of Constantine would not be proved a forgery until Lorenzo de Valla made this demonstration around 1440.

44 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:403; cf. 1:406.

45 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:395.

46 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:405.

47 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:397.

Biblical inerrancy

On inerrancy, important figures continued to maintain the patristic position that Scripture was true, did not contradict itself and did not contain any error. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that 'other sciences derive their certitude from the natural light of human reason, which can err (*errare*); whereas this [science] derives its certitude from the light of divine knowledge, which cannot be misled (*decipi non potest*).'⁴⁸ Later he said that 'faith rests upon infallible truth (*infallibili veritati*)', and the context makes it clear that 'faith' comes from Scripture.⁴⁹ Finally, in another place he wrote, 'It is unlawful to hold that any false (*falsum*) assertion is contained either in the Gospel or in any canonical Scripture, or that the writers thereof have told untruths (*mendacium*), because faith would be deprived of its certitude which is based on the authority of Holy Writ.'⁵⁰

Similarly, Wycliffe affirmed that Scripture did not contain any errors: 'Surely even a small error (*modicus ... error*) in this principle could bring about the death of the Church. ... I have often said that Scripture is true in all of its parts (*vera ... secundum quamlibet eius partem*) according to the intended literal sense.'⁵¹ Elsewhere he affirmed, 'No Holy Scripture is false (*nulla scriptura sacra sit falsa*). But whatever is sacred is true (*vera*), such that no part of it is capable of being contrary (*contraria*) to another, as I have very clearly stated throughout this treatise.'⁵² As Anthony Kenny has noted, it 'is wrong to think of Wyclif as a fundamentalist' on the inerrancy of Scripture, but rather he should be considered a faithful son of the church: 'In attributing inerrancy to the Bible in this way Wyclif was merely following Catholic tradition.'⁵³

The Reformation period (16th–18th centuries)

Whereas in the Middle Ages the doctrine of Scripture was more assumed than reflected on, in the 16th to 18th centuries it became one of the central issues of theological debate and discussion. For the first time ever, confessions of faith and dogmatic treatises dedicated lengthy chapters—often the first, or one of the first—to the doctrine of Scripture. Whereas in previous periods our problem was a lack of sources, here we face the opposite. Thus, I cannot be exhaustive in my treatment of the sources, but I will try to be representative.

*Biblical inspiration*⁵⁴

During this period, the theories of divine dictation and concursive inspiration were carried forward, but with important modifications. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that everyone was committed to the concursive theory of inspiration, but that

48 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.1, a.5.

49 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.1, a.8.

50 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIb, q.110, a.3.

51 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 1:1–2 (Buddensieg, *John Wyclif's*, 1:2); cf. 1:109.

52 Wycliffe, *On the Truth*, 3:278 (Buddensieg, *John Wyclif's*, 3:278); cf. 1:23.

53 Anthony Kenny, *Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 60.

54 For Catholic views of inspiration in this and the modern period, see James Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), esp. 44–87.

two distinct groups positioned themselves on opposite sides of the divine–human spectrum: one group emphasized the divine element over the human while the other did the reverse.

To understand the debate over the nature of the Bible during this time period, we must situate it within the broader debate over the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom.⁵⁵ On one side, Scotists, Jesuits, Benedictines and Anabaptists favored reason and human freedom, while on the other side, Dominicans, Augustinians, Jansenists, Lutherans and Reformed favored faith and God's sovereignty, and this divide generally parallels the two sides' views of inspiration.⁵⁶ Thus, although the debate occurred mainly along Roman Catholic–Protestant lines (and it will be presented as such below), it was actually more complicated than that, since Roman Catholics and Protestants were clearly divided amongst themselves.

In Roman Catholic circles, and in no small part thanks to the influence of the Jesuits and their reaction against Protestant teaching on Scripture, three distinct yet related positions emerged. First, according to the divine assistance theory (also known as special direction) developed by Lessius (Leonhard Leys), God's role was limited to preserving the biblical authors from asserting error. This theory was similar to the Jesuit doctrine of middle knowledge: God surrounds the individual with a set of circumstances and graces by which he will inevitably, but of his own choice, perform God's will (in this case, write Scripture).⁵⁷ Second, the consequent inspiration theory, developed by Sixtus of Siena, stated that a text can be viewed as inspired because the church subsequently deemed it so.⁵⁸ Lastly, according to the limited inspiration theory developed by Marcantonio de Dominis, the extent of the Bible's inspiration was limited to faith and morals, thereby excluding other affirmations such as those related to history and science.⁵⁹ All three views shared a commitment to concursive inspiration, but with a marked emphasis on the human element. Despite some revivals in the 19th century (see below), none of these theories would ultimately survive, since all were condemned at Vatican I (1869–1870).

At the other end of the concursive spectrum, Protestants tended to emphasize the divine element in inspiration, occasionally employing language reminiscent of divine dictation. Thus, Luther said prophets were those 'into whose mouth the Holy Spirit has given the words',⁶⁰ and 'not only the words but also the expressions used

55 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 127. Although Burtchaell was speaking of 19th-century debates in this passage, the statement seems applicable to the 16th century as well.

56 The two groups were similarly divided over justification and the relationship between faith and good works, with the former emphasizing good works and the latter emphasizing faith.

57 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 90–91.

58 Casiodoro de Reina would edit one of his works, *Sacred Library*, calling it a 'theology of great importance', although he did confess to having 'corrected' some parts of it (in a letter to Theodore Zwinger on 27 October 1574).

59 In the 19th century, this theory would enjoy a revival thanks to its most famous exponent, John Henry Newman, who coined the phrase *orbiter dicta* (incidentally spoken) to describe 'errors' in the Bible.

60 *Weimarer Ausgabe* (WA) 3:172, quoted in A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther: Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1969), 142.

by the Holy Spirit and Scripture are divine.⁶¹ Similarly, John Calvin described Scripture as having been given by God when commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16:

This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs (*organa*) of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit (*a Spiritu Sancto dictatam*).⁶²

However, this did not keep them from affirming human agency. For example, when preaching on Matthew 24:15–28, Luther stated:

In this chapter is described the conclusion and end of both kingdoms, that of Judah and that of the whole world. But the two evangelists, Matthew and Mark, mingle the two and do not keep the order that has been preserved in Luke, for they are concerned only about telling and repeating the words without troubling themselves as to the order in which they words were spoken.⁶³

Biblical authority

During the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, as is widely known, Roman Catholics argued that other authorities—specifically tradition and the magisterium—were equal to biblical authority while Protestants insisted on *sola Scriptura*. During the fourth session of the Council of Trent (1546), the Roman Catholic Church decreed—in line with previous councils such as Nicea II (787), which Protestants typically reject—that both ‘written books’ and ‘unwritten tradition’ were equally authoritative.⁶⁴ The Catechism of the Council of Trent subsequently affirmed, ‘Now all the doctrines in which the faithful are to be instructed are contained in the Word of God, which is found in Scripture and tradition.’⁶⁵

In contrast, Protestants averred that Scripture alone was the unique and final authority in the life of the church.⁶⁶ Martin Luther’s famous 1521 speech at the Diet of Worms could have been said by any Protestant of this period. When asked to retract his views, he declared:

61 WA 40:3:254, quoted in Wood, *Captive to the Word*, 143.

62 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1856), 249; for the Latin, cf. John Calvin, *In omnes Pauli Apostoli Epistolas* (Geneva: John Crispin, 1557), 523. For a treatment of Calvin’s view of Scripture, see John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1979), esp. 11–31.

63 Quoted in M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1944), 110–11. Similarly, Wood affirms Luther’s doctrine of ‘double inspiration’ (*Captive to the Word*, 143).

64 Tanner, *Decrees*, 2:663.

65 *The Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests*, trans. John McHugh and Charles Callan (1566/1923), eBook edition, location 260 of 9018.

66 For example, Formula of Concord, §1; Ten Theses of Bern, §1–2; Tetrapolitan Confession, §1; Second Helvetic Confession, §1–2; Juan Díaz, *Sum of the Christian Religion* (1546).

Your Imperial Majesty and Your Lordships demand a simple answer. Here it is, plain and unvarnished. Unless I am convicted of error by the testimony of Scriptures or (since I put no trust in the unsupported authority of Pope or of councils, since it is plain that they have often erred and often contradicted themselves) by manifest reasoning I stand convicted by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's word, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.⁶⁷

However, Protestants did not do away with all other authorities. Rather, they continued to hold tradition and bishops in high regard, and as for church creeds, the standard Protestant position was to accept the Apostles', Nicene-Constantinopolitan and Athanasian Creeds as faithful expositions of essential Christian belief. All major Protestant traditions except the Anabaptists⁶⁸ included them as part of their confessional tradition.⁶⁹ Less common, but still within the general Protestant tradition, was to accept the first four ecumenical councils as authoritative.⁷⁰ Thus, whatever particular approach each Protestant tradition took, they typically upheld the spirituality, theology and ecclesiology of the first five centuries of Christian tradition as subordinate to Scripture.⁷¹

In a related development, during this time Roman Catholics began insisting on the Latin Vulgate as the official text of Scripture, whereas the Reformers preferred the original biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.⁷²

Biblical inerrancy

As for Roman Catholic authors of this period, although most of their energies went into defending papal infallibility rather than biblical inerrancy,⁷³ James Burtchaell

67 Translation taken from Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 214.

68 However, some Anabaptists such as Balthasar Hubmaier endorsed the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds; see his *A Christian Catechism* in H. Wayne Pipkin and John Yoder (eds.), *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2019), 339–65 (esp. 349, 351).

69 Lutheran: Formula of Concord, §4; Anglican: 42 Articles of the Church of England, §7 and 39 Articles of the Church of England, §8; Reformed: French Confession, §5, Belgic Confession, §9 and Second Helvetic Confession, §11.

70 Juan Diaz, *Sum of the Christian Religion*, §2; Waldensian Confession of Turin (Leger, Balmas and Theiler); Geneva Students' Confession; French Confession, §6; Second Helvetic Confession, §11; Netherlands Confession, §1.

71 This position is known as the *consensus patrum* (consensus of the fathers) or *consensus quinquesecularis* (consensus of the [first] five centuries). This did not mean that Protestants rejected the next thousand years as heretical, but rather that they saw a general drift in the church's focus away from Christ and Scripture, and that later accretions—such as certain elements in the mass or Mariology—were not legitimate developments of scriptural teaching.

72 The Latin Vulgate was declared the official text of the Roman Catholic Church at the fourth session of the Council of Trent (1546). For a defender of the original languages from this period, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.10–12, 15.

73 For example, see Thomas Stapleton, *A Returne of Untruthes upon M. Jewelles Replie* (Antwerp: John Latius, 1566), 111. The concept of papal infallibility did not originate in the 16th century, but rather dated back to the Middle Ages.

succinctly summarizes their position as follows: 'As for the content of the Bible, this was taken for granted as inerrant.'⁷⁴

Although Protestant Reformers' stance on inerrancy has been called into question by some scholars,⁷⁵ the overall evidence favours the interpretation that they upheld the classical teaching of the church. Martin Luther stated, 'Scripture has never erred' (*Schrift ... die noch nie geirret hat*), and then approvingly cited Augustine's *Epistle* 82 to Jerome.⁷⁶ As the quotation above from his commentary on 2 Timothy 3:16 above makes clear, Calvin believed that all of Scripture had been 'dictated by the Holy Spirit', which implies a commitment to inerrancy.⁷⁷ After providing the appropriate texts from the major Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican confessions of faith from the 16th and 17th centuries, Charles Hodge summarized the basic Protestant position as follows: 'The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are therefore infallible and of divine authority in all things pertaining to faith and practice, and consequently free from all error whether of doctrine, fact, or precept.'⁷⁸

During this period, Protestants began affirming explicitly that inerrancy was not limited to faith and morals, but rather extended to every word contained in Scripture (otherwise known as verbal, plenary inspiration). For example, the Lutheran theologian Johannes Andreas Quenstedt said that Scripture

is the infallible truth, free of any error; or, to say the same thing in another way, in canonical Sacred Scripture there is no lie, no falsehood, not even the tiniest of errors (*nullus vel minimus error*), either in content or in words. Rather, each and every thing contained in it is altogether true, be it dogmatic or moral or historical, chronological, topographical, or onomastic. It is neither possible nor permissible to attribute to the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit any ignorance, lack of thought, or forgetfulness, or any lapse of memory, in recording Holy Writ.⁷⁹

Similarly, the Reformed theologian Johann Heinrich Heidegger wrote, 'Under the inspiration of God the writers simply could not err ... neither in important matters nor in trivial ones' since 'if we acknowledge any errors of any sort in the Scriptures, we no longer believe the Holy Spirit to be their author.'⁸⁰ In fact, the Protestant insistence on inerrancy went so far that some authors attributed inerrancy to the

74 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 88.

75 For example, C. A. Briggs, *The Bible: The Church and the Reason*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 217–21; Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999).

76 Martin Luther, *Sämtliche Schriften*, 15:1481.

77 See Murray, *Calvin on Scripture*, 11–31; Roger Nicole, 'John Calvin and Inerrancy', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 4 (1982): 425–42. The three most famous counter-examples in Calvin's commentaries—Matt 27:9; Acts 7:14–16; and Heb 11:21—can be resolved by careful exegesis and textual criticism.

78 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1873), 1:152.

79 Johannes Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum* (Leipzig, 1715), 1:112, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971–1991), 4:343–44.

80 Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae Christianae* (Zurich, 1700), 1:33 (quoted in Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 4:344).

Hebrew vowel points.⁸¹ Happily, this unsustainable position has remained on the fringe of Protestant thought.

Summary up to this point

Robert Preus has ably summarized the Church's teaching on Scripture up through this period: "That the Bible is the Word of God, inerrant and of supreme divine authority, was a conviction held by all Christians and Christian teachers through the first 1,700 years of church history. Except in the case of certain free-thinking scholastics, such as Abelard, this fact has not really been contested by many scholars."⁸² In the next period, however, this conviction would be challenged.

The modern period (19th–21st centuries)

The modern period presents a sharp break with how the church—and those outside the church—had traditionally understood biblical inspiration and inerrancy. Instead of stressing the divine element in inspiration, scholars began to stress the human, and instead of asserting the Bible's truthfulness in all its parts, scholars begin to assert more frequently that the Bible contains errors (even if they were limited to minor details that did not affect faith and morals). James Burtchaell provides four reasons why this change took place: according to many scholars of the time, geology and paleontology discredited the Genesis cosmogony, archaeology discredited the Bible's history, comparative studies discredited the Bible's originality, and literary criticism discredited the Bible's credibility, making it seem as if the Bible had elevated myth and legend into historical fact.⁸³ In addition to these four changes, one may add the general influence of the Enlightenment on Western epistemology, which stresses that all truth claims must be subjected to human reason and that if something did not seem reasonable, it should be discarded as erroneous.

Biblical inspiration

In Roman Catholic circles, there were three great schools of thought during this period, two of which continued the teaching of previous periods. Jesuits—mainly in Germany—continued to hold to content inspiration and Dominicans—mainly in Italy and France—to verbal, plenary inspiration.⁸⁴ Both sides held to some version of concursive inspiration, but with different nuances. Many were treating the topic as if divine and human authorship were mutually exclusive, with one beginning where the other left off. As in the previous period, the precise nature of concursive inspiration was part of the bigger theological issue of the relationship between God's sovereignty and human freedom.⁸⁵

The third view, which originated primarily at the University of Tübingen but also found support elsewhere, would become known as the 'liberal' view. At least three issues were at play here. First, while many were willing to maintain that

81 E.g. *Helvetic Consensus*, §2.

82 Preus, 'The View of the Bible', in Hannah, *Inerrancy*, 357.

83 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 2; cf. 115–16.

84 According to Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 88 and 121, content inspiration was the dominant theory from the 1840s to the 1890s.

85 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 127.

Scripture was 'inspired', the divine element was so weakened as to become almost non-existent. Second, according to this view, Scripture is a collection of primitive documents written in a specific time and context—indeed, the phrase 'children of their time' comes from this period⁸⁶—and thus is radically human throughout. Its wisdom, knowledge, ethics and grammar all reflect the limitations of the human authors who penned the works. If Scripture is anything, it is not God's word for all mankind for all time, but rather the first step—riddled with errors and contradictions—in a long journey of development and self-understanding. Third, Enlightenment principles, such as the preference for naturalistic explanations over supernatural ones, facilitated the conclusion that inspiration could be explained on natural grounds alone. During the early 19th century, clear denials of inspiration began to emerge. It appears that the first denial of plenary inspiration can be attributed to Franz Anton Staudenmaier in 1840 and the first denial of verbal inspiration to Johann Evangelist von Kuhn in 1859.⁸⁷

Within the Protestant world, similar postures can be detected. Some influential theologians continued to expound divine dictation and concursive inspiration, but others began arguing for the liberal view. Charles Hodge seems to have endorsed divine dictation: 'On this subject the common doctrine of the Church is, and ever has been, that inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of his mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God, that what they said God said.'⁸⁸ However, shortly thereafter he eschewed divine dictation theory (which he called the mechanical theory of inspiration) in favour of concursive inspiration. Although his judgement on the church's historical position must be modified in light of our previous discussion of divine dictation, the following statement articulates his own view on the topic:

The Church has never held what has been stigmatized as the mechanical theory of inspiration. The sacred writers were not machines. Their self-consciousness was not suspended; nor were their intellectual powers superseded. Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. It was men, not machines; not unconscious instruments, but living, thinking, willing minds, whom the Spirit used as his organs.⁸⁹

Similarly, B. B. Warfield—Hodge's colleague at Princeton Seminary and perhaps the most influential modern thinker on the topic of the nature of Scripture—defined inspiration as follows: 'Inspiration is that extraordinary, supernatural influence (or, passively, the result of it), exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred

86 Franz von Hummelauer, *Exegetisches zur Inspirationsfrage, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das alte Testament* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1904), 50–98, quoted in Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 187.

87 See Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 24–25, 29, citing Staudenmaier's *Encyclopädie der theologischen Wissenschaften als System der gesamten Theologie*, 2nd ed. (Mains: Florian Kupferberg, 1840), 347–48 and Kuhn's *Katholische Dogmatik*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Laupp & Siebeck, 1859), 1:94. Burtchaell distinguishes between the 'Tübingen School', from which these quotations come, and the 'Inspiration without Inerrancy' school. However, I find them sufficiently similar as to include them as one group.

88 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 154; cf. 156.

89 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 157.

Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God, and, therefore, perfectly infallible.⁹⁰ However, Warfield then added a significant clarification: '[This definition] purposely declares nothing as to the mode of inspiration. The Reformed Churches admit that this is inscrutable. They content themselves with defining carefully and holding fast the effects of the divine influence, leaving the mode of divine action by which it is brought about draped in mystery.'⁹¹

Regarding the liberal view, several other influential theologians began to assert that the Bible contained errors and to limit inerrancy to matters of faith and practice. One common way to do so was to argue that the biblical text was the product of many authors—many of them anonymous or pseudonymous—whose primary 'inspiration' came not from God but rather from their surrounding ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures. The seeds of this liberal approach to Scripture can be traced to the 17th century during the rise of inductive reasoning as the dominant method for research, the scientific revolution, and the explosion of archaeological and scientific finds.⁹² Thus, for example, in the 17th century, Baruch Spinoza claimed that the Bible contains contradictions; in the 18th and 19th centuries, scholars such as Hermann Samuel Reimarus and David Strauss claimed to have uncovered the 'Jesus of history' as opposed to the 'Christ of faith'; and in the 19th century, W. M. L. de Wette and Julius Wellhausen attacked traditional views on the dating and authorship of several Old Testament works and crystallized the JEDP theory of Pentateuchal authorship.⁹³

Similar to liberalism within Roman Catholic circles, in the 19th century denials or redefinitions of inspiration became more overt in Protestant thought as well. Thus, for example, in 1830, Edward Pusey—a conservative theologian and churchman—denied or redefined plenary inspiration such that the biblical authors were not completely free from error, and in 1860 the seven authors of *Essays and Reviews* cautiously denied the traditional understanding of biblical inspiration.⁹⁴

90 B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 420 (italicized in the original).

91 Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 420–21. He does mention three 'modes of revelation': external manifestation, internal suggestion and concursive operation (*Inspiration and Authority*, 83). The Reformed tradition has not always affirmed that the mode of inspiration is unknowable. Warfield's 1915 article on inspiration, in which he exegetes 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:19–21, leans heavily towards the divine dictation theory of inspiration, but without crossing over into it (*Inspiration and Authority*, 132–37).

92 See Norman Geisler, 'Inductivism, Materialism, and Rationalism: Bacon, Hobbes, and Spinoza', in Geisler (ed.), *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of its Philosophical Roots* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 11–22.

93 John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984), esp. 28–49, 257–89; Colin Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought, 1778–1860* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), esp. 1–55; Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 44–61; Roy Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 32–65, 89–130.

94 Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism*, 168–69; Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Inspiration*, 57.

Biblical authority

In Roman Catholic circles, the document *Dei Verbum* from Vatican II reinforced the Roman Catholic position that Scripture and tradition ‘flow from the same divine wellspring, merge together to some extent (*quodammodo*), and are on course towards the same end. ... Both scripture and tradition are to be accepted and honored with like devotion and reverence.’ Shortly thereafter, the document states, ‘It is clear that, by God’s wise design, tradition, scripture and the church’s teaching function are so connected and associated that one does not stand without the others, but all together.’⁹⁵

As for Protestants, the traditional position of viewing the Bible as the unique, but not the only, authority in the church began to be pulled in two opposite directions during the 19th century. On the one hand, the Church of England’s Tractarian/Oxford Movement emphasized the importance of church history, the historic creeds and confessions and the authority of tradition and the magisterium to such an extent that a large portion of the church became ‘Anglo-Catholic’, with some—most notably John Henry Newman—ultimately converting to Roman Catholicism.⁹⁶

On the other hand, both inside and outside the Church of England, several movements attempted to restore Christianity to its supposed New Testament purity and reacted strongly against traditional and ecclesiastical authorities, which they saw as perversions of the true gospel and church. Thus, England witnessed the Brethren movement as a reaction against the Church of England, and the United States witnessed ‘restorationist’ movements such as the Stone-Campbell movement, Landmarkism and Adventism, many of which began employing the slogan ‘No creed but the Christ, no book but the Bible’.⁹⁷ All these movements shared a commitment to *sola Scriptura*, but to the exclusion of other authorities such as tradition, bishops and the historic creeds and councils. To distinguish this 19th-century understanding of *sola Scriptura* from its previous formulations, some have preferred to call it *solo Scriptura* (‘the Bible alone’, i.e. without anything else whatsoever) or *nuda Scriptura* (‘bare Scripture’). Whatever one calls it, this emphasis represented a drastic change from how the church traditionally had understood the relationship between Scripture and other authorities.

95 *Dei verbum*, §9; cf. Tanner, *Decrees*, 2:974–75; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §81–82, 585–86.

