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



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Editorial:

A Renewed Church in the World

OUR LEAD ARTICLE BY the late celebrated Dutch theologian, Klass Runia, is a choice sample from one of our earlier editions. Of course, allowance needs to be made for some dated references and allusions, but the theme is still valid and topical—the church always needs to be aware of its origin and functioning as a work of God, and its role as ‘missionary and diaconal’. So ‘the renewal of the church is a blessing not only for the church itself, but also for the world around it’. This renewal is ‘born of the union of Word and Spirit’. This is a timeless message which is, if possible, more relevant today than when first written more than twenty years ago.

In our second article, Ron Man (USA) reminds us that one of the ways the church becomes authentic is through its worship, with all its variety and change. The author is well placed to report and advise on some of this activity, but he is careful to emphasise that, although there are many interesting cultural developments, it is important to remember the close relationship between worship and mission, and how this awareness has generated progress in making worship culturally authentic in many parts of the world.

Equally important for the renewal of the church is its attitude towards others. Terry Tiessen (Canada) tackles the vexed question of the salvation of the unevangelised from the perspective of the divine covenants. He argues that ‘membership in the covenant community was never the boundary of God’s re-

demptive work, and knowledge of the revelation which God had entrusted to that community was not necessary for the Spirit to create saving faith in the people’s hearts’. People are responsible within the covenant framework in which they live, which places greater responsibility on those who have a clear knowledge of God’s saving grace.

Our last two articles deal with two particular aspects of the church in the world. First, Christine Schirmmacher (Germany) takes up a highly prominent issue—attitudes to death and dying in Islam, and after providing informative insights about the range of views that exist, offers a short but insightful comparison with Christian views. Although there are many human factors in common, the contrast could hardly be greater—with Christians being ‘assured of God’s love and mercy’.

Taking a broader approach still, Clinton Stockwell (USA) compares fundamentalist impulses within Christianity, Judaism and Islam in relation to the ‘shalom’ or welfare of the community at large. The historical, political and cultural insights explained in this article should go a long way to helping us understand some of the disturbing movements and events in our world today, but more than this—it offers a vision of ‘the way it is supposed to be’. Overall, it is evident that a renewed church is needed to create, foster and direct this vision which is nothing less than the Kingdom of God.

Thomas Schirmmacher, General Editor
David Parker, Executive Editor

The Renewal of the Church

Klaas Runia

KEYWORDS: *Secularity, confession, forgiveness, denominations, congregation, structure, worship*

I AM SURE IT WILL not be necessary to deal extensively with the *reasons why we need a spiritual renewal of our churches*. In a Dutch doctoral thesis I read the following illustration:

The future of God in the Netherlands evokes the image of a camping-ground in the autumn. In the green pasture there are still a few tents, on the edge there are a few immovable site caravans. Here and there is a car with a foreign number plate. There is a lonely boy carrying a rucksack and looking for the Manager. The latter gives him a searching glance and asks: For how long?¹

It is a splendid but also a shocking picture. There are still a few tents, a few churches, but they do not mean much anymore; they are only 'tents'. There are a few immovable site caravans,

a few old-fashioned chapels that did not move along with the times. There are a few cars with foreign number plates, a few sects that came from across the Atlantic Ocean or from the Far East. There is a lonely boy with a rucksack, the image of young people who are still looking for God (the Manager—with a Capital M!), but he has little faith in their search and therefore asks: 'For how long?'

I believe this picture of Holland applies to other western European countries as well. In West Germany church attendance has dropped from 7% in 1968 to 4% in 1983. Among young people it has even dropped from 9% to 2%! In the big cities it is still worse: not even 1%. Since 1970 some two million people have officially broken with the EKD (the Evangelical Church in Germany). In Great Britain, in the seventies, a million people stopped going to the church. In the same period a thousand church buildings were closed and the number of clergymen dropped by 2500. In the last thirty years the Free Churches lost 700,000 members.