96 See John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1876); Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1878).

97 For the slogan, see Terry Miethe, ‘Slogans’, in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 688. This mentality deeply affected the Southern Baptist Convention in the 19th century; see Rhyne Putman, ‘Baptists, *Sola Scriptura*, and the Place of the Christian Tradition’, in *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards and Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*, ed. Matthew Emerson, Christopher Morgan and R. Lucas Stamps (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2020), 28–33.

Biblical inerrancy

During this period, a movement of scholars who denied inerrancy arose;⁹⁸ it was especially strong in Germany but also present in other European countries. Scholars began to argue either that Scripture was not all inspired (and therefore errant in some places) or that while Scripture may be inspired in its totality, the human element in the inspiration process placed certain limitations and restrictions on what the biblical text could contain, thereby relativizing its contents and reducing its universal and timeless truthfulness. Although the movement never organized behind a specific leader or school, James Burtchaell summarizes its basic tenets as follows: '(1) Secular affirmations (of science and history) lie beyond the charismatic interests and competence of inspired writers. (2) Biblical religion portrays the faith in its crudest and most imperfect stages.'⁹⁹ In addition, the Enlightenment's project of submitting all truth claims to human inquiry and independent confirmation meant that even Scripture should not be taken at face value, but rather must be submitted to the human intellect.

Nevertheless, most of the Christian tradition continued to affirm inerrancy. In the Roman Catholic camp, a whole host of official documents affirmed the plenary inspiration and total inerrancy of Scripture: *Syllabus Errorum* (1864), *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920) and *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943).¹⁰⁰

Within the Protestant camp, affirmations were just as vigorous. In 1840, the Frenchman Louis (François) Gaussen published *La Théopneustie, ou pleine inspiration des saintes écritures*, in which he argued for verbal, plenary inspiration and biblical inerrancy.¹⁰¹ In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, B. B. Warfield wrote extensively on issues related to the nature and inerrancy of Scripture, treating it from exegetical, historical and systematic/philosophical perspectives.¹⁰² Similarly, the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy, formed in 1977, held conferences and published five volumes on biblical inerrancy from multiple perspectives.¹⁰³ Most of the modern debate regarding inerrancy has taken place in the English-, German-

98 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 164–229, and also 8–43. He summarizes the view of some 19th-century Roman Catholic thinkers as follows: 'The Bible, though totally inspired, is not necessarily totally inerrant. The writers are concerned, indeed unequipped, to teach matters that do not touch on religion. And even when religion is in question, the faith portrayed is in a primitive, undeveloped state' (*Catholic Theories*, 216).

99 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 229.

100 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 2.

101 The second edition, published in 1841 and translated into English, is better known. See Louis Gaussen, *Theopneustia. The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1841), 29–30, 36–37.

102 See his collected works on the topic in *Inspiration and Authority*.

103 Norman Geisler (ed.), *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); Geisler, *Biblical Errancy*; Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (eds.), *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); John Hannah (ed.), *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus (eds.), *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

and French-speaking worlds, but recently the debate has been introduced into the Spanish-speaking world as well.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Biblical inspiration

For most of church history, the church has tended towards a divine dictation theory of inspiration, according to which God was the only real author of Scripture, with humans remaining mainly or entirely passive in the process. However, as early as the patristic period, one also finds evidence of the concursive theory of inspiration, in which both human and divine agencies were active. These views are not mutually exclusive, as Augustine's own testimony has illustrated: God could use human writers' personality, experiences and memory to communicate a message that ultimately came from God. Working out the mechanics of inspiration has plagued the church for centuries, and thus figures such as B. B. Warfield have preferred to shift the focus of inspiration away from its process and towards its result, contending that however Scripture may have been inspired, the resulting product reflects God's very words.

Biblical authority

Arguably the majority position throughout church history, which has been embraced energetically by Protestants, has seen Scripture as holding unique authority in the church but has also accepted other authorities such as tradition, bishops, creeds and councils. Arguably the minority position, taken up by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, has viewed Scripture and tradition as equally authoritative. As Protestants, we believe that we have recovered the scriptural and patristic position of submitting all other authorities to Scripture, which is the only 'God-exhaled' teaching we have (2 Tim 3:16; cf. 2 Pet 1:19–21).

Given the balance between Scripture and other sources of authority through church history, it is troubling to see in much of the evangelical community a nearly complete disregard for church tradition. For all the good done by the 19th-century restorationist movements, they have also often had the disastrous effect of separating modern evangelicalism from historic Christianity. Is it any wonder that so many denominations and cults can trace their roots back to 19th-century America, where it became common to read and interpret the Bible in *solo* or *nuda Scriptura* fashion? The 19th-century slogan 'No creed but the Bible' has never reflected traditional Christian theology and ought to be abandoned.

104 Along with a few other Spanish-language works which contain sections or chapters on inerrancy, Messmer and Hutter, *La inerrancia bíblica*, have addressed inerrancy from systematic, exegetical and historical perspectives.

Biblical inerrancy

Despite the oft-repeated accusation that inerrancy is a 19th- and 20th-century American phenomenon,¹⁰⁵ the first time when inerrancy was seriously questioned within the church was in 19th-century Germany. Thus, if there is any ignorance over the historical development of the doctrine of inerrancy, it is on the part of the liberals, not the inerrantists. As Origen and Augustine demonstrated, inerrancy is a limited idea that allows for diverse hermeneutical approaches. Therefore, the fundamental affirmation—that Scripture does not assert any falsehood—should be maintained today. Of course, there are difficulties to overcome—most notably the relationship between Scripture on one hand and science and history on the other—but there have always been difficulties to overcome in the church's articulation of biblical inerrancy, and our age is no different.

105 For example, see N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 183; Carlos Bovell, 'Editor's Preface', in Bovell (ed.), *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Authority of Scripture: Historical, Biblical, and Theoretical Perspectives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), xxi; Stephen Dawes, 'But Jesus Believed That David Wrote the Psalms ...' in Bovell, *Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 179–80.

The Relation between Biblical Law and Christian Faith

Glenn N. Davies

This article masterfully, through parallel sections with ample scriptural support, depicts the continuity of God's dealing with humanity across both Old Testament and New Testament times with regard to law, grace and obedience.

The covenant dynamic of the Old and New Testaments is the interaction between grace and response. God is the giver of grace, which he lavishly pours forth upon his people, and he delights in their response of obedience. This characteristic dynamic is present in each of the covenants of the Old Testament as well as in the promised new covenant, which unfolds in the New Testament.

The two parts of the Bible would have been better called the Old Covenant and New Covenant, rather than using 'testament' to translate *berît* or *diathêkê*. However, the most important thing to understand is the continuity between the covenants with respect to God's dealings with humankind, notwithstanding the discontinuity or, more properly, the fulfilment of the old in the new. In particular, we should recognize the similarity in the response to God's grace under either the old or the new covenant: it should always be characterized by a faith which issues in obedience or, as Paul describes it, the obedience of faith (Rom 1:5; 16:26).¹ This article will explore the content of that obedience for the Christian—the place of the Decalogue in the Christian life.

Old covenant law

The Ten Commandments evidence the nature of the grace-response dynamic. The obedience required of Israel in the Decalogue is an obedience which flows from God's grace. Hence, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage' (Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6) is the necessary preamble to the giving of God's law. Israel had seen the goodness of the Lord in their departure from Egypt and redemption from slavery, and the response God required of them was to trust and obey him.

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¹ In this phrase, 'of faith' is rightly translated as a genitive of origin, as per the translation by the NIV: 'the obedience that comes from faith'.

As they stood on the banks of the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's army behind them, Israel had to trust God's word, delivered through Moses, so that the salvation of the Lord would be manifested (Ex 14:13). Yet to display trust in God, as the waters divided, they had to walk through it themselves. God did not transport them across the sea or provide a traveller, with no effort or activity on their behalf. Rather, they had to respond by getting up and walking across. This was their obedience of faith. Yet such obedience could never be seen as the ground of their salvation, but merely as the means of the salvation which God alone had provided.

In God's infinite wisdom, he ordains not only the act of salvation, but also the means. Israel's journey across the Red Sea is exemplary of the life of faith, a faith that issues in obedience. The Ten Commandments thereby became the blueprint for Israel's obedience both in the wilderness and in the Promised Land.

However, it is not as if the knowledge of these commandments was new to Israel. Moses' narrative throughout the Pentateuch bears witness to infractions of each of these commandments prior to Mount Sinai, with the attendant disapproval of God. The first commandment was broken by Adam and Eve, the tenth and sixth by Cain, and the fourth was violated by the Israelites in the wilderness en route to Sinai (Exodus 16:26ff). Shem and Japheth knew to honour their father, Reuben knew the sin of false witness, and Joseph knew adultery was wrong. Indeed, God describes Abraham as one who 'obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my law' (Gen 26:5).

Therefore, one might ask: what is the significance of God's promulgation of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, if these laws were already known? The answer the Bible supplies is that the law of God is here given to Israel with the attendant penalties attached for breaking God's law. For this reason, the apodictic laws of Exodus 20 are followed by the casuistic or case law of the following chapters, where Moses outlines which penalties apply to specific breaches of God's law. Prior to Mount Sinai, the penalty for law-breaking had not generally been revealed. The declaration of the death penalty for murder, as recorded in Genesis 9:6, is an exception, but the death penalty was not applied to Cain's murder of Abel.

This is no doubt the reasoning of the apostle Paul in Romans 5:12–15.²

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

Paul identifies the similarity between the law given to Adam and the law given to Moses, along with the dissimilarity of sins committed between the time of Adam and Moses. In the latter case, sins were 'not counted', not being like the sin of Adam. The law given to Adam came with its own sanction, namely, the penalty of death should he eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Similarly, there was an array of penalties for the breaking of the Mosaic law, with capital punishment being the overriding sanction. Yet, says Paul, death reigned from Adam to Moses, because of the culpability of humanity's participation in Adam's sin. This teaching

2 All quotations are from the ESV, unless otherwise specified.

is amplified later in Romans 5 as Paul exclaims that ‘one trespass led to condemnation for all people, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all people’ (5:18).

An illustration of the lack of knowledge as to the penalty for breaking God’s laws may be found in Numbers 15:32ff. The event recorded there is most likely prior to Mount Sinai, as the penalty for Sabbath-breaking was not revealed until after Moses had descended from the mountain (Ex 31:12–14). Thus, before Moses could deal with the offender, God needed to tell him the specific sanction for Sabbath-breaking, as the penalty had not previously been disclosed (Num 15:34).

The association of the Mosaic law with the penalty of death enables Paul to describe it as ‘the ministry of death, carved in letters of stone’ (2 Cor 3:7). However, in the same verse, Paul can also claim that it came ‘with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory’. In other words, we should not lose sight of the glory of God’s law as given to Moses, even though it brought a sentence of death upon those who broke it. Yet the law promised life (Lev 18:5; Neh 9:29) and so could be described as ‘living oracles’ (Acts 7:38), ‘spiritual’,³ ‘holy and just and good’ (Rom 7:12, 14). In fact, the law of God is full of grace—‘more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb’ (Ps 19:10).

Old covenant grace

Central to the nature of the Mosaic law is the sacrificial system. This is where God’s grace was manifested in the life of Israel. For God in his wisdom knew that sin was a present reality in the life of his righteous people (Eccl 7:20), indeed, a reality for every human being (Ps 143:2). Hence, the provision of forgiveness by way of animal sacrifice is a necessary part of the Mosaic law. The law never envisaged sinless, perfect observance by Israel. On the contrary, *the law presupposes sin*. For the offering of sacrifices is part and parcel of keeping the law. If people thought they had not committed sin and so declined to offer a sacrifice, then they would be breaking the law (since offering sacrifices was mandatory), and would therefore be bound to seek forgiveness by offering a sacrifice!

When the priest offered a sacrifice on behalf of an Israelite, the forgiveness was real and immediate, as the oft-repeated refrain in Leviticus 4–5 testifies: ‘The priest shall make atonement for him for the sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.’ Likewise, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would offer sacrifices for his own sins and then for the sins of the people: ‘For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the Lord from all your sins’ (Lev 16:30).

Of course, the offering of sacrifices was in response to the offender’s repentance. The only sin that could not be forgiven was ‘sinning with a high hand’ (Num 15:30), or ‘sinning defiantly’ (NIV), i.e. a sin without repentance. The writer to the Hebrews warns his readers that even under the new covenant, defiant sin without repentance

3 Paul characteristically uses *pneumatikos* as a reference to the Holy Spirit, except in Ephesians 6:12, where the context demands otherwise. See R. B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

cannot receive forgiveness, but merely a fearful prospect of judgment (Heb 10:27). God does not forgive sin where there is no repentance (Heb 12:17).

Yet forgiveness, like salvation, is all of grace. The faith exercised by repentant Israelites in offering a sacrifice is their response to God's grace, his promise of forgiveness. As this dynamic is reflected in the lives of individual Israelites, it is also the underlying contour of Israel's entry into the Promised Land. Their inheritance of the land of Canaan is not the result of their achievement but is due to God's grace. Hence, in Deuteronomy 9:4–5 Moses warns the Israelites against the folly of presumption.

Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land', whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Nonetheless, Israel still has to enter into battle. In fact, their victory over Amalek (Ex 17:8–16) dramatically portrays their dependence upon God for the victory, as Israel prevails only when Moses' hands are lifted in prayerful dependence upon God. When Moses' hands weaken, Amalek prevails. Yet when Aaron and Hur hold up Moses' hands, we see the symbolism of all Israel trusting in God, which gives them the victory. Accordingly, Moses builds an altar and names it 'The LORD is my banner', saying, 'A hand upon the throne of the LORD'. 'Doing' is not antithetical to grace, as James emphatically teaches: 'faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead' (Jam 2:17).⁴

Old covenant obedience

Israel's obedience to the Mosaic law, generated by faith and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit,⁵ was a genuine possibility, which the elect accomplished, though the majority of Israelites failed to achieve it (Rom 11:7). Stephen, citing Exodus 33:3; Jeremiah 6:10 and 9:26, describes disobedient Israel (including his hearers) as 'a stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit ... you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it' (Acts 7:51, 53).

4 J. C. Ryle's comment on Luke 12:41–48 is worth noting. 'The lesson is one which many, unhappily, shrink from giving, and many more shrink from receiving. We are gravely told that to talk of "working" and "doing" is legal, and brings Christians into bondage! Remarks of this kind should never move us. They savour of ignorance or perverseness. The lesson before us is not about justification, but about sanctification—not about faith, but about holiness; the point is not *what a man should do to be saved*, but *what ought a saved man to do*. The teaching of Scripture is clear and express on this subject. A saved man ought to be "careful to maintain good works" (Tit. 3:8). The desire of a true Christian ought to be, to be found "doing"'. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Luke*, vol. 2 (Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co., 1969), 90.

5 The circumcision of the heart is the usual description of a regenerate heart in the Old Testament. See G. N. Davies, 'The Spirit of Regeneration in the Old Testament', in *Spirit of the Living God*, part 1, ed. B. G. Webb (Homebush West, NSW, Australia: Lancer, 1991), 23–43.

Christian commentators often overlook the fact that whereas most Israelites were breakers of God's law (Rom 2:23), it *was* possible to keep God's law (Rom 2:26). Yet one can understand this only in the light of the law's provision for forgiveness through sacrifice, as the gift of grace. Hence, in Deuteronomy 30:11–14, Moses encourages Israel to keep God's law, by which they shall live (see also Lev 18:5):

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. (NIV)

The apostle Paul recognizes that such intended obedience to the law of Moses was possible only by faith (Rom 10:6).⁶ Just as Abraham obeyed all the ordinances of the (pre-Sinai) law by faith (Gen 15:6; 26:5), so did David, as he testifies in Psalm 18:20–24 (NIV).

The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.
For I have kept the ways of the Lord;
I am not guilty of turning from my God.
All his laws are before me;
I have not turned away from his decrees.
I have been blameless before him
and have kept myself from sin.
The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

Many readers find such claims by David to be questionable, if not outrageous, given his adultery with Bathsheba and other sins recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel. Yet despite David's clear violation of God's law, God in his mercy had forgiven David, notwithstanding the fact that his sin deserved death (Lev 20:10). For David repented of his sin (Ps 51) and sought the Lord for mercy. In Psalm 18, David does not claim that he deserves God's mercy, for he is aware of his own frailty and his need of a Saviour (vv. 2–3, 35, 46) as he is aware of the promises of God to all who take refuge in him (v. 30). However, he is also aware of the need to manifest the obedience that comes from faith.

When he introduces the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Luke is equally aware of the importance of obedience in relation to God's covenant promises. As a priest, Zechariah knew the significance and value of Levitical sacrifices, just as he also knew the importance of acting in obedience to God's law.

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. (Lk 1:5–6, NIV)

⁶ For an explanation of Romans 9:30–10:13, see G. N. Davies, *The Obedience of Faith: A Study in Romans 1–4* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 177–204.

The importance of this description of two Old Testament saints should not be underestimated. They were righteous in the sight of God (echoing Genesis 15:6) but also obedient to the Mosaic law—observing *all* the Lord's commands. Neither of them was sinless, but each of them was blameless, because the guilt of their sin had been removed through the appointed sacrifices. They were blessed in their obedience, like David, with the declaration of Psalm 32:1–2, that the Lord had forgiven their transgressions and covered their sins.⁷

Faithful Israelites kept God's law as their response to his grace. They understood that the essence of grace was God's love towards them (Deut 7:8), just as the essence of their response was love of God (Deut 6:4–6) and love of their neighbour (Lev 19:18). It is therefore not surprising that Jesus should declare that all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments of love (Mt 22:37–40).

New covenant law

The parting words of Jesus to his disciples constitute what has become known as the Great Commission, calling for the making of disciples through the waters of baptism in the triune name and teaching those followers to obey all that Jesus had commanded. This demand of discipleship in terms of obedience to the Lord Jesus is echoed in our Saviour's words to his apostles in the upper room: 'If you love me, keep my commandments' (Jn 14:15). Just as the commandment to love God was central to the old covenant, so it is with the new covenant. Love and obedience hang together; Jesus abides in the Father's love by keeping the Father's commandments. Accordingly, Jesus declares, 'If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love' (Jn 15:10). Moreover, the converse is true; if anyone does not love Jesus, they will not obey his teaching:

Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. (Jn 14:23–24, NIV)

However, although Jesus could summarize the Law by the two great commandments of loving God and loving one's neighbour, we must not assume that this love is devoid of objective content or that it amounts simply to what one feels to be right. On the contrary, Jesus did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil them (Mt 5:18–19).

Similarly, in Jesus' revelation to John, he encourages his readers with these telling words: 'Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus' (Rev 14:12).

7 'The necessity of obedience to God's commands, as the expression of faith in God's promises, is therefore not works righteousness, since both the promises of God and the power to trust them are gifts of God's unmerited, saving grace. God gives what he demands, and what he demands is the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).' Scott Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 139.

New covenant grace

Yet, just as grace was plentiful under the old covenant, grace overflowed under the new covenant. In Jesus, we see the first and only sinless observer of God's law. His maturation as an adult in his humanity required leading a life of reverent submission to his Father. By so doing, he was perfected by his obedience to God's law: 'Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him' (Heb 5:8–9).

Note that those who are saved are those who obey. By Jesus' obedience unto death on a cross (Phil 2:8), he thereby 'destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim 1:10, NIV).

As we have seen in the promulgation of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, whereas the law was graciously given to Israel as their means of responding to God's grace, at the same time the law brought condemnation to those who disobeyed. Strictly speaking, this condemnation rested upon all Israel, including Moses, but in God's mercy provision was made for forgiveness within the very structure of the law, enabling sinful Israelites to be forgiven. As the writer to the Hebrews acknowledges, 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins' (Heb 9:22). However, he is also aware that 'it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Heb 10:4). For 'the law was but a shadow of the good things to come' (Heb 10:1). The shadow, of course, is removed by Christ through his sinless obedience to the law, as well as taking upon himself the law's punishment, which belonged to God's people. As Paul puts it, 'For our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21).

In other words, the condemnation of the law is removed for those who are in Christ, because Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1–2). Paul does not say that Christ has set us free from the ethical demands of the law, but that he has set us free from its condemnation. As Luke records Paul's words to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch:

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38–39)

The law of Moses could not ultimately free Israel from judgment, as the sacrifices were not effective in themselves but only inasmuch as they prefigured the salvation that was to be procured by Christ's sacrifice:

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. (Heb 9:15)

Paul expresses a similar thought in Romans 3:25–26, where he defends God's righteousness in passing over former sins, committed under the Mosaic covenant, because God has definitively dealt with sin, once and for all, through the sacrifice of Christ. In other words, Christ's sacrifice is retrospective as well prospective for God's people throughout redemptive history.

New covenant obedience

In Romans 6, Paul is at pains to counter misunderstandings about God's grace that could encourage believers to sin more, so 'that grace may abound' (6:1). Similarly, his dictum that we 'are not under law but under grace' in Romans 6:15 is often misunderstood today by those who conclude that keeping God's law is no longer required of the Christian. Yet the next verse speaks of our slavery to Christ, which comprises an obedience that leads to righteousness (6:16). Paul thereby encourages his Roman readers to realize that God has made them 'obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which they were committed' (6:17). Moreover, in the following chapter, whatever position one takes on the identity of the man of Romans 7, Paul clearly indicates that obedience to the law of God is still the goal, for the law is spiritual; indeed he 'delights in the law of God' (7:22), despite his natural inability to keep it.

Paul's statement that we are not under law but under grace is a shorthand way of saying that we no longer live under the judgement of the law (a ministry of death) but under the reign of grace, whereby Christ has taken the penalty of law-breaking upon himself for us. This is the burden of Romans 8:1: 'There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' For 'the just requirement of the law has been fulfilled in us' (8:4).⁸

Paul eloquently reminds Timothy of the removal of judgement for the believer, while highlighting the stark reality that the condemnation of the law continues to fall upon the unbeliever:

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practise homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. (1 Tim 1:8–11)

At first sight, Paul's words appear problematic. He seems to be suggesting that the law has no application to the just (i.e. the righteous), but only to the ungodly and sinners. Yet the words 'not laid down' are significant for understanding Paul's meaning.⁹ The use of *keitai* in this context suggests that the laying down of the penalty of the law is in view. The full force of the law's judgement is laid upon the ungodly, the law-breakers. For Paul prefaces his remarks by saying that 'the law is good if used lawfully (*nomimōs*)'—that is, in the way it was intended, to provide the right response to God's grace. For Timothy and the saints at Ephesus, the law continues to provide guidelines for their behaviour. Yet the law's condemnation

8 The Greek word *dikaiōma* is in the singular, as it is in 1:32, where the death penalty is in view. Its appearance in the plural, however, can refer to the precepts of the law as in 2:26, which has caused some commentators to assume that 8:4 is a reference to the fulfilment of the precepts of the law, whereas the context and the grammar indicate the fulfilment of the judgement of death that Christ has undertaken on our behalf. While both the NIV and ESV rightly translate *dikaiōma* as 'righteous decree' in 1:32, they unhelpfully translate it as 'righteous requirement' in 8:4.

9 The NIV's translation of *keitai* as 'made' is inadequate, if not misleading.

does not fall upon the righteous, those who by faith are declared righteous in God's sight, because the judgement that would have belonged to them has been satisfied by the death of Christ. Christians no longer live under the law but under grace. However, the judgement of the law does fall on those who persist in unbelief and disobedience—for them there is no sacrifice for sins.¹⁰

Moreover, in his exhortation to Timothy, Paul refers to specific commandments from the Decalogue that apply to the believer, as he does in Romans 14:8–10. Although in the latter passage Paul declares that the demands of love sum up these commandments, he does not thereby mean to say that the commandments no longer have any applicability. Rather, these commands are 'sound doctrine' and 'in accordance with the gospel' which was entrusted to Paul (1 Tim 1:11).

Application of God's law under the new covenant

When the prophets foretold the new covenant, they included obedience to the law as part of God's new economy. In Jeremiah 31:33ff, the prophet speaks of God writing his law on the hearts of his people. Isaiah 42:4, referring to the ministry of the Servant of the Lord, states, 'He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.'

Similarly, in Ezekiel 11:19–20, the prophet reinforces the importance of following God's laws:

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. (NIV)

Yet, since the new covenant envisages an international community, not the theocracy of a nation-state, clearly law under the new covenant must be seen through the prism of Christ. This is the perspective of Paul's description of the 'law of Christ' (Gal 6:2), or in James' words 'the perfect law, the law of liberty' (Jam 1:25) or fulfilling 'the royal law' (Jam 2:8, where he cites Leviticus 19:18). For example, the food laws of the Old Testament no longer apply under the new covenant (Mk 6:19), nor does the requirement of circumcision. Yet the fact that we are still required to keep God's laws, without being subject to the whole Mosaic economy, is expressed clearly by Paul: 'For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God' (1 Cor 7:19).

The irony of this statement is that circumcision was a command of God, yet Paul exhorts his readers (some of them uncircumcised) to keep the commandments of God. How then should we understand which commands to keep? The Reformers faced this question in the 16th century. The Church of England therefore adopted Article VII of the Thirty-nine Articles as a solution to the problem:

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory

¹⁰ If the warning of Hebrews 10:26 applies to those who sin deliberately after receiving knowledge of the truth, how much more does it apply to those who willfully ignore the truth?

promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.¹¹

The recitation of the Ten Commandments in the Administration of the Lord's Supper in the *Book of Common Prayer* demonstrates the continuing application of the Decalogue in the life of the believer. After each commandment is read, the congregation responds, 'Incline our hearts to keep this law.'

Such a response is worthy of all God's people, not just Anglicans, as the words of the psalmist indicate:

If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have given me life. (Ps 119:92–93)

11 The Church of Scotland, on the other hand, adopted Chapter 19 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which declares a similar distinction between the moral law, as expressed in the Ten Commandments, and the ceremonial and judicial laws of Israel.

Christians in Cuba: Dealing with Subtle Forms of Repression

Dennis P. Petri

The restrictions on religious freedom imposed by the Cuban state—a direct consequence of the authoritarian nature of the regime and its atheist and anti-religious ideology—are well-known. Much less understood is the subtle nature of the vulnerability of Christians, especially after the changes that have occurred since the 1990s. This article examines their situation in depth.

Cuba is one of the most sensitive countries in the world with regard to religious freedom. Christian churches appear to exist openly, but their operations are limited, and internal or external efforts to advocate for greater freedom can prove counterproductive.

In this article, drawn from my dissertation,¹ I describe the situation faced by Christians in Cuba, including the various factors that limit their activities. As my dissertation relied mainly on fieldwork conducted in 2016 and 2017, I have added recent information that takes into account the rare protests that have occurred in Cuba during the past year. A careful consideration of the religious freedom context in Cuba can also help to guide our actions with regard to other countries where similar regimes offer some level of tolerance of religion, such as China and Vietnam.

How Cuba regulates religion

According to the World Christian Database, as of 2020 Cuba's population was 61.7 percent Christian, the lowest percentage in all of Latin America.² This relatively low percentage of Christians is generally considered a direct result of the militant atheist policies in the early days following Cuba's communist revolution, which aimed to eradicate religion.³

Evangelistic activity and religious forms of civic participation are quite limited in Cuba, because, to a large extent, they are restricted by law. In view of the

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1 Dennis P. Petri, 'The Specific Vulnerability of Religious Minorities' (PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2020).

2 Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020).

3 Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013); Jonathan Fox, *The Unfree Exercise of Religion: A World Survey of Religious Discrimination against Religious Minorities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

restrictions on freedom of expression, simply by joining a religious group Cubans make an implicit political statement against the regime, because it is one of the few opportunities for them to express anything.⁴

Religious identity and the least active forms of religious behaviour are not a direct cause of vulnerability for most Christians. Religious affiliation used to be a problem during the early days of the communist regime, but this is no longer the case, especially since the religious policy changes of 1991 (described below). However, the more active Christians are in terms of visible social behaviour, the greater their vulnerability.

There has also been a noteworthy difference between the Cuban government's approach to Catholics and Protestants. Cuba has engaged in some outright persecution of Catholics, the largest Christian group, whereas the strategy towards the much smaller Protestant community has focused on restrictions, co-optation and divide-and-rule.⁵ Catholic baptisms were forbidden for years, training seminaries were closed and buildings were confiscated. Attendance at mass is quite low.

As for Protestants, denominations registered before 1959 are tolerated, but no new denominations have been allowed to register since then. Moreover, only church buildings that existed before 1959 are permitted. Except for one Russian Orthodox church in 2008 and a 'show' church in the tourist area of Varadero, no new church buildings have been constructed.

To circumvent these restrictions, both registered and independent Protestants experiencing growth in membership began meeting as house churches. According to various Cuban church leaders I interviewed, independent denominations now constitute two-thirds of Cuba's Protestant population.

Registered denominations can function in relative openness but are closely supervised and face some restrictions. Independent denominations are technically illegal and face tighter restrictions and monitoring, although they are not required to submit reports on their activities as the registered denominations do. House churches are technically illegal and always at risk of being shut down, especially if they grow, spread messages perceived as subversive, or get into conflicts with neighbours.⁶ If they manage to avoid attracting attention and stay under the radar, which is very difficult because informants are everywhere, this risk can be mitigated.

The Cuban regime has also implemented a co-optation strategy towards Protestants by inviting them to join the Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba (CIC, Spanish for Cuban Council of Churches), a state-controlled body similar to the Three-Self Church in China. CIC membership brings such benefits as access to foreign donations, use of seminary facilities, and the right to import religious literature and travel abroad, in exchange for tight internal surveillance and unconditional support

4 Jill Goldenziel, 'Sanctioning Faith: Religion, State, and U.S.-Cuban Relations', *Journal of Law & Politics* 25 (2009): 195.

5 Goldenziel, 'Sanctioning Faith', 179-210.

6 Lena López, 'Cuba: Draconian New Restrictions on "Home Religious Meetings"', *Forum* 18 (2005), <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454dpp1>; Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 147.

for the regime.⁷ Of Cuba's 35 registered denominations, 22 are full CIC members. Despite of its lack of representativeness, the Cuban government treats the CIC as the only voice of Protestant Christianity in Cuba.

Overall, then, Christianity in Cuba can be divided into five categories: Catholics, registered Protestant denominations (subdivided into CIC members and non-members), unregistered denominations and house churches. I consider house churches a separate category because of their unique status, although house churches can be found within both registered and unregistered denominations.

The Cuban regime perceives religious groups as an ideological threat because of their transnational networks, resources and opposition to communism.⁸ In 1961, the new Cuban government declared itself officially atheist and implemented a militantly anti-religious policy.⁹ Article 54 of the 1975 Constitution made it illegal to oppose the revolution on religious grounds. Some opening up occurred around the time when Soviet communism collapsed; in 1992, the Constitution was amended to eliminate discrimination against religion, and various restrictions have been relaxed since then, such as permitting religious groups to provide prison chaplains and conduct some charitable initiatives. In the last 30 years, restriction of religious practice seems to have happened more through 'bureaucratic discouragement' as 'the government continued to try to control local congregations through recourse to legal technicalities.'¹⁰

Collecting information

Obtaining information about religious practice in Cuba is not easy. I did not want to put myself or (especially) my informants at any risk.

I began actively monitoring the situation in Cuba in 2011, and in 2015 an international organization asked me to investigate whether it should resume operations in the country. I was later asked to set up renewed operations, which I managed until the end of 2017.

During two field trips to Cuba in March 2015 and February 2016, I conducted about 40 interviews with Cuban church leaders and members. I introduced myself as a tourist from Holland who was interested in meeting Cuban Christians, a cover I tried to maintain throughout the research, but I was always open about my desire to understand the religious freedom situation.

I also had the opportunity to meet with a number of Cuban church leaders outside Cuba during training conferences I organized in 2016 and 2017. Furthermore, in January 2017 I attended a consultation of representatives of some 20 faith-based organizations working in Cuba. I decided not to return to Cuba after 2016 because the interviews I had granted to various news services and the testimony

7 Goldenziel, 'Sanctioning Faith', 187–91.

8 Goldenziel, 'Sanctioning Faith', 184; Fox, *Political Secularism*, 125; Karrie J. Koesel, *Religion and Authoritarianism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3.

9 John M. Kirk, *Between God and the Party: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Cuba* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1989).

10 Geraldine Lievesley, *The Cuban Revolution: Past, Present and Future Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 179.

I delivered at a U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing in September 2015 could have made me identifiable to the regime.

Cuban society is characterized by an advanced degree of suspicion and secrecy, which is the result of decades of communism, under which anyone might be an informant of the regime. Thus, I could never be completely sure that my interviewees were telling the truth or not withholding information. As one interviewee confided, 'Nobody in Cuba tells you everything.'

Types of threats

My research identified 10 types of threats that Christians face in Cuba. Each of these is discussed below.

Conversion from the Communist Party

If an active member of the Communist Party decides to join a church, the consequences for that individual and family members can be severe, including loss of employment. Since 1991, party members can have a religious affiliation, but conversion is still discouraged and can result in various discriminatory measures.

In various interviews, I was told that a growing number of Communist officials have affiliated with churches, but that Christians often respond to former Communist Party members seeking to join their church with suspicion, because they are accustomed to people portraying themselves as earnest believers who have renounced Marxist and atheist ideology but who are in fact acting as informants for the regime.

A 2015 article in a Protestant magazine for Hispanic residents in the United States told the story of Jorge Luis Pantoja, a Cuban secret agent who was trained to infiltrate a Baptist church and become a youth leader and pastor. Pantoja stated that after years of working as a spy, he experienced a genuine conversion. He explained his plight: 'I could not tell anyone about [my conversion] because I took a military oath, and this would be considered as treason of the fatherland. My only option was to speak with God daily asking for direction. As a young person I was afraid of what could happen to me because I started to learn how low and dirty this regime really was.' Pantoja remained silent about his newfound faith for several years until 1995, when he sought political asylum in the United States.¹¹

State surveillance

State surveillance, both physical and digital (the state is the only Internet provider in Cuba), is present in all spheres of life. There is systematic monitoring of church services and sermons, as well as widespread monitoring of other areas of society. By international standards, this surveillance is a human rights violation. Surveillance also encompasses all written and electronic communications by church leaders and other influential persons.

One pastor told me, 'We know that there are always informants listening to our sermons. That is why we are always very careful and refrain from making any comments that could disturb the communists.' Another pastor said, 'As long as we

11 'De agente secreto a siervo de Dios', *Cristianismo Hispano Hoy*, January 2015.

stick to religious themes, we have nothing to fear, but when we discuss social issues, there are always informants.' And one interviewee offered the comforting assurance, 'They [the state security] already know you're here, meeting with me.'

The Cuban ministers whom I interviewed exhibited a certain acceptance of the surveillance, presumably because they are simply so accustomed to it that they do not question it.

The only people who seem bothered by the permanent surveillance are foreign ministers working in Cuba and Cubans living outside Cuba. However, it has a paralysing effect on the work of Christian ministers, effectively reducing their freedom to speak freely or undertake any initiative the authorities might not appreciate. Crossing the line can lead to interrogations at the police station or the party bureau, occasional physical harassment or fabricated charges as discussed below.

Since 2020, measures adopted by the government to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, under the guise of epidemiological surveillance to guarantee compliance with prevention measures, have been arbitrarily applied to monitor activities inside religious temples and scrutinize the content of sermons.¹²

Discrimination by the authorities

'You'd be stupid to put your religion on a job application. ... It would go straight in the bin', said one Cuban schoolteacher.¹³ The existence of such discrimination is so normal for most Christians that they rarely complain about it.

Christians occasionally experience discrimination in the form of exclusion from access to basic social services and food rations, or when they apply for various permits. Some churches seem to have better relationships with the authorities than others, suggesting that it is possible to mitigate some threats through personal advocacy. However, the unpredictable and arbitrary implementation of these restrictions causes considerable stress.

One pastor whose daughter was not accepted into a university told me, 'I suspect this happened to punish me because my church has been very successful in converting people to the Gospel.' Discrimination also exists in public employment (private employment does not technically exist in Cuba). A young engineer said he would have faced challenges in his job at a public company due to being the son of a pastor if he had not developed a good relationship with his boss.

Restriction of educational activities

Under the anti-religious interpretation of communist ideology, education is an exclusive prerogative of the state.¹⁴ Therefore, families, private schools and religious institutions are not entitled to engage in any form of educational activities. Non-compliance with the education policy occasionally leads to human rights violations.

12 Teresa Flores and Rossana Muga, 'Vulnerabilidad de las comunidades religiosas en América Latina en el contexto del COVID-19', *Religiones Latinoamericanas*, new series 6, no. 2 (2020): 137–72.

13 'Religion in Cuba: Chango Unchained', *The Economist*, 18 April 2015.

14 Ani Sarkissian, *The Varieties of Religious Repression: Why Governments Restrict Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

One pastor and his wife refused to send their children to a public school, 'arguing that the state system emphasises a Marxist-Leninist atheist ideology that goes against their beliefs. They also [said] their children were bullied at school.'¹⁵ The couple was arrested, and after a quick trial, the pastor was condemned to a one-year prison sentence and his wife to house arrest. In addition, the pastor was required to cease his work as a church leader. After international advocacy efforts, the sentences were reduced and the pastor was allowed to resume his religious work.¹⁶

In the church sphere, there is slightly more room for educational activities. 'The state is particularly jealous about the influence of churches on young people', a pastor explained. 'As churches, we can develop educational programs, but they must be small-scale, so we do not attract attention.' Catechetical teaching must be done cautiously, avoiding large gatherings of youths and the teaching of any topic that could be labelled as subversive. Similarly, various Christian denominations organize summer camps for youths, which are tolerated if conducted quietly.

Various pastors expressed their sense that their denominations have failed to educate their congregations in essential ways. This situation is a direct result of the prevailing communist policy. One interviewee stated, 'We always assumed that we as church leaders needed to stay out of education because this is the role of the state, but we are starting to realize now that this was a mistake.'

In higher education, religious education is possible, but only by government-approved seminaries of registered denominations, which are always under intense scrutiny. Curricula and literature must formally be approved by the CIC (and informally by the Communist Party). Topics related to any form of social or political engagement of Christians are to be avoided at all times.

In the family sphere, Christian parents try to educate their children in the Christian faith, but the educational role of parents is not fully respected. As one pastor declared, 'Schoolteachers pit children against their parents by saying things like "don't believe what your parents tell you, they're wrong."'

Restrictions pertaining to freedom of worship

My fieldwork indicated that the severity of restrictions on freedom of worship in Cuba depends on many factors, including the type of denomination and the extent to which a particular individual or group is viewed as a threat to the regime. As noted, house churches are always at risk. In one extreme case, a house church building was bulldozed and its members detained by the police.¹⁷ In this case, the pastor had repeatedly made statements criticizing the regime, and his church had experienced rapid growth and was part of an unregistered denomination. A total of 20 closed, confiscated or destroyed churches were verified by the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (www.violentincidents.com) between 2011 and 2021.

15 'Cuba: Pastor Returns to Work after Arrest for Home-Schooling', *World Watch Monitor*, 18 August 2017.

16 'Pastor Barred from Working as Church Leader', *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, 4 August 2017.

17 'Church Destroyed and 200 Members Detained in Cuba', *Christian Today*, 9 February 2016.

More common practices include intimidation, bureaucratic discouragement and discrimination. For example, Cuban ministers who travel abroad to international conferences are systematically questioned before and after their trips. Importing of Christian materials must be channelled through the CIC and is subject to censorship, as I confirmed on my visits to the printing presses and libraries of various Cuban denominations. Sometimes the state intervenes in the designation of denominational leaders, and it ensures that the president of the CIC is always favourable to the regime. Registered denominations can have a bank account, but the number of transactions per month is limited.

Generally, many aspects of freedom of worship are officially tolerated but typically hindered through bureaucratic processes, leading to frustration and a permanent feeling of obstruction. 'The permanent obstruction is a strategy of the government. Only the most determined people actually manage to get things done', one interviewee stated.

Christians are rarely directly accused of violating religious policy. Rather, when the authorities want to hinder a particular individual or church, they tend to fabricate charges unrelated to religion. One such strategy is to accuse someone of buying on the black market. This is a very convenient tool, because virtually everyone in Cuba buys on the black market as many supplies are simply unavailable in the formal economy. Or a church may be charged with violating zoning regulations, which is very common in the case of house churches, whose formal designation is residential and not religious. The COVID-19 context has fuelled these incidents under the pretext of crimes such as 'transmission of the epidemic' or not complying with the required sanitary precautions during religious services.

Christians have learned to find ways to work within these restrictions. Developing personal relationships with the authorities has been a good strategy to mitigate risks, but when authorities change, the situation can turn unpredictable. 'If we are smart, we can enjoy some degree of freedom, but you need to know how the system works', said one pastor. There is no real legal security for churches in Cuba.

Restrictions on church growth

When churches grow in membership, integrating many new converts, they frequently experience more opposition. Their sheer growth is viewed as a threat by the state. On a few occasions, authorities have broken up the church. More often, other pretexts are found to intimidate the pastor or priest, cause the church to split up, or even fabricate scandals to discredit the minister. An older pastor explained, 'The communists don't like large gatherings of people. They simply cannot stand it that we [religious ministers] have such an influence in the community while the Communist Party is losing members.' Another interviewee reinforced this point: 'Vital religion and the communist ideology are incompatible. The sight of successful and growing churches is a sign to the world that communism failed.'

Prosecution of conscientious objectors

Conscientious objection is classically associated with both freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. Under the Cuban Constitution, refusal of military service is a punishable offence, regardless of the reason cited. However, in actual practice, the

authorities allow conscientious objectors to perform alternative service.¹⁸ The Cuban government, through its Permanent Mission to the UN office in Geneva, confirmed this in a letter to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Conscientious objection can become an issue in the field of education. Several ministers whom I interviewed complained about being pressured to publicly express their support of gay rights, which the Cuban government decided to embrace in 1986, after decades of persecution of sexual minorities.¹⁹ Refusal to support gay rights did not get them into trouble, but they did receive warnings that the situation could change in the future.

Restrictions on missionary activity

Legal restrictions on missionary activity have been applied to both Cuban nationals and foreign clergy or missionaries, who may be granted visas only under the condition that they refrain from proselytizing.²⁰

Cuba's policy regarding missionary activity is not unequivocal. Like other restrictions, these seemed to be tightest on the eastern side of the island and generally target fast-growing denominations not affiliated with the CIC.

During my visits to Cuba, I observed groups engaging in street evangelism, but one should not make too much of this observation. On one hand, I saw a very marginal group of social outcasts with little education, who gathered for religious services next to a garbage dump and were not restricted from doing street evangelism. I suspect that the authorities did not bother to intervene in the activities of such a marginal group. On the other hand, I received reports that better-organized groups belonging to larger denominations were denied permission for street evangelism.

I would theorize that the authorities prefer not to give the impression that religion is oppressed in Cuba, and therefore they restrict only the missionary work of groups they view as a threat, just as freedom of worship is not restricted but church growth is. By comparison, Afro-Cuban religion is now very visible on the streets of Havana and faces less restriction than Christianity. The Cuban government has become less hostile to Afro-Cuban religion in recent years, mainly because it is increasingly viewed as part of the Cuban national culture—whereas Christianity is viewed as imposed by Spanish colonizers and American imperialism—and because it has increasingly become an export product.²¹

Hindrance of charitable work

Beginning in 1991, religious groups were authorized to engage in some forms of charitable work. Many religious organizations took advantage of this opportunity.

18 US Department of State, *2017 Report on International Religious Freedom*, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454dpp2>.

19 'From Persecution to Acceptance? The History of LGBT Rights in Cuba', *Cutting Edge*, 24 October 2012.

20 Fox, *Political Secularism*, 193–94.

21 Ivor L. Miller, 'Religious Symbolism in Cuban Political Performance', *Drama Review* 44, no. 2 (2000): 30–55; Adrian H. Hearn, *Cuba: Religion, Social Capital, and Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

The largest charitable initiative in this field is the Cuban chapter of Caritas, which has operated legally in Cuba since 1991 under the umbrella of the Catholic Church.²² World Vision International entered Cuba in 2011.²³

However, religious groups must stay within the service boundaries defined by the government. Given its own limited capacity, the government is happy to have religious groups providing meals for elderly people and children with disabilities or conducting emergency relief programs. However, they cannot engage in any activities related to education, youth work or business development. Humanitarian work is always subject to strict monitoring. The state must always be given the credit, initiatives must not attract too much attention, and missionary activity must be avoided.

After Hurricanes Matthew and Nicole in September and October 2016 and Hurricane Irma in September 2017, in a display of inter-church solidarity, a coalition of churches loaded some trucks with food and supplies for those in need, but the authorities stopped these trucks, alleging that they lacked the proper permits. One interviewee involved in the humanitarian operation after Hurricane Irma said, 'The authorities told us there was no need for us to take humanitarian aid to the victims and that this is the responsibility of the state. They confiscated all the supplies to distribute it themselves.' To bring humanitarian aid to the victims, the group had to come up with alternative strategies, such as travelling by night and in smaller, less conspicuous vehicles.²⁴ Religious leaders who decided to provide and distribute aid to the neediest populations during the COVID-19 pandemic have been charged with contempt.

Restrictions also exist in the realm of business development initiatives, in which some churches engage to generate revenue for poor members, church operations, missionary work or their printing presses. Businesses that grow too visibly risk being closed. One interviewee recalled, 'My cousin started a small business, a restaurant, just around the corner. After three months it was shut down by the government. Why? Because it was too successful.' Microloan programs, for which foreign ministries often provide capital, are also threatened: 'The government says that churches should not give loans for businesses. They say that if someone needs credit, they can reach out to the public banks. But this is not true; they never give loans to small businesses.'