Particularly alarming is the fact that so many young people drop out. The churches seem to be completely losing

¹ Paul Schnabel, *Tussen Stigma en charisma. Nieuwe religieuze bewegingen en geestelijke volksgezondheid*, 1982, 186.

This article is re-published from our issue of Volume 13:1 (January 1989), 66-86. At the time, the author, Dr. Klaas Runia (1926-2006), was the President of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) and was ministering in Holland. He was Professor of Systematic Theology at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong Australia (1956-71) and Professor of Practical Theology at Kampen Theological University, Netherlands (1971-92). While some of the material in this article may be dated, the general thrust is timeless.

their grip on their future members. And this dropping out of the young people does not happen only in families that are on the edge of the church, but also in families that are actively participating in church life. There is hardly any church family nowadays that does not experience the sad fact that one or more children do not show any interest in the church and in the Christian faith. Apparently secularization is not only a threatening force attacking the church from the outside, but it is also active inside our families and churches.

On the top of all this we observe the fact that many churches are weakened by the phenomenon of pluralism. There is no longer a united witness. In fact, the churches often seem to be quite uncertain about their own message. From the pulpits the people who still come to church hear contradictory messages, not to speak of the conflicting views propounded by the theologians. In many local churches there are very few, if any, signs of true spiritual life.

This is a sombre picture indeed, but it is the picture of *western Europe*. Of course, it is not the picture of the total church as it is spread all over the world. There are continents where the church is growing by leaps and bounds. This is particularly true of the church in some African and Asian countries. But however comforting and encouraging this may be, it does not alter the fact that we here in western Europe are experiencing a strong decline in church attendance and church membership. Moreover, there is little reason to think that this decline is only temporary.

It is simply impossible to compare our situation with that in other continents. While in the other continents people experience the gospel as some-

thing entirely new, we are facing the fact that in western Europe people are abandoning Christianity because they see it as something totally antiquated and therefore useless. While in Africa and in Asia people are more or less in a pre-Christian situation, we are moving towards a *post-Christian situation*,² with all its terrible consequences. One of them is that people who have gone 'through' Christianity seem to have become immune to the message of the gospel. They are like persons who have had a smallpox vaccination. After they have received a tiny bit of vaccine they have developed sufficient antibodies to be immune to a real 'attack'.

It is obvious that this sad situation cannot be changed by a few simple tricks or structural alterations. What is necessary for the churches in western Europe is a *complete spiritual renewal*. They really have to be made 'new' again.

I A Suggestion From The Sixties

But how can this happen? What should we do? Some twenty years ago many church leaders thought they knew the answer. In his booklet *The Humiliation of the Church*, published in 1967, Albert Van den Heuvel, then Director of the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches, mentioned quite a number of *renewal theologians*, such as Bonhoeffer, Visser 't Hooft, Rahner, Kueng, Kraemer, Ebeling, Weber, Congar, MacLeod, Gollwitzer, Hoekendijk, Newbiggin, Margull and many others.

² Cf. Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, 1980.

He further mentioned quite a few names of theologians and sociologists who stressed the need for the church to relate to society; such as Wickham, Wendland, Simanowski, Gibson, Winter, and Peter Berger.³

All these people, in one way or another, stressed the necessity of a 'total' renewal of church and theology. They were all convinced that the present structures of the church are altogether outdated. According to Ernest Southcott, what we need is not a renewal of the wallpaper of the church, but of the walls themselves! Van der Heuvel himself says: 'Perhaps first of all everything must be razed to the ground so that something new may be built from the rubbish.' But what is the blueprint of the new building? It must be a church that is directed towards the world. 'Society (the world) is rediscovered in renewal theology as a laboratory of God, in which he carries out his experiments. Pagans are the bearers of the promise, and within the circle of the renewers there are open eyes and open ears for what Christ says to them through the world.'

Within their own churches they often feel ill at ease. They rebel against the dogged complacency they find there. They are often also bad churchgoers. Even though most of them still attend, they feel like the kitchen chef of Louis XIV, who had to eat dry bread in the Bastille. They believe that the church and its people are far too 'inner-directed' and do not know the despairing feeling of the spiritual void, a silent God, and the breakdown of a personal morality.