Intimidation of people engaging in human rights activism

Finally, anyone engaging in human rights activism or any public criticism of the Cuban regime risks severe consequences. This is by far the most intense threat Christians can face, although only a small minority of them take the risk.

Denominational leaders deliberately choose to avoid making political statements, mainly to avoid trouble. 'We just don't do this. It would make things worse for us', one denominational leader said. Another commented, 'In Cuba, if we

22 Goldenziel, 'Sanctioning Faith', 199.

23 'Trabajando por la niñez en Cuba', World Vision International, 3 September 2015.

24 'Cuban Government Is Blocking Religious Charities from Aiding Hurricane Irma Victims, Pastor Warns', *Christian Times*, 1 November 2017.

really want to promote social change, we should not do it through open criticism of the government. We need to be cautious, patient and strategic.’

Some individual Christians have actively engaged in political speech, resulting in grave repercussions. For example, pastor Mario Félix Leonart was strongly committed to ‘integral mission’, which emphasizes that Christianity should address the social, political, educational and political fields and should not be reduced to religious worship. His views led him to actively engage in social action—collaborating with human rights activists, publicly denouncing the regime on a blog, writing for various underground newspapers, organizing conferences and concerts, and participating in radio and television programmes outside Cuba. Barroso suffered severe human security threats, including intense surveillance, confiscation of personal belongings, numerous threats, beatings and imprisonments²⁵ before finally leaving Cuba. In another case, a university student who performed religious freedom advocacy work in the United States was harassed and eventually expelled from his university, based on the fabricated justification that he had accumulated too many absences.²⁶

Conclusions regarding threats to Christians in Cuba

One clear characteristic of the regulation of religion in present-day Cuba is that it rarely involves physical violence. Rather, it is mainly expressed through legal restrictions on religious practice, in combination with intentional bureaucratic discouragement and intimidation tactics, although arrests, demolitions of religious property and various forms of harassment do still occur.

Also, the most severe vulnerability of religious minorities in Cuba is primarily, although not exclusively, the consequence of social activism inspired by religious convictions. A high degree of social activism can also lead to restrictions of other, less active forms of religious behaviour, as a kind of repercussion measure.

Believers are no longer significantly discriminated against in terms of access to university education, public-sector jobs or membership in the Communist Party. Attendance at church services, even those of house churches or unregistered denominations, also rarely poses a threat. But the unpredictability of the state and the permanent surveillance nevertheless remain intimidating. Religious ministers, especially those not affiliated with the CIC, live in a constant state of fear and discouragement, as they are subject to permanent surveillance, the threat of fabricated charges whenever something they do displeases the authorities, ongoing discrimination, total absence of legal security, and frustrating restrictions in the conduct of their work.

Most Cuban religious leaders did not seem to view the remaining restrictions as a problem. I see two reasons for this attitude. First, they are content with their current freedoms, which go considerably beyond what they were formerly permitted to do. Second, many religious groups have, perhaps unconsciously, internalized a narrow interpretation of religious freedom, to the point that they believe they *have* freedom of religion and would not even consider doing anything outside the established parameters. The Cuban regime has been extremely successful, not in

25 ‘Cuban Pastor Was Arrested Hours before Obama Visit’, *CBN News*, 31 March 2016.

26 ‘Cuban Activist Expelled from University’, *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, 10 May 2017.

eliminating Christianity or slowing down its growth, but in unconsciously defining the options for Cuban Christians and the nature of the freedom they aspire to, which is a form of 'symbolic violence'.²⁷

I found younger interviewees more aware that their situation is still not ideal. When asked whether they faced operating restrictions, many would say there were none, but when I asked specifically about aspects related to church repairs or expansions, active missionary activity or criticism of the government, all immediately declared that these things were not possible or subject to restrictions. This discrepancy could be explained by the optimistic nature of the Cuban people or their reluctance to express criticisms to strangers, but they may also have become so accustomed to the pressure that they consider it normal.

The internalization of this narrow definition of religious freedom is also present among international faith-based organizations active in Cuba, all of which accept the rules imposed by the Cuban government: to be allowed to work there, they must avoid any form of intervention related to human rights or somehow do it undercover.

The common denominator amongst the most prominent threats to Christians is that any form of religious behaviour viewed by the regime as subversive creates vulnerability. Visible church growth or human rights activism provokes the most intense threats. In these cases, the distinction between CIC-affiliated and non-affiliated groups fades, although CIC members rarely overstep the authorized boundaries.

In summary, Cuba's opening up since 1991 has really created only the illusion of religious freedom. The Cuban state defines the parameters of what religious freedom includes, effectively restricting it to purely 'ministerial' activities—i.e. activities taking place within the church sphere, but not the social dimensions of Christianity. Any political content in church services, theological training or religious literature is out of the question. Surveillance of church services may even have increased since 1991.²⁸

Resilience tools exhibited by Cuban Christians

Avoidance

Avoidance is a common coping mechanism for all Christians, although documenting it is challenging, because people who adopt this coping mechanism avoid making their views known. Moreover, most of my interviewees were relatively outspoken about their faith. But many of them referred to 'staying under the radar' or trying not to be noticed by the authorities. I observed avoidance in many different areas, such as the organization of evangelistic activities, the creation of small businesses, the conduct of social work or the operation of a printing press. These activities are generally conducted in such a way as to attract as little attention as possible, with frequent tactical postponements.

27 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La reproduction: Éléments d'une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1970).

28 Goldenziel, 'Sanctioning Faith', 208.

Individual Christians also practice avoidance. For example, a young engineer working for a state company remained silent about his Christian convictions to avoid any trouble in his professional career.

Christians adopt ways of speaking covertly through Bible stories, parables, biographies of saints or well-known Christians and seemingly apolitical religious acts. For example, in one church service I attended, the pastor made references to John Bunyan, the seventeenth-century English writer and preacher who had been imprisoned for his missionary work, but left his audience to establish any parallel with the persecution in modern-day Cuba. Similarly, in Afro-Cuban religion, the annual procession in honour of Saint Lázaro evolved in the 1990s into a forum for the expression of political protest.²⁹ In these and other cases, seemingly religious acts constitute covert expressions of protest, which really is the only way for religious organizations to express disagreement with the regime.

As another form of avoiding attention, missionary activity occurs primarily through personal, casual-looking conversations rather than large gatherings. Businesses are careful not to grow beyond one employee. Churches avoid integrating new converts but instead direct them towards house churches within the same denomination. Humanitarian work is performed by small groups and from multiple locations.

At times, staying under the radar is impossible, and the only alternatives are to abandon one's social activity or leave the country. Many interviewees pointed out that numerous church leaders have ended up migrating to the United States, either because they grew tired of the oppression or because the authorities asked them to depart, leaving their Cuban churches without leadership.

Spiritual endurance

Almost all the Cuban Christians I interviewed stated that their Christian faith is a source of comfort, relief and hope that helps them to undergo the challenges inherent in living in a communist system. They cited the biblical teaching that believers are promised a better world in the future as a source of consolation. In addition, Cuban Christians expressed comfort in the realization that Christians have suffered tribulations throughout history and presently suffer in many parts of the world.

Many interviewees expressed a calling to remain and serve the church in Cuba. Some of them described living in the United States as not necessarily ideal, particularly in view of the temptations and challenges of materialism they would face there. One even viewed living under communism as 'a blessing because it helps [us] to stay true to the faith'.

Finally, the house church model can be an important source of spiritual endurance. As Koesel suggests, house churches are particularly appropriate for developing deep personal relationships. In China, they have enabled Christianity to

29 Katherine J. Hagedorn, 'Long Day's Journey to Rincón: From Suffering to Resistance in the Procession of San Lázaro/Babalú Ayé', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 11, no. 1 (2002): 43–69.

grow in ways that may not have been possible without the restrictions imposed by the communist regime.³⁰ This also seems to be the case in Cuba.

Compliance

For Cuban Christians, compliance can take two general forms: actual acceptance of and obedience to regulations, or formal compliance while disrespecting the government's intent. For example, expanding a church building is not technically permissible, but if one does it very gradually, without attracting attention, and formal requirements such as maintaining the historical façade of the building are respected, restrictions can be circumvented. One pastor showed me a 1959 photograph of his church, which could hold perhaps 50 people at that time. The façade was maintained, but three stories were built on top of it, and now the church can accommodate 500 people.

Another pastor operates an illegal printing press in east Cuba, with the complicity of the authorities. He stated, 'The only reason why my printing press is not shut down is because I maintain such good relations with the authorities. We have an unspoken agreement that I will never print anything that could jeopardize the authorities. I also printed some materials for them when their own printing press was broken.' A youth pastor from Havana encouraged one of his church members to write a thesis on the persecution of Protestants during the first decades after the Cuban revolution. The student cleverly took advantage of a legal loophole and wrote the thesis not for a seminary but in a journalism program. It was later published in the United States and distributed via flash drives in Cuba, circumventing the restrictions on printing.

More often, Christians simply obey when ordered to shut down a particular project or operation. 'Sometimes it's best to just comply. You need to pick your battles', one pastor said. For many, compliance is a protective mechanism: 'If we are ever questioned, we can always say we have always obeyed previous orders.'

Social wisdom

Christian leaders consider very carefully when to circumvent regulations, when to comply, and when to engage in potentially risky behaviours such as social work, evangelism or advocacy. They approach their interactions strategically, complying in most cases so as not to be viewed as troublemakers and disobeying only when the matter is sufficiently important. The importance of social wisdom can also be observed when it is lacking, as in the case of a few Christian leaders who became targets for repression because of behaviour that their peers considered unnecessarily provocative.

Moral standing

Moral standing can be both a coping mechanism and a source of vulnerability. High moral standing in society increases vulnerability, because the communist authorities are wary of religious leaders' moral authority. In contrast, earning the respect of

30 Karrie J. Koesel, 'The Rise of a Chinese House Church: The Organizational Weapon', *China Quarterly* 215 (2013): 572–89; Koesel, *Religion and Authoritarianism*.

communist officials, such as through personal friendships or because the spouses of party leaders attend their church, can become a coping mechanism. However, if a church's humanitarian work generates a certain level of goodwill within a community, the church can be seen as competing with the state—something the communist leaders never appreciate.

Solidarity

Some examples of inter-Christian solidarity can be observed in Cuba, in spite of the limited material resources available to churches. After the destructive hurricanes, churches in the less hard-hit western part of the island collected donations and supplies to help those in more heavily affected areas.

However, this solidarity is the exception, not the rule. There is great mistrust amongst Cuban churches and even within Christian denominations, partly due to the regime's divide-and-rule strategy. Collaboration across denominations remains uncommon. Christian leaders understand that this situation reduces their overall resilience but find it difficult to trust one another.

The international ties of Cuban churches, although not appreciated by the Cuban regime, provide partners who frequently speak on their behalf in international advocacy forums and to the media. Unfortunately, international advocacy can often be counterproductive. Frequently, Cuban leaders complain that the misdirected advocacy efforts of international faith-based organizations, in which Cuban emigrants to the United States are often involved, do more harm than good. "They only yell at the Cuban authorities, but their reports are often not accurate, and they create problems for us", said one Cuban pastor.

Collective action

Collective action (e.g. organized resistance or protests) as a coping mechanism is relatively underdeveloped among most Christians in Cuba. The Communist Party's divide-and-rule strategy has sought to prevent any form of coordinated effort among Christians that could destabilize the regime. In addition, Christians generally avoid any form of political advocacy that could disturb the precarious status quo that allows them to operate their churches with relative freedom.

However, a few Christians have learned about nonviolent resistance through their relations with other (non-religious) dissidents. Works such as *From Dictatorship to Democracy* by Gene Sharp³¹ have become available on flash drives, and some Christian activists have timidly started to adopt similar techniques.

Mario Félix Lleonart, the aforementioned human rights activist, is a follower of Sharp's teachings. He told me in an interview that he once received notice that he would be arrested because a particular blog post annoyed the authorities. He immediately asked the members of his congregation to come to his church for a service. Overcoming their fear, many people gathered in front of the rectory where he lived, in a display of solidarity. When the police arrived, the crowd made it

31 Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 1993).

practically impossible to arrest him. Other church leaders have applied the same tactic.

There appears to be a growing awareness that concerted efforts, if executed ‘wisely’ (their word choice), can sometimes be beneficial. For example, an organized lobbying effort helped to secure permission to rebuild churches destroyed by a hurricane. But nearly all Cuban Christians steer clear of advocacy work. Many interviewees did not believe that international pressure could have a positive effect on religious freedom.

The last four years

When Miguel Díaz-Canel took over as Cuba’s president in 2018, after 59 years of leadership by Fidel Castro and then his brother Raúl, most analysts expected continuity of the communist system.³² They also warned that the growing social discontent in Cuba, mainly related to the dire economic situation and the food and electricity shortages, would lead to an increase of social protests.³³ Indeed, in July 2021 a series of unprecedented protests erupted against the ruling Communist Party.³⁴ As expected, these protests were violently repressed and did not alter the political status quo—at least not immediately.

Under Díaz-Canel, the repression of Christians seems to have increased somewhat, especially for unregistered churches on the island. Norms such as Decree Law 370, ‘On the Computerization of Society in Cuba’, are used to interrogate, threaten and confiscate resources from anyone who disseminates unapproved information on social networks. Under this decree, exorbitant fines are imposed, often leading to non-payment and subsequent imprisonment. This regulation, in addition to limiting freedom of expression, also prohibits all religious manifestations containing content in opposition to the regime.³⁵ Between January 2020 and August 2021, the database of violent incidents of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America reported 33 arrests, three sentencings, 15 cases of physical or mental abuse and three attacks on houses of religious ministers. Worship services continue to be monitored, a situation that has worsened in the context of COVID-19.

After decades of disagreements with the CIC, seven Protestant denominations have formed the Alliance of Cuban Evangelical Churches, seeking to establish a united front against government intimidation of Christians. Their members are constantly monitored and intimidated by the regime.³⁶

32 Dennis P. Petri and Teresa Flores, ‘Country Overviews and Case Studies of Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba’, 2019, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454dpp3>.

33 José Antonio Pastor and Dennis P. Petri, ‘Cuba: New Names, but the Same Approach’, Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, 2 April 2018, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454dpp4>.

34 ‘Cuba Protests: Frustration at Government Runs Deep’, *BBC News*, 14 July 2021.

35 ‘Cuba and Its Decree Law 370: Annihilating Freedom of Expression on the Internet’, Reporters Without Borders, 5 July 2021.

36 ‘Evangelical Churches of Cuba Establish Their Own Alliance’, *Evangelical Focus*, 14 June 2019.

Building the Kingdom of God in Europe: Reflecting Theologically on One's Self-Understanding

Peirong Lin

In this short essay, the WEA's Deputy Secretary General, a Singapore native now working in Europe, reflects on her experience as a foreign woman in a male-dominated, sometimes unfriendly context and develops an understanding of how she—and, by extension, all of us—can build the kingdom of God each day, wherever we are.

One way to understand the building of God's kingdom is as working towards the experience of God's reign, which is rooted in God's character as universal, unconditional and omnipotent love.¹ Volf and Croasmun describe this experience as flourishing, whereby we are 'called to flourish fully in the world—become God's home and partially on the journey there—rejoicing even while others having to mourn, accepting lack willingly so that the needs of others can be satisfied, leading lives of courage and integrity as we struggle against the evils of this age, trusting and loving God, participating in God's mission in the world, and in all this growing into our own human fullness'.²

This paper is more than an academic exercise; it looks at what it might mean for me to do my part in building this kingdom of God. It is in part autobiographical, as I reflect theologically on my existing situation. In doing so, I seek to demonstrate the value of articulating how a theologically informed Christian actually lives one's life.³

I was born and raised in Singapore and have lived in Europe for around 10 years. I completed my doctoral studies in Brussels, Belgium, and now I work in Bonn, Germany for the World Evangelical Alliance. I am also a wife to Dirk and mother to Hans Xi, my little toddler born in late 2019.

As a foreigner in Europe and a younger woman who is active in theological and church circles, I sometimes have an acute feeling of otherness. For example, I have

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1 Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019), 73.

2 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 80.

3 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 129.

been exposed to casual racism. One day, while I was shopping in a supermarket and minding my own business, a man approached me and shouted, 'Zurück' (Return).

As a theologian coming from a home context where Christianity has not been around for centuries, I resonate strongly with the idea that 'theology is first a lived experience of the church before it is a set of ideas formulated by church theologians.'⁴ Such an understanding has been a challenge at times, however, in my theological education in Europe. The emphasis on logical and critical arguments about God has had the effect of causing my personal faith to feel foreign and alienating. As a woman in a predominantly male professional environment, having well-meaning colleagues tell me that they cannot share a meal with me alone, just because of my sex, can feel demoralizing, especially since networking happens primarily at these meals.

I know I am not the only one to face these struggles. We all experience different challenges in our own personal context. Some of them, we can overcome—such as by learning the local language or the rules of logic or not taking everything personally. Others cannot be so easily changed: my sex, my skin color or my accent when I speak German. How then can I who experience otherness in Europe contribute to the building of God's kingdom here?

WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher has pointed out that embracing a victim mentality is certainly not helpful. He notes that Christians in Europe sometimes lament their minority position on the continent and, because of the unfavourable cultural context, are not vibrant and active. Finding another scapegoat or retreating to where one is comfortable is a limited response. Created by God and placed in a particular context, we are sent to participate in God's mission where we are. With this perspective in mind, I will share some of my own reflections on who I am and how I can contribute to the flourishing of Europe and play my role in kingdom building.

Who am I?

I am a representative of God

Created in the image of God, both men and women were created to be representatives of God in their dealings with all of creation, reflecting the nature of God to creation.⁵ Individually, they each enjoy special standing in creation, differentiated from other creatures. They are exceptionally chosen to be recipients of God's love and are more esteemed within his creation (Mt 6:26). Women need to recognize their value, despite societal norms that sometimes suggest otherwise.

Being made in the image of God also has implications for our relationships. Our lives are to be lived 'in relationship with God and with other creatures. ... To be human is to live freely and gladly in relationships of mutual respect and love.'⁶ This relationship should also be apparent between men and women. Mutual respect and

4 Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 15.

5 Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 230.

6 Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 145.

love should be expressed in the way men and women work together to represent God in creation. Humans are not made to work in isolation but in partnership.

I am a pilgrim on this earth

For migrants, the imagery of a pilgrim can be useful. Pilgrims seek to follow Jesus in whatever they do. They focus on the central role of faith in their life journey and are aware of the existence of all artificial borders that impede the quest for communion with God and with other people.⁷

This involves being engaged in the struggle of helping to make the world into God's home.⁸ Our stake in a particular space is therefore tentative, secondary to shaping the world into God's home and the struggles that arise from this. Consequently, one's ultimate loyalty should shift from a place on this earth to the whole world that we seek to reconstruct in God image. 'One's primary allegiance is not to the states of which they are citizens or to some-yet-to-be-created global super state but to the one God of all people.'⁹

Additionally, we can be comforted that we are sent by the migrant God, a God who, in Jesus Christ, had no place to lay his head (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58). In the *missio Dei*, we see how the triune God moved in His mission. God the Father came to his people, the Israelites, and 'dwelt among them'; similarly, Jesus came to earth and made his dwelling among us (Jn 1:14). His life journey reflected the challenges of being a migrant. The Holy Spirit finds its dwelling within each individual believer (1 Cor 3:16).¹⁰

Acting responsibly

Taking these two notions seriously in my self-understanding, how then should I act responsibly? To describe my actions as responsible is to imply that I have agency. I am not just a victim in the situation. I can choose how I act in different situations, regardless of how others behave. Recognizing that my theology is very much influenced by my experience, I describe three notions that influence my actions.

I act by responding to God who sent Jesus as a migrant

Sent by God the Father, Jesus came to earth and made his dwelling among us (Jn 1:14). From his birth to his itinerant ministry, his life journey reflected the challenges of being a migrant. Following in God's example, we are sent with the Holy Spirit. Living in this foreign land, we become strangers and sojourners in the present world.¹¹ This would imply being aware that my actions should first and foremost reflect my identity as a follower of Christ. Following Jesus 'involves obeying him and

7 William T. Cavanaugh, 'Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk: Mobility and Identity in a Global Age', *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 351.

8 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 77.

9 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 106.

10 Stephen Dye, 'The Multicultural Missionary Identity of Diaspora Christians in Germany', in *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narratives and Missiology*, ed. Israel Oluwale Olofinjana (Oxford: Regnum, 2020), 39.

11 Dye, 'Multicultural Missionary Identity', 38.

growing in his grace and knowledge (Heb 12:1–2; Col 3:1–3), from which love and service flow naturally (2 Pet 3:18; 1 Jn 4:7).¹²

I act aware of my actions towards my neighbour

Having known ‘othering’ experiences, I am able to empathize with those who may have experienced difficult situations too. Although such experiences are certainly not ideal, this state of brokenness can also direct one’s attention to God. Jesus said, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, because they can see God’ (Mt 5:3). Being in a difficult situation can help to make me willing to move out of the status quo.

Additionally, learning from the example of Jesus implies recognizing that Jesus did not operate within existing manmade limitations. During his ministry, he ‘transgressed the supposed boundaries of God’s grace and thus shocked the sensibilities of the guardians of religious tradition’.¹³ He disturbed the status quo of his time and went against the prevailing social norms. In the same way, I can lean into solidarity with those who are oppressed, working towards bringing justice and God’s rule into the situation.¹⁴

I act by actively fostering unity in witness to Christ

As followers of Christ, Christians around the world are supposed to unite in their prayer for God’s kingdom to come. Doing this realizes the prayer of Christ in John 17:22–23. This involves the church truly being ‘the place that suspends the worry of how multiple peoples may encounter each other together, not by avoiding such complexity but through showing a collective body moving, living, and struggling to form a space of life and love’.¹⁵

More often than not, churches are also the hallmark of cultural traditions, the place where things have always been done in a certain way. This is because fostering unity requires work. It requires an intentional building of relationships with the other. Miroslav Volf, in his groundbreaking book *Exclusion and Embrace*, described what embrace can look like. He used the embrace as a metaphor to reflect the dynamic relationship between the self and the other. His model consists of four structural elements: opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms and opening them again.¹⁶ These elements signify the process that embrace involves, as a deliberate effort that takes all parties seriously.

12 ‘Our Pledge: Holistic Disciple-making’, World Evangelical Alliance, 2019, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert454pl1>.

13 Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 180.

14 Amanda Jackson and Peirong Lin, *Co-workers and Co-leaders: Women and Men Partnering for God’s Work* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2021), 32–33.

15 Willie J. Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 4.

16 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 140–43.

The church, as a collective body of Christ, must embrace foreigners. One way in which this embrace can be observed is through the presence of a truly multi-cultural church, in congregational membership, structure and leadership.¹⁷

Even as a foreigner, I can choose to ‘open my arms’, stay open to the environment I am in, and use my own experiences and perspectives to actively build bridges and bring people together. This includes making myself available for different opportunities presented to me to be part of the multi-cultural church that Europe is building.

The call is universal

I hope that in this short message drawn from my own experiences, I have inspired you to also look at your own personal story and consider how you can be building the kingdom of God in your situation. May we actively contribute to the flourishing of the place where we are called to be.

17 Usha Reifsnider, ‘Cross-Cultural Mission from a British Gujarati Context’, in *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diaspora Identity, Narratives and Missiology*, ed. Israel Oluwale Olofinjana (Oxford: Regnum, 2020), 169–83.

The ‘Surprise’ in Mission History: Prospects for African Cross-Cultural Mission to the West

Ebenezer Yaw Blasus and Joshua D. Settles

The Christian mission enterprise has grown greatly in multi-cultural understanding since the famed Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910, but in some ways, Western Christianity still strains to open itself to the empowering influences of the burgeoning church in Africa. This article reviews historical developments, through a fascinating comparison between 1910 and 2010, and offers concrete suggestions from an African perspective.

Missiologists have generally concluded that ‘through the efforts of western missionaries and home-grown churches and evangelists, Christianity has taken root in Africa with astonishing speed, to the point that by the close of the 20th century, Africa was considered one of the heartlands of world Christianity.’¹ Available statistics indicate a growth from fewer than 9 million African Christians in 1900 to some 350 to 400 million by 2000, with projected growth to almost 630 million by 2025.² As Andrew Walls has noted, what happens in Africa will greatly determine what the global Christianity of the 21st and 22nd centuries will be like.³ This pattern suggests a reversal of the 19th-century missionary tradition, with Africa becoming a major *source* of mission—a surprise perhaps, yet a reality.⁴ Max Oxbrow and Genevieve James expressed the same hope in their report on a session that discussed forms of missionary engagement at the 2010 Edinburgh missionary conference.⁵

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1 Gerrie ter Haar, *How God Became African: African Spirituality and Western Secular Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), chapter 2.

2 Haar, *How God Became African*, 22.

3 Andrew F. Walls, ‘Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century’, *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4, no. 2 (December 2001): 47.

4 Max Oxbrow and Genevieve James, ‘Forms of Missionary Engagement’, in Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds.), *Edinburgh 2010—Mission Today and Tomorrow*, 152. The phrase ‘surprise in missionary history’ is borrowed from Kwame Bediako’s idea that ‘There is only one word that can truly describe the present status of Christianity in Africa as we approach the [21st century].’ Bediako was then writing about modern Africa being a heartland of the Christian religion. See Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2004), 3.

5 Oxbrow and James, ‘Forms of Missionary Engagement’, 152.

Indeed, 'African-influenced Christianity' is spreading 'around the new African Diaspora' already.⁶ However, we do not yet know how this change in missionary direction will affect the life of the church worldwide, at the theoretical, practical or missional level.⁷

In this article, we reflect on the prospects of African-to-Western missionary itinerary in the 21st century, considering Western Christians' perception and attitude towards African Christian spirituality. We propose that as the centre of gravity of global Christianity has shifted to the Global South, there must be a consequent shift in Western Christians' understanding of missions as a whole, and an empowerment of Africans (and others) to carry out mission in the world—especially the West. A deep-seated perception of mission as a civilizing movement from the superior to the inferior, and from the centre to the margins, still affects Western perceptions of African Christianity and thus its mission prospects. Furthermore, although Western attitudes toward Africans as mission partners are better than they were in 1910, there is still room for improvement. These factors together pose a challenge to African mission to the West in the 21st century. Consequently, the issues discussed since 1910 'remain pertinent even in the vastly changed world of today' post-Edinburgh 2010.⁸

We begin with a description of the Edinburgh conferences of 1910 and 2010 as significant events in mission history. We then proceed to discuss Western Christian attitudes towards African spirituality, and thus towards African Christianity in both 1910 and 2010 and the causes and trajectories of these attitudes. Finally, we consider the persistent challenges facing African–Western cross-cultural mission and propose some ways forward in redressing the view of African Christianity as an 'underdog' in mission.

Primal religion and spirituality

It is important to clarify our use of the term 'primal', a key concept employed throughout this article. Some prefer the word 'indigenous' to refer to similar spiritualities or practices. Our use of 'primal' is intended to situate African religious traditions as within the context of other indigenous religious traditions, and therefore not exotic. Second, our use of the term is a positive theological assertion that knowledge of 'the divine destiny of man as an abiding divine-human relationship'⁹ is not confined to Christianity but is attested in primal religious traditions around the world. Finally, the concept of primal spirituality is not limited to pre-Christian or non-Christian religious practices but finds continued expression within Christian faith: 'Primal ... means basal or elemental, the fundamental stratum

6 Haar, *How God Became African*, 25.

7 Haar, *How God Became African*, 22.

8 David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* (Oxford, UK: Regnum, 2009), 3.

9 Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum, 2014), 102.

to all subsequent religious experience, continuing to varying degrees in all later religious traditions.¹⁰

In Christian mission history, primal spirituality has been a *praeparatio evangelica* for the appropriation and sustenance of Christian faith, even where the cultural symbols and forms of expressing the faith differ. Indeed, the core theological claims and practices of Christianity—the incarnation, the resurrection, the ascension, baptism, the Eucharist and so on—are rooted in a primal imagination that conceives of the universe as ‘a unified cosmic system, essentially spiritual’¹¹ in nature. Hence, the theological concept of primal spirituality defies the description of non-Western religious expressions as ‘syncretistic’, since the continuity of one and the same experience of the ultimate is not the same as mixing different beliefs, as implied by syncretism.

The Edinburgh 1910 and 2010 World Missionary Conferences

Edinburgh 1910 was the first ‘international missionary conference to meet under this title’,¹² and its objective was ‘to consider missionary problems in relation to the non-Christian world’.¹³ This major event would impact the development of Christian mission in the twentieth century.¹⁴ According to David Kerr and Kenneth Ross, ‘the “essence” of Edinburgh 1910’ involved establishing the plausibility, urgency and mandate for ‘carrying the Gospel into the entire non-Christian world’.¹⁵ The insistence was that churches must apply themselves to their primary task of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to ‘the whole creation’.¹⁶ Although the conference was not intended to be an authoritative or directive body for missions, a continuation committee, the International Mission Committee (IMC), was established to sustain the spirit of the conference with follow-up mission summits well into the mid-20th century. Their work was eventually absorbed into the World Council of Churches (WCC).¹⁷ By the mid-20th century, some evangelicals who felt that the WCC was not keeping up the Edinburgh 1910 evangelistic torch responded by creating parallel assemblies such as the Lausanne Congresses of 1974, 1989 and 2004.¹⁸

The centenary of Edinburgh 1910 was celebrated with a similar conference called Edinburgh 2010. The preparatory study for Edinburgh 2010 aimed at making ‘clear the changes in missionary thinking since 1910’,¹⁹ and this motivation informed the conference objective to study and reflect on ‘the current state of world mission and

10 Gillian M. Bediako, ‘Primal Religion and Christian Faith: Antagonists or Soul-Mates?’ *Journal of African Christian Thought* 3, no. 1 (June 2000): 12.

11 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 96.

12 Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 4.

13 Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 7.

14 Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 3.

15 Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 11.

16 Kenneth Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard for Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2009), 15.

17 J. Stanley Friesen, *Missionary Responses to Tribal Religions at Edinburgh, 1910* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 6.

18 Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 28.

19 Kirsteen Kim, ‘Conference Study Process’, in Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, 51.

the challenges facing all who seek to witness to Christ today'.²⁰ This objective was deliberated upon in nine themes, with the main outcome being a mission declaration dubbed 'Edinburgh 2010 Common Call'²¹ to give impetus and direction to missions as *missio Dei* in the 21st century. Between Edinburgh 1910 and 2010, changing perspectives led to the emergence of a more complex view of church and mission.²² One such change involved Western Christians' perception of African religious thought and praxis.

Western Christian perceptions of African spirituality at Edinburgh 1910

Long before Edinburgh 1910, African forms of religious life had been seen by the West as 'superstitious' or 'idolatrous'.²³ The conference confirmed these views. In 1926, Diedrich Westermann critiqued the general perception and attitude of Western Christians and missionaries towards Africans and African religiosity as follows:

We do not take into account the fact that the African has evolved a genius of his own. There is an African state of mind, an African material and mental culture, an African view of things. Is this altogether so bad that it has to be destroyed, or is it so weak and negligible that it does not deserve our consideration?²⁴

At Edinburgh, the Western missionary answer to Westermann's rhetorical question was an unequivocal yes. At the conference, the primal religions of Africa and other parts of the world were tagged as animism, which W. H. T. Gairdner described as 'the religious beliefs of more or less backward or degraded peoples all over the world'.²⁵ Harold Turner would later reject the term 'animist' as 'misleadingly inaccurate', as well as the word 'primitive' for being 'too evaluative in a derogatory sense and quite unacceptable to the people to whom it has been applied'.²⁶ Yet its use at the conference was reflective of Western missionary attitudes of the time. The ascription of such terms as 'primitive' and 'animistic' invariably relegated Africans to the position of underdogs in cross-cultural mission. Their religions were seen as inimical to the course of the Christian gospel and were expected to give way to and, in fact, be 'uprooted' by western Christianity.²⁷ Africans were the underdogs, considered spiritually weaker than others and therefore unlikely to be successful, or even to participate at all in the arena of Christian mission.

20 Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, 3.

21 Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, ix.

22 Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 130.

23 Haar, *How God Became African*, 25.

24 Diedrich Westermann, 'The Value of the African's Past', *International Review of Missions* 15, no. 59 (July 1926): 419.

25 W. H. T. Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference*, 2nd ed. (London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 137.

26 Harold Turner, *Australian Essays in World Religions* (Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1977), 27.

27 Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 31.

In view of these attitudes, the lack of African participation in the conference is therefore unsurprising. Indeed, the complete exclusion of Africans from the Edinburgh 1910 conference is evidence of Western Christians' low esteem of African spirituality, and thus of the African Christianity that was already emerging from it.

Edinburgh 1910 included some 1,200 Protestant missionaries and representatives of missionary boards, mainly people from Europe and North America. There were a small number from Asia and Australia, but no indigenous Africans.²⁸ The contortions of later Christian mission scholars to argue that a single participant may have been African serve only to highlight the obvious imbalance.²⁹ At a conference intended to spur mission to Africa (and other places), indigenous African voices were entirely absent. 'White missionaries spoke for Africans but their voices were so discordant that the conferees soon realised the vastness of the neglected continent, the complexity of the problems, and the challenging nature of the mission enterprise there.'³⁰ The prevailing view of Africans as underdogs led to their exclusion from participating in that which God had intended and commanded to benefit all nations (Mt 28:18).

Western cultural self-understanding as a cause of the 'underdog' perception of African Christianity

Although the exclusion of African Christian voices may have been unintentional, it more likely arose from the intrinsically Eurocentric attitude held by missionaries of that time. The negative perception of Africa by the West was the result of the West's self-understanding as custodians of Christianity, which was understood not only as the faith of Europe, but as a European faith. This attitude, coupled with a centuries-old mission paradigm that understood mission as flowing from the 'higher' to 'lower' locations—from the 'civilized' centre to the savage margins—meant that 'other religions, great and small, [were] obstacles and menaces to the missionary effort of spreading the kingdom of Christ.'³¹

Speaking at Edinburgh 2010, Kosuke Koyama remarked, 'At Edinburgh 1910 Christians of the West understood themselves to be the chosen people of God—the heart that pumps the gospel's blood of life to all extremities.'³² This brief statement summarizes how they viewed themselves missiologically in relation to the 'non-Christian world', particularly Africans and African religions. They divided humanity

28 Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 7. The delegates came from 176 missionary societies and boards: 59 from North America, 58 from Europe, 47 from the UK, and 12 from South Africa and Australia.

29 The only African purportedly present at Edinburgh 1910 was described by Stanley Friesen as a male African American. But based on the available evidence, we believe the person referred to was actually a dark-skinned Asian named Grace Stephens. See Friesen, *Missionary Responses to Tribal Religions*, 27–29; Bryan Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 91–107.

30 Ogbu U. Kalu, 'To Hang a Ladder in the Air: An African Assessment', in Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 91.

31 Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 31.

32 Kosuke Koyama, 'Commission One—after a Century of Violence: The Search for a Larger Christ', in Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 41.

into 'the Christian world and the non-Christian world',³³ and they alone were in real spiritual relationship with God as his children.

The theology undergirding this Eurocentric concept was based partially on flawed scriptural exegesis that privileged white Europeans while Africans were relegated to a subordinate role and destined for subjugation.³⁴ This racialized perspective was complemented by a hierarchical conception of religion, whereby Africans and their primal religions occupied the lowest place while Europeans and Christianity held the highest. This understanding of Christianity was normative, and was presumably the correct and progressive one.³⁵

Changing perceptions of African Christianity at Edinburgh 2010

By Edinburgh 2010, the scenario had changed. Western Christians could not continue to see themselves as necessarily superior or remain paternalistically the religious spokespeople for Africans. The change is evidenced in the participation of Africans at Edinburgh 2010 as well as in the deliberations and conference resolutions. In sharp contrast to the 1,200 participants at Edinburgh 1910, there were only 300 delegates at Edinburgh 2010.³⁶ Nevertheless, participation was broader, as not only missionaries but a broader array of Christians from more nations participated at Edinburgh 2010. Sixty percent of the delegates came from the Global South and 11.6 percent were Africans,³⁷ corresponding to the shift in the centre of gravity of world Christianity.³⁸ A new participatory process was employed for the preparatory discussion of nine main themes³⁹ at regional and confessional levels prior to the conference. For example, Edinburgh 2010's Core Study Group 9, on mission spirituality and authentic discipleship, drew on experiences of Christians in the global South in 'seek[ing] to understand mission in relation to such concepts as new creation, spiritual gifts, renewal, reconstruction, identity, service and holism'.⁴⁰

In her keynote address at Edinburgh 2010, Dana Robert acknowledged that the delegates to the 1910 conference could not have imagined the decline of Christianity

33 Koyama, 'Commission One', 41.

34 Bediako, *Primal Religion and the Bible*, 37. See also Robin Blackburn, 'The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery', *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 65–102.

35 Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 25.

36 According to Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, 4, the 300 delegates came from 202 organizations representing 115 denominations or national churches (including African Independent Churches), 75 nationalities and 61 different mother tongues. All the world's continents were represented.

37 Kim and Anderson, 'Appendix 9: Conference Delegates', in *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow*, 425–42.

38 Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 40.

39 The nine themes were as follows: foundations for mission, Christian mission among other faiths, mission and postmodernity, mission and power, forms of missionary engagement, theological education and formation, Christian communities in contemporary contexts, mission and unity (ecclesiology and mission), and mission spirituality and authentic discipleship. See Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, v.

40 Cathy Ross and Wonsuk Ma, 'Edinburgh 2010: Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship', <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert454bs1>.

in Europe. Neither could they envision the eventual radicalism of the indigenization that they called for.⁴¹ Yet this became a historical reality. Today, Europe is largely post-Christian, no longer the prime representative Christian society. And in a huge reversal of 1910, most Christians now live in the Global South, including Africa.⁴² So not only has Africa become one of the new heartlands of Christianity, but the growth of Christianity in the Global South has encouraged a reverse mission thrust to revitalize the receding Christian spirituality of the Global North. Western Christians could not therefore continue to regard themselves as the sole custodians of Christianity, endowed with a divine task to evangelize the 'rest of the world'. Fidón Mwombeki noted the change: '[At Edinburgh 1910] Christian and non-Christian worlds were distinguished. A generation later the reality was different. The "mission fields" have become "churches" and ... further the gospel under their own initiative and management.'⁴³

Canon Max Oxbrow and Genevieve James echoed Walls' assertion that Africa will increasingly take the lead in global mission and provide more missionaries both locally and cross-culturally.⁴⁴ Consistent with this expectation, the Edinburgh 2010 declaration affirmed 'mission in all directions',⁴⁵ changing the language from 'mission from West to rest'⁴⁶ in 1910 to one describable as mission by everyone to everywhere in 2010. By Edinburgh 2010, Africa, the 1910 'underdogs' of culture and religion, was being heralded as a new custodian of Christianity and as possible pathfinders for Christian mission in the 21st century. Challenges remain, however, especially in relation to African mission to the West, described as 'modern culture'.⁴⁷

Factors underlying the changes in Western perception of African spirituality

Between Edinburgh 1910 and 2010, at the level of intellectual or theoretical discussions, significant changes occurred in the West's self-understanding of Christianity and Christian mission, especially vis-à-vis Africans and African primal spirituality. In our view, two important factors led to these changes: (1) increased knowledge and appreciation of African religions, and (2) increased awareness of the affinity between primal African spirituality and biblical religiosity.

In relation to the first factor, W. H. T. Gairdner had advocated for African religions to be 'studied with sympathy for understanding',⁴⁸ because African primal religions might find 'fulfilment'⁴⁹ in 'Christianity, the religion of the Light of the

41 Dana L. Robert, 'Mission in Long Perspective—Keynote Address', in Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, 55.

42 Walls, 'Commission One', 33.

43 Fidón Mwombeki, 'Mission to the North: Opportunities and Prospects', in Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, 113.

44 Oxbrow and James, 'Forms of Missionary Engagement', 152.

45 Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, 1.

46 Anne-Marie Kool, 'Changing Images in the Formation of Mission Commission Five in Light of Current Challenges: A World Perspective', in Kerr and Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 167.

47 Lesslie Newbigin, 'Can the West Be Converted?' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, January 1987, 2, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert454bs2>.

48 Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910*, 137.

49 Friesen, *Missionary Responses to Tribal Religions*, 1.

World'.⁵⁰ The challenges missionaries faced in truly understanding African religions vis-à-vis their exclusive claims of Christianity⁵¹ might thus be rectified. Kwame Bediako noted that 'a little over a decade after Edinburgh 1910, the missionary image of Africa was already registering some marked changes which included "more respect for the Africans and for their past", which was now believed to contain "elements of a religious value"'.⁵²

In addition to this re-evaluation, African theologians, in 'reaction' to the 'feeling ... that [black people] had not been taken sufficiently seriously by white people, including missionaries',⁵³ embarked on intellectual engagements to rediscover their 'natural dynamism' and cultural 'identity'.⁵⁴ Scholars such as John Mbiti and Bishop Bolaji Idowu built on initiatives of African secular scholarship that had first challenged the missionaries, 'whom they accuse[d] of failing to appreciate the values of African culture'.⁵⁵ These theologians 'found the courage to tread the paths of their non-religious compatriots'⁵⁶ and thus began re-examining, re-evaluating and re-writing their own stories. The year 1989 was a key 'symbolic turning point ... [for] the church as a worldwide community, united in common mission', with the release of Lamin Sanneh's book *Translating the Message*, which promoted appreciation for Christian cultural diversity through Bible translation.⁵⁷

The main element of religious value projected by African scholars as their contribution to the upsurge of Christianity in Africa in the 20th century was the re-invoking of their suppressed primal spirituality. This is the second factor in the change in Western perceptions of African spirituality. We have mentioned earlier that primal spirituality is anterior to, underlies and contributes to Christian faith and life; and this is affirmatively so because 'primal religions and Christian faith have a unique phenomenological affinity'.⁵⁸ The affinity is demonstrated by 'how Christian faith may be shown to answer directly to the religious needs and aspirations of people of primal religious background, and to result in fresh insights into the meaning of Christian faith'.⁵⁹ The importance of primal spirituality for the upsurge of Christian faith and life in post-missionary Africa then lies in the fact that its features (or insights) not only resonate with Christian faith and life, but eventuate in the recovery of heretofore neglected biblical insights.⁶⁰

A good example of this pattern may be observed in African Pentecostalism, which, as Asamoah-Gyadu has observed, resonates theologically with primal

50 Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910*, 137.

51 Friesen, *Missionary Responses to Tribal Religions*, 6.

52 Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 235. Bediako based his observation on the special article written by D. Westermann for the Le Zoute conference in Belgium in 1926. See Westermann, 'The Value of the African's Past', 419.

53 Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, trans. from German by John O'Donohue (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 49.

54 Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 50.

55 Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 50.

56 Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 50.

57 Robert, 'Keynote Address', 65.

58 Bediako, 'Primal Religion and Christian Faith', 14.

59 John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presences amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1963). Gillian Bediako cited Taylor in 'Primal Religion and Christian Faith', 14, 15.

60 Bediako, 'Primal Religion and Christian Faith', 14.

spirituality.⁶¹ He concludes that the movement's popularity in Africa is because of its integration of the biblical themes of 'prophecy, exorcism and healing into worship, ... provid[ing] Christian ritual contexts within which people may experience God's presence and power in forceful and demonstrable ways.'⁶² This is not limited to Pentecostal or charismatic groups, but is apparent within the historic 'mainline' African churches as well. African Christian scholars, though not uncritical of excesses, have responded mostly positively to the recovery of the primal within Christian faith, seeing it as a positive development in Christian mission history.

Western views of African spirituality as a challenge to post-2010 cross-cultural mission

The positive change in Western attitudes towards Africa and African Christianity is self-evident. One no longer sees, nor can even imagine, the kind of overtly racist and culturally insensitive missionary attitudes present at Edinburgh 1910. Indeed, African Christianity has emerged as something of a force in global ecclesial politics, with Western conservatives and evangelicals seeing it as a potent force against emergent liberalization in Western denominations. This role has been demonstrated amidst the ongoing controversies in the Anglican communion over gender and sexuality.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to how genuine or substantial the change in Western Christian perception of African Christianity and its mission prospects has been. In our view, Western Christian reservations about African mission prospects derive from two distinct but related factors. The first is a flawed conception of mission. The second is a deep suspicion of the primal vision that underpins authentic Christianity in the African context.

Historically, mission has moved from centres of Christianity to the periphery. Naturally, therefore, now that Africa has become a Christian heartland, mission should begin to move from Africa to revitalize and re-evangelize the West. But Lesslie Newbigin, following General Simatoupong of Indonesia, wondered, 'Can the West be converted?'⁶³ let alone by Africans.⁶⁴ In view of Article 5 of the Edinburgh 2010 Common Call,⁶⁵ the answer should be a resounding yes. Yet we cannot be so sanguine about this, considering Fidon Mwombeki's assessment of the difficulties in getting rid of old convictions:

61 Asamoah-Gyadu, "Drinking from Our Own Wells": The Primal Imagination and Christian Religious Innovation in Africa', *Journal of African Christian Thought* 11, no. 2 (December 2008): 34.

62 Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Drinking from Our Own Wells', 38.

63 Newbigin, 'Can the West Be Converted?' 2.

64 Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 53. According to Gerrie ter Haar, 'Europe is a continent that many Africans believe to have lost its original spiritual roots.' See Haar, *How God Became African*, 25.