What we have to learn again is that Jesus never became a Christian; he became a man. Therefore we are not called to become Christians and we are not called to create Christians. Our calling is to help people to become people. The church has to take on the 'form of a slave' and to get away from its 'morphological fundamentalism'—that is, the fundamentalism of one particular outdated structure which is regarded as ultimate and final. Rather, we should let the world have its own forms and fill these forms with the content of the gospel.

For this reason, sociology is not just helpful but essential for the church. To put it in the words of Hans Storck: 'The church can be really present and function in a culture only if she synchronizes her calendar with the calendar of that society.' Or, in the words of one of the documents of the WCC in those very same years: if the church is to have a future, it must be the 'church for others' or 'the church for the world'.

II Wrong Diagnosis

It cannot be denied that these views of the so-called renewal theologians have really helped the church to get a better view of itself. It is a fact that in the past the church has often been too inner-directed, and it was salutary for the church to be reminded of its responsibility for the world. And yet we must also say that this theology of the sixties and seventies has not brought about a true renewal of the church. The decline of the church has not been stopped by it. On the contrary, the churches that followed the guidelines given by the renewal theologians, and devoted much of their time and energy

³ Gilbert, *Post-Christian Britain*, 48, 183.

to the matters of the world, have suffered more from this decline than the churches that continued to concentrate on the preaching of the gospel itself.

Why was this so? Because the calendar or the agenda of the world first of all deals with political, social and economical matters, which do not belong to the primary task of the church. I do not mean to say that the gospel itself has nothing to do with politics or economics. On the contrary, as a man who belongs to the church of which Abraham Kuyper was also a member, I believe that the whole world belongs to Christ and that we have to serve him also in our political, social and economic life. But this is the task of the individual believers rather than of the institutional church. The latter has its own, very special task: to be a community of believers who come together for worship, for instruction in the Christian faith, for mutual pastoral care, and whose first task towards the world is the spreading of the gospel through missionary and diaconal service.

Undoubtedly, the church is part of the world. It is one of the many organizations that we find in this world. Its structures are, just as in the case of all human organizations, worldly structures that can clearly be discerned. They are also open to criticism and in constant need of renovation. But the church is also more than just a human organization with worldly structures. It is also the body of Christ, the people of God. We should never forget that the church has its place in the Christian confession of faith and that in that confession we say: 'I believe in a holy, catholic and apostolic church.'

In its deepest essence the church is an object of faith. It has its origin

not here on earth but in heaven. As the Heidelberg Catechism says concerning the holy catholic church:

I believe that, from the beginning to the end of the world, and from among the whole human race, the son of God, by his Spirit and his Word, gathers, protects and preserves for himself, in the unity of the true faith, a congregation chosen for eternal life.

And that this article of faith is not a mere abstraction appears from what immediately follows: 'Moreover, I believe that I am and forever will remain a living member of it' (Lord's Day 21).

III Church And Spirit

The church, however, is not only an article of faith, but it also has its place in the *third article* of the Apostle's Creed. This means that in dealing with the church we find ourselves in the sphere of action of the *Holy Spirit*. Of course we have always known this and yet we are confronted by the fact that especially in Protestant theology the relationship between the Spirit and church has often been a neglected aspect.

Usually the main emphasis was on the work of the Spirit in the individual believer.⁴ I remember that, when a few years ago I was asked to give a paper on 'the Holy Spirit and the church',⁵ I

⁴ Cf. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), 322, 340ff. Berkhof mentions some exceptions, such as John Owen, Abraham Kuyper and Paul Althaus.

⁵ Klaas Runia, 'The Holy Spirit and the Church' in *The Holy Spirit down to Earth* (RES Publications, Grand Rapids, 1977), 29.

checked a great number of theological works on this topic and soon discovered how poor the harvest was. And yet we cannot understand the reality of the church if we do not constantly see its relationship to, and dependence upon, the Spirit. Rightly it has been said: 'Without the *pneuma* there is no *soma*'.⁶

The church owes not only its coming into existence to the Spirit, but also (and no less) its continued existence. Otto Weber has pointed out that in the New Testament 'body' and 'Spirit' are almost synonymous concepts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; 10:3, 4; Eph. 2:16, 18; 4:4).⁷ This does not at all mean that the church therefore 'has' the Spirit. The Spirit is nobody's property, neither the individual believer, nor any congregation or denomination. As David Watson puts it:

There is no guaranteed bestowal of the Spirit at baptism, confirmation or ordination.... The Spirit will not be tied to the church, nor to any ecclesiastical office within the church.... The church which tries to tie the Spirit to its institutionalized forms, to its traditional patterns, or to its doctrinal statements, will quickly find itself moribund and powerless. True spiritual life and freedom will come only insofar as the church submits to the Spirit, listens to the Spirit and obeys the Spirit. At every stage we must learn to hear what the Spirit is saying

to the churches, even if that word sometimes is a word of rebuke, or a warning of judgment. God gives the Spirit to those who obey him.⁸

The last expression is taken from Acts 5:32 and is very important for our understanding of the Spirit and his work. On the one hand, it clearly says that *God gives the Spirit*. No one can dispose of the Spirit. No one can 'grab' the Spirit and force him to act. On the other hand, we also see that we ourselves are 'involved' in this giving of the Spirit, for he is given to *those who obey him*.

Precisely at this point we encounter the essential difference between the work of Christ and that of the Spirit. In Christ's work we are involved only as objects. He does everything, we do nothing. He does everything for us, but also without us. Paul makes this quite clear in Rom. 5:8f.: Christ died for us while we were *still sinners*. Yes, we were *still enemies* of God, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. In the work of the Spirit, the relationship is quite different. Although the initiative is and remains always his, he at the same time and from the very beginning *involves us actively* in his work and uses us in his service. He wants and expects us to work together with him. For this reason Paul can speak of himself and his helpers as co-workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9; 1 Thess. 3:2; cf. Col. 4:11).

6 Rene Padilla, 'The Kingdom of God and the Church', in *Theological Fraternity Bulletin*, No. 1 and 2, 1976, 7.

7 Cf. O. Weber, *Versammelte Gemeinde*, 1975, 24f.

8 David Watson, *I believe in the Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1978), 166-67. Cf. also Peter Kuzmič, 'The Church and the Kingdom of God', in *The Church, God's Agent for Change*, edited by Bruce I. Nicholls (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 71ff.

This does not mean a pneumatological synergism, a division of labour between the Spirit and us, something like 50–50 (or, if that is too much honour for us, 90–10; or, if we are still more humble, 99–1). No it is quite different. On the one hand, we must say that the Spirit does everything, the full 100%. And yet the sum total is not 200% but 100%, for he works in and through us. He employs us with all that we are and have. He never uses us as robots but always as living people who are in his service. We find this pneumatological mystery well expressed in Paul's words in Phil. 2:12 and 13—'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure'. Here we have the 'twice the 100%' which nevertheless remains one single 100%, and the secret lies in the little word 'for'.

All this is of great importance for our subject: it means that when we speak of the renewal of the church, we do not only speak about the work of the Spirit, but at the same time also about our own task!

IV Structures And Renewal

This task first of all involves our own personal renewal. I do mention this first because I believe that there is a certain chronological order in *personal renewal* of the church. Sometimes one hears people saying that the members of the congregation must *first* be renewed personally and that *only after* that can we begin to think about the renewal of the church. I believe this is a mistake and that it is based on a wrong dilemma. A similar dilemma one often encounters with regard to

the change of social structures. Quite often the argument runs as follows: 'if people would change, the structures would improve automatically'. I totally disagree with this argument.

In the first place, nothing happens 'automatically' in the realm of social and economic structures. They are far too strong and too tough. Secondly, wrong structures often imprison people and therefore obstruct personal renewal. A company with dishonest practices often has a corrupting influence on its employees. In a different and yet similar way a church with antiquated, formalistic and authoritarian structures may have a negative impact on the personal renewal of its members. Likewise, a modern church that has a strongly bureaucratic centre, staffed by theological or social professionals who are constantly trying to 'brainwash' the local congregations and their members, may impede the spiritual renewal of its members.