65 Article 5 states, 'Affirming the importance of the biblical foundations of missional engagement and valuing the witness of the Apostles and martyrs, we are called to rejoice in the expression of the gospel in many nations all over the world. We celebrate the renewal experienced through movements of migration and mission in all directions, the way all are equipped for mission by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God's continual calling of children and young people to further the gospel.'

Many in the North still think their continent is not a mission field as it is Christian already; ... [the] North is not able to define what they need from [the] South, and talks of 'spirituality' do not make the term easy for them to define; Southern missionaries are stigmatised as 'economic migrants' only seeking fortunes in the North.⁶⁶

As Mwombeki points out here, many Western Christians still hold the rather self-deceptive, 19th-century Eurocentric view of the West as 'the Christian and fully missioned world', self-sufficient and independent of other parts of the world or mission fields.

Herein lies the crux of the matter, for the entire conception of mission remains bound up with a territorial and developmental idea of Christianity that extends back to the fourth and fifth centuries, when Christianity became associated with Roman civilization and its attendant cultural biases. Mission came to be seen as 'a movement from the superior to the inferior',⁶⁷ a notion amplified in the development of the idea of Christian Europe and a civilizing mission. The generally patronizing attitude towards the non-Western world remains widespread today, though the terms 'civilized' and 'barbarian' have been replaced by 'First World' and 'developing world' as ways of distinguishing who sits where in the ranking of global influence. The large overlap of these designations with 'fully missioned' and 'mission field' cannot be considered incidental. The persistence of this mentality is demonstrated in the derogatory stigmatization of African Christian 'missioners' from the 'developing world' as 'economic migrants' rather than 'carriers' of the gospel, notwithstanding the fact that some of the most vibrant Christian initiatives in the West are headed by Africans. Westerners still seem to believe that the West has some privileged place in the history of Christianity and remains the guardians and guarantors of what is authentically Christian. The persistence of this 'ethnocentric view of Christianity'⁶⁸ among Western Christians has led to a blurred vision of the marks of God's presence with his people (Acts 14:17).

This brings us to the second obstacle: Western suspicion of African primal spirituality. Africans have wholeheartedly embraced the symbols, Scriptures and traditions of historical Christianity, yet they have done so while building on the foundation of the continent's primal spirituality.⁶⁹ The resultant Africanized expressions of Christianity are not fully understood and often considered syncretistic, 'superstitious or involving forms of idolatry'.⁷⁰ The 'cultural arrogance of the Western mind which came to attach to the missionary movement'⁷¹ lingers and must be exorcised for it limits the potential of cross-cultural mission from Africa.

66 Mwombeki, 'Mission to the North', 116.

67 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 193.

68 Lamin Sanneh, 'The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7, no. 4 (October 1983): 170.

69 Haar, *How God Became African*, chapter 2.

70 Haar, *How God Became African*, 25.

71 Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 242.

The theological claim that Christianity provides the only true divine provision for reconciling all creation to God is central to our faith; but the idea that it is the *only* means by which any truth about God may be known is theologically and scripturally problematic. As C. S. Lewis admonished:

If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong all through. ... If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of truth. ... But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong.⁷²

Lewis here draws on the Christian doctrine of general revelation, which suggests that every people group has some measure of authentic religious truth written on their hearts. Paul insists that something may be known about God from his creative works (Rom 1:18–24), and that even pagan philosophers may express true knowledge of God's nature (Acts 17:28). For he has given all humans the desire to know of his eternal nature, even if they do not understand his actions (Eccl 3:11). Don Richardson argues that 'God who prepared the gospel for all people groups also prepared all people groups for the gospel' and hence 'folk religions' could fulfil an 'amazing role as allies of the gospel'.⁷³ This implies that truths about God as conceived in primal religiosity may not only deepen appropriation of the Christian faith but also enhance Christian comprehension of God.

African religious maxims are one source of such truths. For example, the Ewe (Ghanaian) maxim *Mawu metia na azi le azi me o* (God's goodness does not distinguish between peanuts) affirms that in God's relationship with all his creation, his actions are never discriminative. It mirrors the scriptural assertion of God's constant presence amongst all people in terms of his good deeds to all, as we see in Paul's preaching in Lystra. Paul asserted that although in the past all nations, including the West and Africa, did not know God, 'he has always given evidence of his existence by the good things he does' to sustain all life everywhere without discrimination (Acts 14:15–17). Similarly, in Athens, Paul's discourse explicitly records that even the Greek primal religiosity, which strongly upset him, left space for God's existence, though God was not fully known to them. From a mission perspective, this observed speck of truth about God in a primal religious imagination of a Gentile people became the starting point and catalyst of Paul's successful proclamation of Christ in the city (Acts 17:22–23). The faith of the resultant converts was a continuation and fulfilment of the old faith, albeit with a greater understanding of God, as expounded by Paul. They did not mix two different concepts of God nor conjoin a concept of two different gods in a syncretistic way. No. They were converted; their primal religious imagination, refracted through the prism of the gospel, recognized and upheld pointers to the Christian God.

It is not difficult to suggest that a change in Western Christianity's reservations about African spirituality could significantly enhance cross-cultural missionary outreach from Africa to the West. But how may this happen?

72 C. S. Lewis, 'The Rival Conceptions of God', in Gilbert H. Muller, *The McGraw-Hill Reader: Issues across the Disciplines*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 383.

73 Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2006), 101.

Towards African-Western cross-cultural mission: Changing Western views of African spirituality

Because of these persistent challenges, we are inclined to regard the changes in Western Christian self-understanding and attitudinal change towards Africans and African religions as still more theoretical than practical. Though there has been progress, a long period of development may be needed for most Christians in the West to come to a more than superficial appreciation of the cultural diversity in Christianity promoted effectively by African theologians in the twentieth century. How might this occur?

On the African side, we recognize that African Christianity needs 'deepening'⁷⁴ while maintaining its uniqueness of 'interpreting'⁷⁵ the positive values of primal consciousness with the gospel. We do not mean to suggest any special deficiency in African Christian thought vis-à-vis Western theology, but to recognize that for Africans to stand out indisputably as reliable pathfinders for the practice and theology of mission in the 21st century, the unique insights derived from African spirituality must be more fully developed, articulated and disseminated worldwide—which would increase the appreciation of its theological, not just numerical significance. In other words, it is important for Africans to 'develop such sense of certainty with regards to their own Christian faith'⁷⁶ and praxis that they will not simply overflow with missionary osmosis to the West, being the new centre of gravity for Christianity (like the Westerners who initiated mission to Africa in the 19th century), but will do so with deeply rooted confidence in the importance of Africa's contribution to Christian faith. In addition, appropriate contextual missionary preparation is essential if 'the "migrant-missionaries" are to carry out a cross-cultural mission which addresses the gospel to the particular context of Europe and North America today.'⁷⁷

On the Western side, there will need to be both recognition and repentance of the Eurocentric biases that still impact theological and missionary training. For example, the presentation of the history of the Western church as *the* story of Christianity in history, whilst side-lining the Christian histories of Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands, must be reconsidered. Few Christians in the West are aware of the continuous Christian history of many parts of Asia, or the long history of the church in sub-Saharan Africa, which inherently biases their perspective on the mission enterprise. Western theologies should be presented as the contextual theologies they truly are, rather than as the standard against which all others are to be measured. Greater attention should therefore be given in the curriculum to non-Western theologians, thinkers and methodologies. Books and commentaries by African authors, writing in and from the African context, should become part of the standard curriculum in Western theological education. These two changes alone would relativize how pastors, and ultimately congregations, see themselves within

74 Oxbrow and James, 'Forms of Missionary Engagement', 152.

75 Kwame Bediako, 'Scripture as Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition', *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4, no. 1 (June 2001): 2–11.

76 Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse, 'Christian Mission among Other Faiths: Giving Account of Our Hope', in Kim and Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010*, 213.

77 Ross, *Edinburgh 2010*, 56.

the mission history of the church, by situating the Western story as one among many of the important stories in that history.

To reiterate, there must also be a willingness to lay aside undue fear of the risk of syncretism when it comes to African Christianity. If building upon one's primal spirituality in the experience and expression of faith is syncretic, then Christianity everywhere is syncretic! African Christians draw on the resources of their existing primal spirituality in the same way that Paul models in Acts 17, to make the Christian faith their own. In this way, African Christians do not have two different religious experiences that are conjoined in a syncretistic way, but simply African cultural expressions of the same God translated into every culture.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the idea of mission itself needs to be reconsidered in the light of Scripture and history. The idea that mission flows from the centre to the margins, or from the higher to the lower, is in fact at odds with the New Testament. In New Testament times, mission was carried out by those on the margins of Roman society. The earliest churches were small groups of marginalized people who did not set out as missionaries, but merely bore lively witness to Jesus as they carried their faith along with them; they were the kind of persons who today might be characterized as 'economic migrants'. The idea of missions as a well-organized enterprise backed with substantial funding and commissioned to go to less developed parts of the world has been made possible only by the astonishing rise of Western economic and imperial power over the past 400 years. That era is over, and Christians must come to terms with it. As Christianity has grown in the two-thirds world and receded in the West, the faith now more closely mirrors what it was in the first century, with the vital centres of Christianity found among economically and politically marginalized people and places. The remnants of Christian cultural influence remain strong for now in the West, but Western Christians must begin to rapidly re-learn the lessons of marginalization in a society that takes neither them nor their faith claims seriously.

African Christians have lived out their faith for centuries in religiously plural societies, with Muslims, traditionalists and Christian believers sometimes all in the same family. As the West grows less Christian but more religiously diverse, it may look to African Christians for lessons on how to navigate this reality. The loss of institutional power lays bare the need to access supernatural sources of spiritual power for Christian witness. African Christians from the margins of global influence, who are still in touch with the primal spirituality that underlies Christian faith, are well positioned to help their Western counterparts make these vital connections.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have compared the environments surrounding the Edinburgh 1910 and 2010 world mission conferences to observe the extent of change in the attitudes of Western Christians towards Africans and African religions. Clearly, at the level of intellectual or theoretical discussion at these summits, we can see a huge change, indicated by increased participation of indigenous Africans in Edinburgh 2010 and a more positive self-understanding of Christianity as multi-cultural. Various factors, including increased knowledge of Africa thanks to the publication of secular and

theological African scholarship, have contributed to this positive change. However, in practice there remain some challenges, due to Western Christians' self-understanding and their resulting attitude towards Africans' primal religiosity and participation in mission. This situation will affect the cross-cultural affirmation of mission in the 21st century. Mission from the Global South to revitalize Christianity in the North in the years ahead will require appropriate Christian theologies of mission based on insights derived from African primal spirituality that not only resonate with Christian faith and life but also can help to recover those biblical truths that were abandoned inadvertently due to the limitations of Western Christian theology in the 19th century.⁷⁸ It will also require appropriate and adequate missionary training that encourages the formation of Christian scholarly thinking that draws on the positive features of African primal worldviews and spirituality.

78 Bediako, 'Primal Religion and Christian Faith', 14.

The Letter to Philemon: Its Background and Enduring Significance

James Reiher

Philemon is a short letter with a compelling—but implicit—story line. This article carefully investigates the main theories as to what lay behind the fascinating interaction of Paul, Philemon and Onesimus and identifies the contemporary applications we can make regardless of which theory is true.

Readers of the fascinating New Testament letter to Philemon tend to assume that Onesimus was a runaway slave who stole something from his master and then ran off. But how certain are those starting points?

Philemon barely appears in the early church fathers until Chrysostom in the late 300s. Tertullian mentioned it in a comment about Marcion's list of inspired books, and Origen reportedly wrote a commentary on it (which is no longer with us¹). Chrysostom is the first to have written a description of the background of this letter that remains extant.² Meanwhile, more recent scholarship has offered a number of different background reconstructions.

Onesimus: runaway slave who providentially bumped into Paul?

The most accepted version is Chrysostom's. He proposed that Onesimus, the central figure in the letter, was a slave (v. 16) and the legal property of Philemon. He had stolen something from his master (18) and run away. Trying to escape as far as possible, he landed in Rome while Paul was there under house arrest. Somehow the

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1 It is conceivable that Jerome's commentary in the late 300s is actually a mostly plagiarized version of Origen's. There are some good arguments for that position. See Ronald E. Heine, 'In Search of Origen's Commentary on Philemon', *Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 2 (2000): 117–33. Even so, we have no way to know where Jerome may have diverged from Origen or inserted his own thoughts.

2 Allen Dwight Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon: Toward an Alternative Argumentum', *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 4 (1993): esp. 365, 366. Margaret M. Mitchell, 'John Chrysostom on Philemon: A Second Look', *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 1 (1995): 135–48, challenged some of Callahan's claims; the same volume contains Callahan's reply.

two met and Paul shared the gospel message with Onesimus (10), who gave his life to Christ and then began assisting Paul's ministry (11, 13).

Paul knew that Onesimus was still the legal property of another man and felt both legally and morally obliged to send him back to his owner. Conveniently, Philemon was also a Christian who had been converted through Paul's preaching (19). So Paul sent Onesimus back with this letter. It is generally presumed that Philemon did accept him as a Christian brother (as requested in v. 16) and freed him as well (21) so that he could continue to minister with Paul.

But there are some problems with this traditional reconstruction. There is no reference to Onesimus being a runaway; no clear indication that he had stolen from Philemon (vv. 18 and 19 begin with 'if'); and doubts about whether or not he was even a slave at all (see below). Moreover, how on earth did Paul and Onesimus meet in Rome? As Carson and Moo declare, 'Such a coincidence seems more in keeping with a Dickens novel than with sober history.'³

A man who wanted Paul to mediate on his behalf?

That last problem can be addressed if we assume that Onesimus actually went to Rome to look for Paul. As a slave in Philemon's home, he had probably met Paul and had certainly heard his household speak about Paul. He would have known that Paul was in open imprisonment in Rome. Perhaps Onesimus did steal from Philemon and ran away, but then realized that he was in big trouble. Before he could be caught, returned and punished, he may have sought out Paul to mediate between himself and Philemon.

If Onesimus was not a slave but had some other problem with Philemon, then perhaps he went to Paul voluntarily. If he was a slave, there were legal precedents permitting slaves to flee their home and seek sanctuary in another person's house. That person would then have been obligated to intercede, seeking to reconcile the slave and his or her master. If those efforts failed, the host would sell the slave at the market and give the money received to the original owner.⁴

If indeed the meeting between Paul and Onesimus was planned, then Onesimus got more than he went there for: he also found a personal faith in Christ and a new life of service to God and others, working with Paul.

A slave of Archippus, not Philemon?

John Knox (not the Scottish reformer) proposed almost a century ago⁵ that Archippus, not Philemon, was the actual owner of the slave and that he personally sent Onesimus to Paul. The letter before us shows Paul returning him to his owner, but with Paul's main goal being that Archippus should free the slave and send him back permanently to work with Paul.

3 D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2005), 590.

4 Erwin R. Goodenough, 'Paul and Onesimus', *Harvard Theological Review* 22, no. 2 (1929): 181–83.

5 John Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul*, 2nd ed. (New York: Abington, 1959; originally published in 1935).

This theory then links Colossians with Philemon and suggests that the exhortation to Archippus in Colossians 4:17 to fulfil his ministry ('the work you received in the Lord') is actually another reminder to free Onesimus. Knox also contends that Philemon was freed and became a bishop (a claim that many accept⁶). He adds that Philemon ended up in the canon of Scripture because Bishop Onesimus, who helped put the canon together, wanted to preserve the letter about himself.

The sexually abused slave?

Joseph Marchal proposes a more extreme scenario, suggesting that the letter needs to be placed in the context of the sexual practices of Greek and Roman slave owners, who used their slaves for sexual gratification.⁷ He assumes that Paul and the converted Philemon happily practised the same sexual behaviours as pagan Gentiles of the time, and he suggests that Paul was using Onesimus in that way.

Marchal does demonstrate that slaves of both genders were commonly and regularly used for the sexual pleasure of slave owners.⁸ He shows how the word 'useful' (v. 11) could be used euphemistically of slaves, referring to their sexual obligations to their masters. Because Paul used the same word in his pun about Onesimus' name (which actually means 'useful'), this becomes evidence that Onesimus was 'good for use' as a slave, and thus 'easy to use' sexually—for the letter's addressee, other community members and even Paul himself.⁹

Marchal's thesis, however, is seriously flawed. It assumes that Paul, raised a Pharisee with strict moral codes, who encouraged sexual purity and even celibacy after his Christian conversion, partook of upper-class pagan Greek and Roman practices. This seems inconceivable for the person who wrote about focusing on the Spirit and not on the flesh, setting one's mind on things above, and counting others better than oneself. How could Paul teach that there was to be no distinction between slave and free (Gal 3:28) and then use slaves for sexual pleasure? Moreover, Marchal does not take into account the likelihood that a common word such as 'useful' could be used in very different ways depending on the context.

6 Ignatius' *Epistle to the Ephesians* 1.1, 6 mentions a local bishop who happens to be named Onesimus. Many have speculated that this could be the person mentioned in Philemon. Ignatius' letter comes from the same general geographic location, and if the Onesimus in Philemon was about 20 or 25 years old at the time of Paul's letter (approximately 61 AD), then he would have been about 70 or 75 in the year 110, when Ignatius' material is usually dated. From this connection, it is extrapolated that Onesimus was freed by Philemon and rose to become the local bishop. In the early church, slaves could be church leaders even while remaining slaves; Constantine would ban the practice in the 300s. So we don't have to assume that he was freed and then became a bishop. Nevertheless, most likely he was freed in response to Paul's requests.

7 Joseph Marchal, 'The Usefulness of an Onesimus: The Sexual Use of Slaves and Paul's Letter to Philemon', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 4 (2011): 749–70. See also Jennifer A. Glancy, 'The Sexual Use of Slaves: A Response to Kyle Harper on Jewish and Christian *Porneia*', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134, no. 1 (2015): 215–29.

8 Marchal, 'The Usefulness of an Onesimus', 752.

9 Marchal, 'The Usefulness of an Onesimus', 761.

Brother of Philemon rather than slave?

Allen Callahan¹⁰ offers a very different backdrop, proposing that Onesimus was not a runaway slave at all but the younger, estranged brother of Philemon. After all, there is certainly no mention at all of him being a runaway in this letter.¹¹ And the one verse that uses the word 'slave' (v. 16) can be interpreted in a non-literal way.

Regarding verse 16, Callahan argues that the Greek word '*hos*' (as) indicates that Philemon treated Onesimus at times as one might treat a slave, but also that he was not an actual slave. Rather, he was simply viewed as if he were a slave. Callahan seeks to strengthen his view by referring to the same word in verse 17 when Paul asks Philemon to accept him 'as' (*hos*) he would accept Paul.¹² That latter use of *hos* can't be literally Paul, so neither is the former use of *hos* literally a slave.

Callahan's highlights verse 16b, where Onesimus is sent back to Philemon no longer as a slave but as a 'beloved brother ... both in the flesh and in the Lord'. To Callahan, these phrases indicate physical and spiritual brotherhood.

For Paul, then, it is time to end the feud between brothers. As Callahan summarizes, 'In this short diplomatic epistle Paul attempted deftly to heal a rift not between errant slave and irate master, but between estranged Christian brothers.'¹³

The phrases 'in the flesh' and 'in the Lord' are certainly significant. Paul often used 'flesh' to reflect on the carnal nature of the human condition without Christ. But such a use does not make sense here. Onesimus is now in Christ (he is *not* being sent back 'in the flesh' as a sinner in need of Christ). So what does 'in the flesh' mean here?

Consider the use of *sarx* by Paul in Galatians 4:23. In comparing the children of Sarah and Hagar, Paul says that 'the son born of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh (*sarx*) and the son born of the freed woman through the promise.' He is making a biological and spiritual comparison in Galatians, and for the biological child, Paul used *sarx*.¹⁴

10 Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon'.

11 John G. Nordling has made the point that Onesimus might have been a runaway, but that Paul wisely did not highlight that in his letter seeking reconciliation. It might hinder the purpose of the letter to keep this fact at the forefront of Philemon's mind. See Nordling, 'Some Matters Favouring the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon', *Neotestamentica* 44, no. 1 (2010): esp. 88, 89. Nordling sees a number of subtle clues in the letter that lead him to conclude that Onesimus *was* a runaway slave. Various words and phrases are compared to other words and phrases in ancient documents that relate to slaves in high positions stealing from their masters.

12 Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', 362.

13 Callahan, 'Paul's Epistle to Philemon', 371.

14 Mitchell, 'John Chrysostom on Philemon', 135–48, rebuts some of Callahan's views about Chrysostom but does not actually prove that Callahan's main thesis is flawed. Mitchell shows that other early church writings reveal a similar acceptance of the runaway slave backdrop. She cites Athanasius, Basil and other writings from the 300s, demonstrating that they too assumed that the relationship was master and slave. Her citations, however, do not prove that Onesimus was *definitely* a slave; they simply prove that by the fourth century, theologians were starting to say as much. Mitchell acknowledges this in her conclusion. Heine, 'In Search of Origen's Commentary', adds to her argument by contending that Jerome's commentary is probably, in large part, Origen's lost commentary plagiarized, in which case the slave hypothesis was likely circulating in the late 200s as well.

The relevance of Philemon today

Whatever view of the background of this letter we accept, certain facts are reasonably clear. Paul was writing to Philemon about Onesimus, asking that he might be accepted back as a brother, rather than 'as a slave'. Paul would have preferred to have Onesimus stay and continue to work with him in Rome. Perhaps it was part of Paul's secondary agenda to get Philemon to allow that. Nevertheless, Paul was sending him back with this letter, trusting that it would facilitate a peaceful reconciliation between Onesimus and Philemon.

So how do we bring this brief letter to bear on our modern situation? I have several suggestions.

1. *It demonstrates how we might respond to structural evils that are not going away any time soon.*

We live in a society full of structural evil. If you understand Philemon to be a letter about a slave, then it is especially relevant to that context. The powers that be are often in the pocket of other powers in society. Consider structural systems that perpetuate racism and sexism. Reflect on the structures that hinder effective work to aid the poorest and most vulnerable. Note the ongoing destruction of the environment, and of specific animal species that God created and enjoyed, and about which he declared, "This is good!" Or consider structures that give advantages and great wealth to those who are already wealthy and perpetuate disadvantage for the poor. We live in a damaged world where selfishness, materialism and racism frequently dominate.

Paul undermined the structural evils of his day by teaching Christ-followers to live differently *within* the structures. He told slaves to work hard and honestly, and he told slave owners to treat their slaves well. He instructed slaves, 'If you get your chance at freedom: take it!' (1 Cor 7:21) but he also told them to live well as slaves, as if serving Christ (Col 3:23). Paul called on Philemon to 'do more than I am asking', which sounds a lot like freeing Onesimus.