What we really need is a *combination of personal and congregational renewal*. For its renewal the congregation needs renewed people, but in order to attain personal renewal the members also need a renewed congregation.

V Constant Renewal

From Scripture it is perfectly clear that personal renewal is a permanent need. To become a Christian may be a once-for-all event, but having become a Christian one is in constant need of ongoing renewal. Paul writes to believers in Rome, who were Christians already: 'Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed [N.B. the present tense! It is a constant process] by the renewal of your mind, that you may

prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (12:2; cf. 2 Cor. 4:16).

This renewal means a new orientation, due to which the 'power of critical judgment' (Greek: *nous*) is able to test and discern what is the will of God. But this, naturally, has consequences for the whole way of life. To the Colossians Paul writes that they 'have put off the old nature with its practices and put on the new nature' (3:9, 10). This undoubtedly refers to their baptism in the name of Christ. But it is not just a once-in-a-life experience, for the apostle immediately adds that this new nature 'is being renewed [N.B. again the present tense!] in knowledge after the image of its creator'.

The source of this renewal is the *gospel of Jesus Christ*; that which once was proclaimed by the prophets and the apostles and now is being proclaimed in the Sunday services. This gospel alone can renew us from day to day. The power of renewal does not reside in us. In his letter Peter quotes the following words from Isaiah 40: 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the words of the Lord abide forever'; and then he immediately adds: 'That word is the good news which was preached to you' (1 Peter 1:24, 25).

The secret power of this proclamation is the *Holy Spirit*, who causes this word of the gospel to penetrate into the heart and to permeate our whole existence. The Gospel of John calls this a 'new' birth or a birth 'from above' (3:3). Without the presence and activity of the Spirit nothing will happen, even if we go to church twice every Sunday and read the Bible daily. The

Spirit must open our ears and our heart to the gospel, and he must do this time and again.

In the New Testament personal renewal is not only a once-for-all event (this is undoubtedly true of the initial act of renewal as in John 3:3 and 5; Eph. 2:4, 5; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1.4.18—in these cases the aorist or the perfect is being used), but it is also a life-long process (cf. Romans 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; Col. 3:10; Tit. 3:5). In the spiritual realm we can never live off the interest of the capital we once acquired. Every day we have to go to the bank of the Holy Spirit to receive renewing grace from his riches.

The same is true of the *congregation*. It, too, is in constant need of renewing grace. No more than the individual believer does it have a capital hidden somewhere in a secret vault in the church. Sometimes we may make this mistaken assumption. We see our nice church, we look at our smoothly running organization and at all the people that belong to it and all the activities that are going on, and we conclude that we have a living church. Or we pride ourselves on the orderly way in which things are going in our church. We have a 'good' minister who conducts the worship service in a very nice and dignified way, who is a talented preacher, who is a good pastor.

What more could one ask? And so we smugly look down upon other congregations where things are not as good as in our parish. But is it really so good? Is our congregation really alive? James I. Packer says in his book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, that many churches today are orderly simply because they are asleep, and with some he fears it is the sleep of death. It is no

commendable thing to be orderly in a cemetery!⁹

VI The Renewal Of The Congregation

But how does a congregation come to real life? It is striking that the *New Testament* does not say much of the renewal of the congregation. I think this is due to the fact that most authors address congregations that are still in a *missionary* situation. For this reason the main emphasis in the New Testament letters is on the *building up* of the congregation. It is only in later parts of the New Testament that we read about the *renewal* of the congregation.

In these cases we have to do with older, sometimes second generation congregations, which already have to be warned against the slackening of their faith and love. We find such warnings, for instance, in the seven letters of the exalted Christ to the churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2 and 3), in the letter to the Hebrews, the letter of Jude, the second letter of Peter, and also in the last letters of Paul, the so-called Pastoral Epistles.