We can live well too. We don't have to live polluting lives. We can 'think globally and act locally'. We might choose a more fuel-efficient car or even use public transport instead. We might live conscious lives of reuse, repair and recycle rather than replacing things. We might join local or national or international conservation groups and do what we can, in our small corner of the world, to make the world a better place. We might support groups that fight against structural evil. We can consciously avoid sexist and racist language and treat all people well. We can call out sexism and racism when we see it. We can rise above the imperfect structures we live under and demonstrate a better way to those around us.

2. *Philemon shows us, and teaches us by example, to be a voice for the voiceless.* The letter is an example of advocacy for someone who would normally have no voice. This is especially so if Onesimus was a slave going back to an owner who felt he had been wronged somehow. The application would still be valid if Paul was advocating for a younger brother who, in the family structure of those times, had considerably less power than the firstborn.

Paul spoke up for Onesimus and asked a person with power *not* to do what he could legally have done—to punish the runaway slave (or an estranged brother who might have stolen from the family) severely. Letters from a third party pleading for

reconciliation between two other parties were not uncommon in the ancient world. Paul plays that role here.

Paul is someone with power in this story. He was a respected apostle who could tell Christ-followers what to do, and he uses his position to appeal on behalf of one without power (Onesimus), to a third party (Philemon). That third party also had power over the one being advocated for (as his master or older brother). Paul was doing what Proverbs 31:8–9 encourages us to do: ‘Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.’

3. *The letter shows us how costly it can be to truly live for Christ.* It is also a beautiful example of living in a Christ-like way in real life, and what it costs someone. Philemon is being asked to forgive someone who seems to have wronged him. Onesimus (as a slave or a brother) perhaps stole from him and then ran off. Paul is asking the offended person to forgive and be reconciled to the offender. If the slave scenario is correct, then to ‘do more than I even ask’ probably means freeing Onesimus, which would be a costly sacrifice for Philemon. If the actual scenario was between brothers, then ‘doing more than I ask’ probably means not just accepting him back and forgiving him but doing so from the heart.

However one interprets the story, Philemon will be out of pocket at the end of it. If he forgives the debt of a runaway slave and thief, he accepts a financial cost. If he accepts back and forgives his younger brother who has somehow offended and perhaps stolen from him, there is still at least an emotional cost. As a mature Christian, Philemon is expected to see that everyone, including himself, will benefit from his forgiveness.

4. *The letter reminds us to always put others before our own personal desires.* It demonstrates how, in a Christian community or church, we should consider others before ourselves. As Paul wrote, ‘Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others’ (Phil 2:3–4).

The letter to Philemon shows how all parties involved are exhorted to act and live in that way. Paul would clearly like to have Onesimus stay with him. He has developed a good friendship with him, and the younger man is proving useful to him in his ministry. By offering to send Onesimus back to Philemon, Paul is sacrificing his own desire and need, granting Philemon the freedom to make the final decision.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Onesimus, by agreeing to return, sacrifices his own safety to try to make things right with his legal owner (or brother), who could pursue legal action to cover an actual or perceived debt. In this way, he considers others before himself. Finally, Philemon is asked to sacrifice his personal interest and investment in Onesimus for

15 Arguably, some of Paul’s comments place considerable pressure on Philemon to release Onesimus back to Paul. See Chris Frilingos, “‘For My Child, Onesimus’: Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 1 (2000): 91–104. Frilingos goes further than I might when he argues that Paul was deliberately using manipulative language (especially family terminology of ‘brother’, ‘son’ and ‘old man’) to impel Philemon to truly forgive and accept Onesimus. Frilingos suggests that since this letter would also be read to the house church, Paul is effectively shaming Philemon to accept Onesimus back without punishment.

the work of ministry. He is free to make his own decision, but Paul expects him to abide by the same principle that he (Paul) and Onesimus are applying.

5. *It is a beautiful picture of family fractures being healed.* What can we do when two members of the same family have a deep and significant falling out? In this short, ancient letter, we see one possible strategy. A neutral third party whom both sides respect is brought into the arena to serve as umpire, negotiator and mediator, seeking to achieve reconciliation and healing. Paul, who was respected by both parties, did all he could (especially considering that he was confined to open imprisonment in Rome), writing a careful, gentle, perhaps a bit manipulative letter to the party with the most power to change the situation. He sought to persuade Philemon to behave as Christ himself would behave. He challenged Philemon to live up to the highest ideals of love and forgiveness, even if he had a genuine grievance against the other.

6. *The letter reminds us that people can change.* If we ever tire of the hard-heartedness of some around us, if we ever feel that we want to wash our hands of that annoying co-worker, or if we are tempted to give up on someone, we should read Philemon and see how Onesimus was changed. People whom we know today can change too. It might take years; it might not happen until after we are dead and gone. Always hope and pray, remembering the story of Onesimus.

7. *Finally, this letter is a figurative picture of the gospel of grace.* Onesimus is like you and me—imperfect and flawed, a sinner in need of reconciliation and forgiveness. Paul, in this analogy, is like Christ, finding the lost sheep and bringing safely into the flock. Onesimus was lost but then was found and shown love and mercy. Paul (similar to Christ in this comparison) took the slave's sins upon himself when he assured Philemon that he would pay him all that Onesimus owed him (v. 19a). Church history and tradition tell us that Onesimus *was* forgiven, embraced and welcomed into the family of Philemon, no longer as a slave but as a brother (v. 16). You and I have also been welcomed into the family of God, despite our failings and our imperfections. We have been embraced and forgiven and accepted.

Of course, Paul is nowhere near as perfect, wonderful or unique as Christ, and his offer to cover the debt of Onesimus is just a woefully small example of what Christ did for us. But I hope you get the picture and can see at least some of the beauty of the gospel message in this real-life story.

The wonderful story of Onesimus encourages us to maintain hope that people can change; advocate for those without a voice; and seek to live in a Christ-like way in the midst of unjust structures that we can't change singlehandedly.

Locust Attacks in India and in the Book of Joel: Are They the Same?

D. Apostle

COVID-19 and other natural threats have intensified speculation amongst various Christian groups as to whether ‘the end is near’. This article responds to one recent set of speculations, following the severe locust attacks of 2020 in India and parts of Africa, and suggests a more reasoned response to the question of whether they fulfil Joel’s prophecies.

Along with the COVID-19 pandemic, India was also shaken last year by an invasion of desert locusts. In May and early June 2020, swarms of locusts were sighted in urban areas of the north-western state of Rajasthan, which is extremely unusual. Swarms were also reported in the states of Madhya Pradesh (in central India) and the western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat.¹ Normally, locust sightings in India occur from July to October along the border with Pakistan. But in 2019 and 2020, parts of western Rajasthan and northern Gujarat reported swarms that caused damage to agricultural crops.² These were the worst locust infestations seen in India in decades.

The desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) is a short-horned (acridic) grasshopper.³ Innocuous when in a solitary state, locusts undergo a behavioural change when their population builds up rapidly.⁴ These insects can consume crops to such an extent that they threaten a region’s food security if not controlled. Under certain climatic and environmental conditions, locusts experience a sudden rise in serotonin levels and start breeding in extreme numbers, forming large swarms. India has not traditionally been susceptible to large locust invasions.⁵

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1 Jacob Koshy, ‘The Hindu Explains: Why Is the Locust Surge Posing a Threat to Agriculture in India?’ *The Hindu*, 31 May 2020, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert454da1>.

2 Mahesh Langa, ‘Massive Locust Invasion Threatens Gujarat Farmers’, *The Hindu*, 26 December 2019, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert454da2>.

3 ‘Desert Locusts’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, updated 2 May 2020, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert454da3>.

4 Parthasarathi Biswas, ‘Locust Plague Explained: Why Locusts Are Being Sighted in Urban Areas, What It Can Mean for Crops’, *Indian Express*, 29 May 2020, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert454da4>.

5 ‘Locust Attack in India’, 27 May 2020, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/ert454da5>. See also Biswas, ‘Locust Plague Explained.’

As of 2018, agriculture employed more than half of the total Indian workforce and contributed 17–18 percent of the country's GDP.⁶ Agriculture is the broadest economic sector in the Indian economy and the primary source of livelihood for 58 percent of the Indian population.⁷ Accordingly, the attack by desert locusts in 2020, in combination with COVID-19, represented a double assault on the backbone of India's economy. Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan—the states most heavily affected by the locust invasion—produce about one-quarter of the nation's crops. An Indian environmental ministry official called it a very badly timed infestation, considering that by October 2020, India ranked second globally amongst the countries most severely affected by the pandemic.

The locust attacks of 2020, in combination with the pandemic, led to the proliferation of apocalyptic theological interpretations amongst many Christians, especially independent pastors and church members, as they compared these catastrophes to the anticipated eschatological day of the Lord.⁸ The message communicated by local independent churches has caused many people to view God as punishing people for their sin. Moreover, the locust invasion has been compared to the locust swarms mentioned in the Old Testament book of Joel, where the locusts represent a form of judgement from God. Hence, it has become important to approach the locust attacks in India from a biblical point of view. Is this a sign of punishment from God, as indicated in the book of Joel, or a common natural disaster that has nothing to do with eschatology?

In this article, I provide an exegetical analysis of the book of Joel, as a basis for a theological solution to our present situation. To make proper application to our present time, we must first understand the background of locusts in the book of Joel, along with other Old Testament events in which locusts are identified as a plague (such as the plagues of the book of Exodus), and the message conveyed by the original authors.

Locusts in the book of Joel

The prophetic book of Joel contains very little personal information about its author. He identifies himself as the son of Pethuel (Joel 1:1) and preaches his prophetic message to the people of Judah. Apart from his father's name, there is no mention of his background in the book as he quickly moves on to deliver God's message. The names of biblical prophets often possess unique significance; the name Joel is derived from *yô'el*, a Standard Hebrew name, *Yo 'el* in Tiberian Hebrew,⁹ meaning 'Yahweh is God'.¹⁰

6 Sushruth Sunder, 'Farmers Gain as Agriculture Mechanisation Speeds Up, but More R&D Needed', *Financial Express*, 29 January 2018, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da6>.

7 India Brand Equity Foundation, 'Agriculture in India: Information about Indian Agriculture and Its Importance', n.d., <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da7>.

8 Jashodhara Mukherjee, 'End of the World? Indians Are Convinced That the Bible Warned Us about Locust Attacks', *News18*, 28 May 2020, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da8>.

9 Behind the Name, 'Meaning, Origin and History of the Name Joel', n.d., <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da9>.

10 Paul J. Achtemeier, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne Press, 1996), 532.

This first verse can suggest two perspectives from which this prophetic book can be viewed. First, we can see Joel as wanting all his readers to consider his message as God's message, given not by him but by God. The second perspective is that these truths are given by God for the benefit of the people. These two perspectives make Joel a scribe or tool for writing down God's word, while God himself is the true original author of the book. Therefore, Joel is claiming to deliver God's message, not just his own words, for the benefit of the people. Thus, the prophetic book of Joel is not only inspired by God but also narrated by God's own words to deliver his message to the people.

Joel's message drew wide attention in Judah as he often used natural imagery: the sun, the moon, grass and locusts. His message was not only for adults but also for children and those not yet born (Joel 1:3); in other words, it was for everyone in Judah. But his messages should not always be interpreted in a literal sense, because they carried symbolic meanings, using words that capture the depth of devastation and the urgency of the situation.¹¹ Joel describes the apocalypse that is about to happen and emphasizes the grief it will bring to the priests and other ministers of God (1:13). The book depicts a plague of locusts under the Old Testament covenant as a type of the day of the Lord (1:4, 15–16).

Joel personifies the army of locusts (Joel 2:2), likening them to a great army, the most magnificent one ever seen on earth. He creates a terrifying picture of horror, grief and sadness in the people's minds before presenting his apocalyptic message, calling on them to be prepared for the tragedy and disaster that will take place. His presentation leaves his readers in a state of abject surrender and with a sense of hopeless agony.

The apocalyptic message about the locusts starts with the anticipated disaster for agricultural crops in Judah (Joel 1:4). The effects include damage to the people's food and occupations. As noted above, an individual locust poses no threat, but when they appear as swarms, it is difficult to control or destroy them.

Given the locust devastation that Joel describes, the final day of the Lord must be even worse for the impenitent. The locusts blanketing the region are depicted as a day of clouds and darkness (Joel 2:2); their arrival is compared to the mighty army of the Lord that will spread across the earth. For Joel, locusts are a warning of the upcoming invasion. The scenario of darkening clouds and smoke seems to be similar to that of Jesus Christ's foreshadowing of the events of the day of his return (cf. Matthew 24:30).¹² Like other prophets who discuss the day of the Lord as both a current event and a future occasion in which God metes out his final judgement on evil, Joel presents the locust's invasion as a day of the Lord that hints at a more noteworthy final day to come which is far worse than this (Joel 15; also see Ezek 7:19; Obad 15; Mal 4:1–5).¹³ The message that the present generation people can take from Joel is 'Be faithful to God and abide in him, for if you don't, the future arrival of the Lord will be far worse than the locusts' invasion.'

11 Mike Fuhrer, 'What Is Joel 2 Really About?' *Forerunner*, March-April 2015, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da10>.

12 Michael Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb: Interpreting Key Images in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 84.

13 Ligonier Ministries, 'Joel and the Locust Invasion', n.d., <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da11>.

The plague of locusts as the wrath of God in the exodus event

A plague of locusts covers the land and strips every living green thing bare. Joel's message about a locust attack was most likely presented during the reign of Joash (835–796 BC), because of the consideration of social and political conditions of the nation that are mentioned in the book. According to Henry T. Fowler, the fact that Joel does not refer to any king or princes, though he enumerates numerous groups such as farmers, elders and priests, leads to the possible implication that he belonged to the period of Joash's reign, when the monarchy was held in tutelage by the community of the priests.¹⁴

Locusts also appear as one of the ten plagues of Egypt in the book of Exodus. Exodus 10 explains elaborately a plague of locusts sent by God to punish the Egyptian Pharaoh and his people, in order to convince them to permit the Israelites to depart from slavery and also as a response to their ill treatment of the Israelites, presumably forcing them to worship the pagan gods that the Egyptians were worshipping. Despite this rebuke, Pharaoh refused to submit to the mighty God, the true eternal King and creator of the earth. Biblically, the thing God hates most is sin, and sin is anything that contradicts God's character.¹⁵ Humans are created in the image of God to think and live in accordance with God's desires; whoever harms other creatures of God, especially his chosen people, is subject to God's anger.

Joel views the anticipated locust attack as destruction sent by almighty God to judge the people for their sins. Therefore, he creates a kind of panic situation by mentioning the word 'locusts', which would immediately cause the Israelites to remember the plague that destroyed the fields in Egypt. He depicts the attack vividly: 'Swarm after swarm of locusts settled on the crops; what one swarm left, the next swarm devoured' (1:4).

Joel presents the impending locust attack as a warning to the people of Judah. He uses fear as a tool to lead the people to repent, give up their immoral living, return to the reverence of God and seek his forgiveness.

God used locusts to send a warning to the people of Judah

The works of God are wondrous, astonishing, marvellous and mysterious to human understanding. It is very difficult to understand his signs and wonders for he is transcendent, possessing knowledge and power that lie beyond human knowledge and the physical laws of nature. As in the locust plagues, God often reveals himself or his anger in the form of elements of nature that he created. God is the supreme creator of the world and has the power to control and direct it. This is beautifully expressed by David: 'He sends hail like gravel; no one can endure the cold he sends! Then he gives a command, and the ice melts; he sends the wind, and the water flows' (Ps 147:17–18).

In many other passages of Scripture, God uses nature and living things to show his anger and to punish. The great flood in Noah's time and Job 37:13, for example,

14 Henry T. Fowler, 'The Chronological Position of Joel among the Prophets', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 16, no. 1–2 (1897): 147–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3268873>.

15 Henry Syn, *Systematic Theology: A Comprehensive Biblical Doctrine* (Simi Valley, CA: World Mission Publication Press, 2001), 519.

indicate that God sometimes brings storms to punish people. God caused the disobedient prophet Jonah's ship to be buffeted by a storm. On the other hand, in some cases God prevents living things from harming those who abide in his word, such as when he protected Daniel from the lions (Daniel 6:22).

However, as we will see further below, these examples do not permit us to equate theological interpretations of locusts of Joel and in India. This is because of differences of context between Joel's prophetic literature and today.

Theological and scientific perspective on locust attacks

Amongst the ten plagues of Exodus, the locusts and hail are the two that directly affect vegetation. They represent God's ability to affect resources that people need for their daily survival. Crops and wheat are the important essential food ingredients for most people living in Asia today. By feeding on this vegetation, the locusts take one of the most essential things needed for human subsistence.

If the government does not try to kill the locusts, then they will destroy all the crops. If the insects are attacked with fire, then people will lose crops to the fire. Moreover, modern pesticides have the capacity to kill these insects, but they too lead to the poisoning and contamination of crops, as pesticides contain various hazardous substances. Apart from this, 98 percent of sprayed insecticides and 95 percent of herbicides fall on places other than their target species, because they are sprayed or spread across entire agricultural fields.¹⁶

Egypt during the time of Pharaoh had very rich agricultural lands, but God destroyed them because of the Egyptians' sins. Joel prophesies similar damage to Judah's crops if the people continued to live in their sin. He describes this disaster and its impact on Judah's agriculture with sorrow: 'Grieve, you farmers; cry, you that take care of the vineyards, because the wheat, the barley, yes, all the crops are destroyed' (Joel 1:17).

Prophetic, cultural and literary differences between Judah and India

The destructive message mentioned by Joel is directly applicable only to Judah, as the prophet clearly mentions that his message is given by God for the people of Judah and as the specific description of the locust invasion implies. The invasion is described with the metaphor of a cloud, as if the locusts are darkening the sky (Joel 2:2). It may also symbolize the upcoming Babylonian invasion, which toppled the kingdom of Judah in 586 BC.

We may be tempted to attribute similar meaning to the locust invasion of India, but there are many differences. Primarily, this infestation is a matter of geographic proximity to Africa and Pakistan rather than an instance of God targeting a particular country. Locusts were first spotted in East Africa in 2019¹⁷ and then

16 George Tyler Miller, *Sustaining the Earth: An Integrated Approach* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2004), 211.

17 ReliefWeb, 'Horn of Africa: Locust Infestation—Oct. 2019', <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da12>.

travelled across Saudi Arabia to Pakistan and eventually to India.¹⁸ Scientists had already issued warnings regarding the locust swarms before their arrival in India.

Considering all these contextual elements and a sensitive exegesis of biblical texts leads us to the conclusion that the locust invasion in India cannot be given the same theological or eschatological meaning as that described by Joel.

The prophet's call to repentance as a solution

Even though the locusts mentioned in the book of Joel and the modern locust invasion in India are not theologically equivalent, the message of judgement and deliverance contained in this prophetic book can be applied to India. The book of Joel serves as a warning, not only to Judah but also to India and all other nations, that 'the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come' (Joel 1:15). The message of repentance in Joel is identical to that uttered centuries later by John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Joel says, 'Repent unto me, declares Yahweh' (Joel 2:12); John the Baptist and Jesus Christ said, 'Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand/near' (Matthew 3:2; 4:17).

Although God is widely seen as a God of justice and judgement in the Old Testament, he was also a God of forgiveness towards Judah. The Old Testament God is frequently acknowledged to be a God of justice and forgiveness¹⁹—punishing people for their sins and at the same time forgiving people if they turned away from their sins, such as the people of Nineveh.

The phrase 'Blow a trumpet in Zion' (Joel 2:1) is usually interpreted as referring to an announcement made from towers in the city walls, by which the trumpet blowers alert the city to impending danger. They are analogous to the sirens used today to warn residents of the threat of a tsunami, earthquake or flood. God here offers an insight regarding how the world will react to the arrival of the Son of Man, whose presence will be as terrifying as the events of which sirens warn.

Joel places great importance on the doctrine of repentance (2:12) and emphasizes this point beautifully by presenting Yahweh as calling to the people. The repentance that the prophet asks of Israel is accompanied by the promise of forgiveness. Joel begs them to turn away from their sinful desires and life and ask for forgiveness, in the hope that God will save their lands, crops and farms (2:14). In the same way, if the people of India turn away from their immorality, unbelief, unholiness and idol worship and ask God for forgiveness, God is always ready to display mercy and grace and to forgive them, because he loves his people as he loves his Son, Jesus Christ.

God restores fertility to the land

By July 2020, there was no sign of locusts in north India. It would be easy to conclude that the locusts had eaten all they wanted and move on. But the second half of Joel 2 suggests a second possible explanation: God always shows concern for the land and mercy to all the people he created, regardless of their spiritual status. He is a

18 ReliefWeb, 'The Locust Crisis: The World Bank's Response', 27 April 2020, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da13>.

19 James M. Arlandson, 'The Wrath of God in the Old Testament: "The Law Brings Wrath"', Bible.org, 2014, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da14>.

compassionate God who shows his everlasting love to all living things, especially humans whom He created in his image and likeness.

'I will remove the locust army that came from the north and will drive some of them into the desert' (Joel 2:20). Although this verse was a promise to the people of Judah, it was also fulfilled, in a way, in India in 2020. The locust invasion came from the north (Pakistan) and ravaged crops in parts of northern and central India. In Joel 2:20, God promised to drive some of the locusts into the Judean desert, which lies east of Jerusalem and descends to the Dead Sea; in India, the green locusts moved on into the Thar desert in Rajasthan state.

As in Joel, God has made the locusts disappear in the desert so that he can restore fertility to the affected lands in India and give the people a chance to turn away from their sins. Similarly, after the great flood in Genesis, God restored the world's fertility and livability.

Conclusion

According to Joel, the day of the Lord was a future event marking the climax of world history, brought about by God's personal visit to the earth. The most important feature of this anticipated day, however, is its complexity.²⁰ Joel also describes how nature would be affected by the locusts' invasion as a sign of the Lord's coming (Joel 2:1–3, 30–31). The day of the Lord is characterized as a day of darkness, gloom and judgement (Joel 2:2). The resignification of this apocalyptic expectation can be found in Jesus' parable of a seed's growth and the kingdom of God (Mark 4:29), which involves the positive aspect of the day of Yahweh that pertains to his rule in Zion (Joel 4:17, 18, 21) rather than to the destruction of his enemies.²¹

Locusts appear again as one of the final seven plagues in the last days, like horses prepared for battle, emerging out of smoke on the earth to inflict torture on the unbelieving people (Revelation 9:3, 5, 7). In all these references, the locusts are mentioned as a sign of the imminent arrival of the Lord.

The coronavirus outbreak, coupled with multiple other disastrous events—the devastating cyclone Amphan in May 2020, floods in Karnataka and Mumbai, and an alarming locust attack—has caused many Christians in India to think that the eschatological day of the Lord may not be far off. However, no one can predict eschatology, God's judgement or the second coming of Christ, as this information is known only to God the Father (Mk 13:32). It is very important to interpret the prophetic books in a careful manner, applying the rules of hermeneutics to grasp the original intended meaning without distorting the essence of Scripture. By doing so, we can avoid wrong theology. Like all prophetic books, Joel should be read and interpreted from the author's perspective, and the details, signs and symbols must be applied to other contexts with great caution, as the entire book was initially addressed to a particular community of people, the Israelites.