It is noteworthy that all these letters are always addressed to the *presbyteroi*. Luther grasped the essence of the New Testament view of the congregation very well when he spoke of the 'priesthood of all believers'. The same is true of the (Reformed) Heidelberg Catechism that first speaks of the threefold office of Jesus Christ and then immediately continues with the

threefold office of the Christian (Lord's day 12).

The New Testament does not know the phenomenon of a 'pastor's church'. In such a church 'the spiritual gifts of the laity have [usually] atrophied, while the responsibilities of ministers and administrators have hypertrophied'.¹⁰ We may even go so far as to say that the so-called 'pastor's church' has a deadly effect on the congregation.¹¹ The congregation can come to renewal only when it begins to realize that it is itself responsible for its own spiritual life and therefore also for its own renewal.

In the New Testament this renewal is always linked with the *Spirit*. All letters to the seven congregations in Asia Minor close with the words: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. This expression is the more striking, when we realize that Jesus Christ himself, so to speak, dictates the letters. And yet at the close of each letter he refers to the Spirit as *speaking* to the congregation.

A twofold truth is revealed here: in the first place, the exalted Christ does all his work through the Spirit; and secondly, the congregation can hear and come to renewal only through the very same Spirit.

¹⁰ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979), 17.

¹¹ Johannes Berewinkel, 'Ausbildung und zuruestung von Gemeindemitarbeitern', in Theodor Schober and Hans Thimme (Hrsg.), *Gemeinde in diakonischer und missionarischer Verantwortung*, 1979, 129—'Eine sogenannte Pastorenkirche wirt fuer die Gemeinde toedlich'.

⁹ James I Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984), 249.

VII God's Work And Ours

But *how* does renewal happen? And what happens in such a renewal? As to the *how* we must always realize that the renewal of the church is *God's work*. Visser't Hooft, who made a thorough study of what both the Old and New Testaments say about renewal, states unequivocally that all the Scriptures teach us 'that the renewal of the Church means first of all the creative work of God among his people, the victories won by the new *aion* over the old *aion*. The church does not renew itself: it is the object of God's renewal.'

'Be ye renewed' does not mean: 'Get busy and find some different and better method of Christian action.' It means: 'Expose yourself to the life-giving work of God. Pray that he may make the dry bones come to life. Expect great things from him. And get ready to do what he commands.'¹² Visser 't Hooft calls this a very 'practical truth'. For it implies that renewal does not begin with solemn declarations and decisions of synods or conferences or committees, but with 'an encounter of God and men, in which God takes hold of the situation and empowers them to serve as his instruments of renewal'.¹³

Must we then simply wait till God takes action? Visser 't Hooft says: Yes, indeed. But he immediately adds: 'Our waiting must be waiting in the biblical sense'. That is, 'as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hands of the mistress, *so* our eyes wait upon

the Lord our God' (Ps. 132:2). Again we see that from the very beginning *we ourselves are involved*.

It is from this perspective of our own involvement that I want to mention the following things we ought to do.

1. First of all we must *repent*. This is not a particularly popular word in our day. For many people, even in the church, it evokes all kinds of negative feelings. And yet we cannot avoid it. Renewal, both personal and congregational, always begins with repentance of our sinful past. It is striking that the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor mention the verb 'to repent' eight times! The Greek word used is *metanoein*.

This is not a merely intellectual change of mind or of ideas, but indicates a real 'turning around' of the whole person.¹⁴ It means that we repent of our own self-opinionated ideas, our own self-willed works, our own self-righteousness; and that we return to the heart of the gospel, to our first love (Rev. 2:4), to our first works (Rev. 2:5), when we were still ablaze for the Lord, expecting everything from him and willing to give ourselves completely to him.

2. All this is possible only when we become a *praying* congregation. Prayer is the secret of a congregation that is alive. In the Acts of the Apostles we read again how much and how earnestly the early church was engaged in prayer. In ch. 1, after the ascension of the Lord his followers devote them-

¹² W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Renewal of the Church* (London: SCM, 1956), 90-91.