20 David Bast, 'Joel: Prophet of Repentance', *Words of Hope*, 1 February 1998, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/ert454da15>.

21 John Strazichich, *Joel's Use of Scripture and the Scripture's Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 441.

Whereas many of Joel's prophetic statements referred to a specific time period, the main message of the book is timeless, emphasizing hope in God's deliverance in times of struggle when we call to the Lord for protection (Joel 2:32).

Book Reviews

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Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity

**Matthew Emerson, Christopher Morgan and
R. Lucas Stamps (eds.)**

Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020

Pb., 371 pp., foreword, index

*Reviewed by Andrew Messmer, Academic Dean, Seminario Teológico de Sevilla;
Associated Professor, Facultad Internacional de Teología IBSTE; Affiliated
Researcher, Evangelische Theologische Fakultät*

The editors of this volume have attempted to situate Baptist faith and practice within the historic Christian tradition, as well as placing current Baptist faith and practice within the historic Baptist tradition. To this end, along with brief introductions and conclusions, they have included 15 chapters on different topics, plus an appendix by the influential moderate Baptist theologian Steven Harmon. The book is not divided into sections, but the beginning chapters follow a typical creedal structure, with later ones covering practical and current issues.

The first chapter is on Christian unity. After a summary of the Bible's teaching, Christopher Morgan and Kristen Ferguson show that, although 17th-century Baptist confessions discussed unity, no such confession has done so since the mid-18th century. Next, Rhyné Putnam treats *sola Scriptura* and the use of creeds, showing that Baptists in the 17th century used creeds but that by the 19th century they preferred a 'No creed but the Bible' posture.

Malcolm B. Yarnell III successfully demonstrates that Baptist confessions over the last four centuries have used classical trinitarian language. However, he also

states that John Gill's 18th-century work on the Trinity remains the most mature presentation available among Baptists.

R. Lucas Stamps addresses classic Christology in chapter 4. After a summary of patristic teaching on the topic, he shows how 17th-century General and Particular Baptists depended on patristic teaching and mimicked their language.

Chapter 5 discusses classical ecclesiology along the four traditional marks of one, holy, catholic and apostolic. After a biblical and historical summary, W. Madison Grace II attempts to demonstrate that Baptist confessions—especially those of the 17th century—have always highlighted these same marks. However, the lack of verbal and structural similarities between the four marks and the Baptist confessions' passages on ecclesiology, as well as the Baptist emphases on baptism and sanctification, limit the argument considerably.

Patrick Schreiner provides a fairly straightforward treatment of the nature and interpretation of Scripture, with Baptists fitting in quite well. Taylor Worley discusses corporate worship, showing the parallels and differences between first-century Christians and 17th-century Baptists and arguing that Baptist values are consistent with reclaiming historical liturgical practices.

Matthew Emerson, in chapter 8, covers baptism. After a brief historical summary through the Reformation, he discusses 16th-century Anabaptist and 17th-century Baptist traditions. His conclusion that Baptists retained the theology of baptism while reforming its practice is only partially correct, since they also reformed part of the theology and recovered its ancient practice.

Michael Haykin (chapter 9) demonstrates that whereas 16th- and 17th-century Baptists held to a more Calvinistic view of the Lord's Supper, those in the 19th and 20th centuries held to a Zwinglian view. Dustin Bruce discusses classical spirituality and argues that Baptists such as John Bunyan and Charles Spurgeon are good Baptist examples of the broader Christian tradition.

Chapters 11 through 14 turn to issues that are either specific to the Southern Baptist Convention (denominational structures and evangelicalism) or current topics (global Christianity and racial tension). Finally, Jason Duesing discusses Baptist contributions to theology and argues that 'Landmarkism' has been an unhelpful contribution, whereas church health and religious liberty have been helpful ones.

This book is significant because it is written by conservative Baptists who are seeking to identify themselves as part of the greater church, and thus it will be of interest to Baptists and ecumenists alike. They describe themselves as part of a renewal (Baptists) within a renewal (Protestantism). Although not ideal as a stand-alone textbook for most Bible college and seminary classes, the work could serve as a helpful complement. Also, many Baptist pastors and theologians interested in 'Baptist catholicity' will benefit greatly from this work.

Two limitations should be noted. First, although the book title and chapters contain the phrase 'Baptists ... and the Christian Tradition', some chapters are restricted to discussing current Baptists within the historic Baptist tradition, or even to Southern Baptist history itself. These chapters are interesting but do not contribute directly to the book's main intention.

Second, although many authors allude to the issue throughout the book, no chapter is dedicated to the pervasive paradigm shift that occurred in Baptist theology and practice between about the mid-18th century and mid-19th century. Whether in reaction to Roman Catholicism, Tractarianism, the influence of rationalism, a new focus on missions, Landmarkism, or the Act of Toleration of 1689, Baptists began to drift away from their historic practices and beliefs and to embrace simplistic practices and reductionistic theologies. One chapter addressing this issue head-on would have helped the editors' overall cause.

Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour

John Goldingay

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019

Pb., viii + 288 pp., indices

Reviewed by Walter McConnell, head of mission research for OMF and editor of Mission Round Table

Half a century ago, studies of Old Testament ethics were so rare that Brevard Childs reproached Bible scholars for failing to provide the church with usable resources. Thankfully, those days are long past. Today, there are a number of works on the Old Testament and ethics for an academic audience, as well as other studies designed to make the subject accessible to beginning students and laity. Goldingay's *Old Testament Ethics* fits well into the second category.

In this readable and engaging book, Goldingay wisely bypasses the tangled and thorny discussion of methodology and, for the most part, refuses to get sidetracked by what he calls the 'tricky questions' that may be important to specialists but are overlooked by biblical authors, or by issues mentioned by Old Testament writers that offend moderns since we believe we know better. Instead, he steers readers to the text itself, stating simply that ethics asks 'what sort of people we are ... how we think ... what sort of thing we do ... and what sort of thing we don't do' (1). He then proceeds to consider the Old Testament's neither systematic nor topically organized response to those issues.

Goldingay divides his book into five parts and 43 chapters. Although Scripture does not organize ethical discussion topically, Goldingay's topical approach identifies issues addressed in passages scattered throughout the Old Testament, in a way that benefits today's readers. The value of this topical approach is reflected in the first three parts of the book, which address (1) personal 'qualities' that should be reflected in our lives, (2) 'aspects of life' that impact our thoughts, feelings and actions, and (3) 'relationships' that we share with people at a closer or farther distance. The topics addressed give us a broad sense of the Old Testament's understanding of how these concerns should be lived out. Part 4 contains eight chapters on biblical texts that set forth broad ethical principles, and part 5 consists of seven chapters introducing us to characters who embody different aspects of ethical living.

I appreciated the fact that Goldingay doesn't just talk about Old Testament ethics; he continually quotes Scripture so that we can see the Bible's take on

important issues and ways of living ethically. He desires that his readers ‘pay more attention to the Old Testament text than to what I write. Reading books about the Bible easily becomes a replacement for reading the Bible’ (179). An author on biblical topics could have no higher aim. This aim is bolstered by the exclusive use of his own translations from the Hebrew (and occasionally from Greek), which made many of the concepts stand out in new ways and from time to time prompted me to consult the original myself. When I did so, I found that the text supported the nuances he brought out and gave me reasons to think more deeply. (Goldingay has also recently published a complete translation of *The First Testament*.)

On occasion, the book makes comparisons between the society and mores of ancient Israel and the modern Western world. These comparisons can be of tremendous value in showing how our setting and worldview differ from those of the biblical world and in causing us to consider why the differences exist and whether we need to adjust our thinking and/or practice. At times, however, readers may simply conclude that their understanding and practice trumps the ancient one simply because it is modern. In a few places, some readers will be left wondering whether Goldingay is stating a modern cultural position or his own vis-à-vis the Old Testament position.

Old Testament Ethics would make an excellent textbook for a course in a theological college, though many crucial issues regarding methodology and the relation of the Old Testament to Christian ethics will need to be addressed elsewhere. The book would be equally useful for personal reflection or for an adult Sunday school class or home Bible study, as the questions provided at the end of each chapter provide a basis for discussions. However, since many of the questions Goldingay provides can be answered with a simple yes/no or short answer, facilitators should be prepared to lead participants into deeper reflection. All in all, the book is a welcome addition to the growing list of books on Old Testament ethics and one that I wholeheartedly encourage others to read.

***The Fourfold Gospel: A Formational Commentary
on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Volume 1:
From the Beginning to the Baptist***
John DelHousaye

Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020
Pb., 370 pp., bibliography, indices

Reviewed by Andrew Messmer (see first review for description)

In his projected multi-volume work, of which this is the first volume, John DelHousaye offers the church something it has not seen in several centuries, if ever: a Gospel harmony with commentary on each unit that interprets the text according to the *quadriga*, or four senses of Scripture.

Although the Christian tradition refers to the *quadriga* under the names of literal, allegorical (doctrinal), tropological (moral) and anagogical (contemplative), DelHousaye has chosen the corresponding Jewish acronym *PaRDeS*—meaning ‘garden (of Eden)’ in Hebrew, which serves as a reminder that the interpretation of

Scripture is communion with God—to structure his commentary. In this acronym, *peshtat* corresponds to the literal, *remez* to the allegorical, *derash* to the tropological and *sod* to the anagogical. By taking this approach, DelHousaye shows that the Gospels can and should be interpreted at various levels, which was the traditional way the church interpreted Scripture until modernity.

DelHousaye's work is truly catholic in the best sense of the word: he lists 200 male and female 'guides' (half of whom come from before the 16th century), with at least one from every century and major tradition (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox). Additionally, he has incorporated insights from non-biblical fields such as modern science, world religions and historical theology. DelHousaye's work represents an attempt to interpret Scripture with all the tools available and to apply it to the whole person—mentally, ethically and spiritually.

This first volume is divided into four sections, the first of which introduces the entire project. DelHousaye discusses issues such as the four Aristotelian causes, *lectio divina*, the *quadriga*, the genre of the Gospels, introductory material on all four Gospels, and the Synoptic problem. On traditional introductory topics—authorship, date, provenance, Markan priority, *agrapha*, etc.—he fits squarely within mainstream biblical research.

The second, third and fourth sections begin the Gospel harmony proper, and they correspond to Jesus' beginnings, birth and baptism, respectively. The Gospel units are arranged in (chrono)logical order, with each pericope commented on in the order of *PaRDeS*. Not every unit receives a fourfold interpretation, although most receive two or more. Unit 24C, on John 1:25–31, illustrates his method: after providing a translation of the text, DelHousaye discusses various historical, grammatical and textual issues (*peshtat*/literal); how the unit's key issues of the Jordan River and lamb of God are used elsewhere in Scripture (*remez*/allegorical); how this text applies to the believer today (*derash*/tropological); then he offers the *Agnus Dei* prayer (*sod*/anagogical).

This work will be appreciated by scholars in many fields, but perhaps its most significant contribution is in applied hermeneutics. DelHousaye has revived the classical interpretation of Scripture and has made it attractive and accessible to an evangelical audience. Gospel scholars will be interested in his literal interpretation, systematicians in his allegorical readings, ethicists and homileticians in his tropological insights, and mystics in his anagogical comments. Or, to look at it from another angle, each person should have each of these tendencies in their soul to one degree or another, and thus DelHousaye's work is designed to exercise each part of the person and so to edify them in faith (allegorical), hope (anagogical), and love (tropological).

In a casual footnote on page 26, DelHousaye acknowledges his debt to Henri de Lubac's work on the four senses of Scripture in medieval exegesis and cites Susan Wood's call to apply Lubac's work to biblical exegesis. This appears to be the impulse behind his project, which he has achieved in this first volume, and which I hope to see him complete in future ones. Evangelicals who are accustomed to only a twofold interpretation of Scripture—literal-grammatical and personal application—will be stretched to read Scripture in new ways, but the rewards will far outweigh the price.

***Race and Covenant: Recovering the Religious Roots
for American Reconciliation***
Gerald R. McDermott (ed.)

Grand Rapids: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, 2020
Pb., xxxv + 278 pp., index

Reviewed by Bruce Barron, executive editor, Evangelical Review of Theology

Most discussions of a ‘national covenant’ in the context of US history smack of American exceptionalism—the idea that God has a special relationship with the United States, usually because its founders and/or founding documents were especially favoured by God. This book is strikingly different. It grounds the idea of a national covenant more generally, in the idea that God relates to nations as well as individuals, and then uses the concept not as a stepping stone to claiming American greatness but as a basis for reconciliation, especially across racial lines.

That message is especially timely at a time when the United States and other Western societies are descending into increasing race-based polarization, with white nationalists on one side and progressives fulminating against white privilege on the other.

The 16 essays that make up this book emerge from a 2019 conference envisioned by editor Gerald McDermott (recently retired from Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama) and Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. Although the contributors occupy the center-to-right portion of the political spectrum, they present significant diversity of views. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. is portrayed in a range of ways, from biblically grounded reconciler to a perpetuator of a black separatist identity.

Beyond the application of the biblical idea of covenant, three recurring themes appear: contemporary identity politics is separating people rather than reconciling them; black Americans would be better off maximizing their autonomy rather than emphasizing their victimization; and a truly Christian message is the best way to overcome racial division.

McDermott’s masterful introduction begins appropriately by looking back to the US Civil War, when the nation’s deep divisions and tolerance of slavery were more on display than its greatness, and when famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass was declaring that America had broken its covenant with God. The idea of God dealing with whole nations or societies, McDermott points out, was commonly held not only by Old Testament prophets but also by many European Christians, the Puritans who migrated to America, Jonathan Edwards and Abraham Lincoln. With that background, he contends that the best solution today is not to assail an allegedly white-dominated system or throw government money at the problem. Rather, he says, ‘our racial dilemma cannot be understood properly without spiritual and religious analysis.’

McDermott rejects four false premises: ‘historical perfectionism which assumes that no repentance has taken place’; ‘historical presentism’ which judges past generations by present standards (as reflected, for example, in the recent removal of a statue of slaveholder Thomas Jefferson); reverse racism, which implies that all people of a certain race should think the same way (and thus denigrates black

conservatives); and pride that assumes we have nothing to learn from people of different races or those who think differently.

It's a mostly Christian book, but the next two essays are by Jewish rabbis. Joshua Berman highlights the welcoming of outsiders such as Rahab and Ruth into the Hebrew covenant with God; Mitchell Rocklin applies the image of exile and return, arguing that reconciliation comes not through later generations offering reparations (which reinforces a perpetual sense of victimhood) but by seeing each other as equals, a prerequisite that the tribalism of identity politics prevents.

The remaining chapters are a mix of probing theological, historical and social-scientific reflections and more narrowly issue-based statements. In the former category, Mark Tooley critiques both progressive optimism and Christian nationalism on his way to concluding that a sense of national covenant should impel us to pursue racial harmony and social justice. Joshua Mitchell shows that identity politics requires defining a transgressor—a scapegoat in Girard's terms—and that it pushes blacks and others to establish their status as innocent victims rather than to emphasize their competence and capacity for self-help. Ivy League economist Glenn Loury combines a call for 'transracial humanism' with a recognition that the woes of African Americans today derive substantially from problems that neither government nor identity politics can solve: weak family structures, out-of-wedlock births, high crime rates.

Chapters primarily on specific policy areas include Alveda King (niece to MLK) on abortion, Jacqueline Rivers on marriage and family, and Robert Woodson on school choice.

The presence of accomplished black voices, including Loury, King, Rivers, Woodson and Carol Swain, enhances the book's credibility. It could have been further strengthened by the inclusion of some interaction or dialogue with left-leaning Christians. Overall, the tone is not strident (except for one statement that blacks' consistent support for the political left proves that their religion does not influence their politics), but someone needs to help gifted black conservative Christians escape being pigeonholed and receive the hearing they deserve in non-conservative circles. There could hardly have been a better place to attempt such bridge building than in this innovative, deeply spiritual book on reconciliation.

Islam and Democracy: Can They Be Reconciled?

Christine Schirrmacher

Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft. 2020

Pb., 74 pp.

Reviewed by Jim Harries, missionary in East Africa and adjunct faculty, William Carey International University, Pasadena, USA

Schirrmacher (a prominent Islamic scholar and wife of the WEA's Secretary General) carefully defines the nature of the democracy to which she refers. The Arab Spring did not lead to democracy as the West knows it, she tells us. Prominent Muslim theologians are not in favour of human rights as known by the West, or as promoted by today's recognized global bodies, although many Muslims in these

countries do support Western notions of human rights and democracy. As a result, despite occasional outbreaks of democratic ideas, official Islamic definitions of what are considered appropriate human rights tend to be aligned with Sharia law, including condemnation of apostasy from Islam.

This book is one of a series Schirrmacher has written to help European people better understand Islam, especially with respect to the governance of contemporary Western societies. The first section considers essential characteristics of a real democracy; the second section, which forms the bulk of the book, considers whether democracy conceived in this way is reconcilable with Islam. Finally, she details the position of certain Muslim intellectuals on this issue. (Muslim intellectuals who lean to the West are often rejected by their own people and thus forced to live in exile.)

This book is scholarly and carefully researched, drawing on the author's evident deep knowledge of modern-day Islam. The text does not question the contemporary categories in which the debate is frequently engaged. So, for example, it simply assumes Islam to be 'a religion' and one of a set of world religions found in contemporary times—a view clearly not shared by Muslims themselves, who consider Islam a 'socio-political order'. As such, the book addresses rather than questions popular contemporary understanding of how to relate to Muslims. Schirrmacher engages primarily with Arab Muslims, though she also deals extensively with Pakistan and Iran. Turkey and Indonesia are referred to; Islam in sub-Saharan Africa is not.

Schirrmacher draws widely on available literature to carefully research the constraints under which Islamic societies operate. The astute reader will discover that they are oriented in a way very contrary to contemporary Western values. Christianity is to Muslims a 'religion' that has been surpassed. For a Muslim, to become a Christian is a step backwards. Becoming a Muslim is a one-way path into a consequent existence, not only for life but for all subsequent generations. It entails strict adherence to stringent Sharia laws that govern all areas of life. Violence is justified as a means of upholding Sharia law. Muslims living in the West form parallel societies, conforming so as to fit in with their hosts, while waiting expectantly for the day when they will become powerful enough to set aside Western democracy and impose Sharia law.

This book was initially written as an information service to policy makers in Germany considering how to respond to a growing Islamic presence. The way in which it presents, frankly but without emotionalism, informed insights on Muslim orientations in practical fields of human society makes it particularly valuable. It is the kind of book you can give to a thoughtful person to help in moving discussion forward, or to policy makers to strengthen their basis for making decisions.

Relational Spirituality: A Psychological-Theological Paradigm for Transformation

Todd W. Hall and M. Elizabeth Lewis-Hall

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021

Pb., 317 pp., chapter notes, index

Reviewed by James Jenkins, doctoral candidate, Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Todd Hall and Elizabeth Lewis-Hall, a married team of professors, earned their degrees and currently work at the Rosemead School of Psychology in La Mirada, California. Both academics bring a wealth of educational experience and praxis to this book. Todd's graduate teachings include psychology and theology integration, attachment-based psychoanalytic therapy, and spirituality and building relationships. Additionally, he has authored numerous books and journal articles, including appearances in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*.

Elizabeth teaches on the integration of psychology and theology and is also a prolific writer, with over 100 articles and book chapters. Furthermore, she is the associate editor for *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Both are practicing Christians.

The authors assert that the deterioration of individual and family relationships over the last 40 years have negatively affected society and thus necessitated the paradigm they present. One example given is the weakening of family subgroup dynamics in the parent-child relationship.

The tensions between scientific methods and the faith of early church leaders invite continuous theological investigations, taking into consideration various unique contextual stages. The Halls affirm the value of science in affecting well-being, since psychology views the mind and emotions as vital elements in relationship building. They cite research findings that validate our capacity for emotional and spiritual development through relationships, along with providing numerous Scripture references.

Two types of knowledge are significant to the Halls. *Explicit* knowledge is measurable by external sources and an innate quality in people; *implicit knowledge* is not as easily traced and put in written form. One example of implicit awareness is how unspoken emotions affect the individual's environmental perceptions. Emotional processing is also vital in appraising the meaning of internal and external events and their effect on well-being. The authors then assert that explicit theology performed through scriptural explorations, including the outward expressions of obedience (the spiritual life), will produce a greater implicit spiritual knowing. Moreover, they say that these processes should be seen as interrelated, leading towards greater spirituality.

The authors lay a foundation for their paradigm by exploring the image of God (the *imago Dei*) in a trinitarian relationship. As they state in the introduction, 'Human beings are fundamentally relational, reflecting the relational nature of our triune God.' This tri-directional love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is shown in Scripture through the incarnation, at the resurrection of Jesus, at Pentecost and in Jesus' baptism and prayer (Gen 1:2; Lk 1:35; Rom 8:11; Acts 2:1-4; Mt 28:19; Rom

8:26). The Christian receives God's love and transmits it within the body of Christ and evangelistically with the world. The reciprocity (interchange) of love is theological and thus could fit within the categories of Christian doctrine. It further bolsters the values of meaningful attachments as referenced through these writings. As Scripture puts it, 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love' (John 15:9).

The theme of loving reciprocity is skilfully woven into the fabric of this book. The Halls speak openly of disparities in the church, home and culture yet encourage the readers to continue in God's love. The stance of claiming to love God and not one's family demonstrates a contradiction in terms (1 Jn 4:20). They draw on the metaphorical view of the church as a family and show that caring members experience transformation and a more significant spiritual development, both individually and collectively, when love is displayed and maintained (1 Cor 12:26; Col 2:19).

The authors describe spiritual transformation in the healthy Christian community as creating healthy attachments. It entails the effective use of theology since it identifies with Scripture and the need to know God and have a personal relationship with him. Good theology and properly applied church doctrine serve as both a corrective to the unhealthy worldview practices of self-centredness and a guide towards the trinitarian model of love best exemplified in Jesus Christ.

The final chapter offers four vital characteristics of the church as a relational community, or ideals that congregations can apply. The first priority should be to glorify God. Second, the church should be relational for 'support, comfort, and encouragement, particularly during difficult times'.

Third, relational spirituality is intentional about creating structures that foster meaningful attachments (i.e. Christian relationships) while being flexible enough to make creative adjustments to accommodate individual uniqueness in the process of spiritual development. Lastly, spiritual communities are authoritative. This fourth vital category is complex and calls for detailed exploration, but the authors summarize the concept by stating that 'authoritative communities are communities that speak the truth in love.'

This book is an academic work for theology students and those seeking to integrate psychology into their spiritual lives. Pastors, ministerial staff, church leaders and serious-minded parishioners can all benefit from this relational spirituality model. It could also be a useful supplement in family and marriage counselling and could also bolster Christian formation and spirituality in instructional settings.