¹³ Visser 't Hooft, *The Renewal of the Church*, 91.

¹⁴ Cf. 'Conversion', by J. Goetzmann, in *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster, 1975) 1:358.

selves with one accord to prayer (v. 14) In ch. 2, with the outpouring of the Spirit the new congregation devotes itself to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (v. 42). In ch. 4, when they are persecuted they engage in prayer, and 'when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness' (v. 31). Peter and John pray for the new converts in Samaria that they may receive the Holy Spirit (v. 15).

In ch. 12, when Peter is imprisoned the congregation prays for him (vv. 5, 12). In ch. 13, when Barnabas and Saul are commissioned for mission work, the congregation fasts and prays (v. 3). In ch. 15, while in prison Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns to God (v. 25). In ch. 20, when Paul takes leave of the elders of Ephesus, he kneels down and prays with them all (v. 36). In ch. 21, the same happens at Tyre, where they pray on the beach (v. 5). A congregation that seeks renewal must be a praying congregation.

3. The *worship service* is of paramount importance for the renewal of the congregation. Unfortunately, too often people go to church out of habit and tradition. They do go, but actually expect little and consequently receive little too. Quite often there is a lack of preparation. The worshippers do not prepare themselves through personal prayer, nor do they pray for the minister who has to proclaim the word of God and lead the congregation in the prayers. How then can they expect anything worthwhile to happen in their worship? For such is possible only if and when both the congregation and

the minister are fired by the Spirit.

4. Only then will the congregation also hear *preaching* that is charged with the power of the Spirit. The history of the Christian church makes it quite clear that such preaching is at the heart of every revival. The 16th century Reformation, which perhaps was the greatest revival of all times, was due to the rediscovery of the gospel of free grace by an obscure monk, who taught the Bible in one of the small universities of Germany.

When this discovery was shared by others, a wave of new preaching swept over western Europe and in thousands of cities and villages a renewal of the church took place. The same is true of the greatest revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries: preaching in the power of the Spirit was the driving force behind them. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones more than once remarked: 'Great preachers produce great listeners and great congregations.'

In his book, *The Renewal of the Church*, W. A. Visser 't Hooft writes: 'Every true renewal of the Church is based on the hearing anew of the Word of God as it comes to us in the Bible.'¹⁵ Why? 'Because the Bible is the authentic record of the only radically new event that has ever taken place in this world.' If we seek to renew the church by taking our lead from some new religious or cultural development or some new technique, we remain in fact 'within the closed circle of the old world'.

If we turn to some period of our own past, such as the 16th century Reformation or 17th century Pietism,

¹⁵ Goetzmann, 'Conversion', 91f.

we are not yet 'directly in touch with the source'. We can get into touch with the new world only if we submit ourselves to the judgment and inspiration of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, and this revelation is given to us through the Scriptures. In true preaching which is based on these Scriptures and is made into the living Word of God by the Spirit we are put in direct touch with this source. Rest assured that renewal will take place when the Word is preached, as Paul puts it, 'in demonstration of the Spirit and power' (1 Cor. 2:4).

5. A congregation that is made alive by this kind of preaching will also become a true *fellowship*. It will no longer be a random collection of unrelated individuals, but it will be a *koinonia* in which there is a place for all: for the older ones and the young, for those who are healthy and those who are sick and handicapped, for families but also for single and lonely people. In such a fellowship the members will care for each other and actively assist each other in their mutual needs. They will suffer together and rejoice together and, when the need arises, even admonish each other (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12–26).

6. Such a congregation will again become a 'charismatic' congregation and pay attention to the *gifts of the Holy Spirit*. According to the New Testament, each believer receives one or more *charismata* from the Spirit (cf. Rom. 12:6, 8; 1 Cor. 12:28–31; Eph. 4:17; 1 Peter 4:10, 11). The problem in many congregations is that the members do not even know that they have received gifts, nor do they know how to use them. If we seek the renewal of the congregation one of our first tasks may well be to look for these gifts (mind

you, not first of all in ourselves but in others!) and encourage others to make use of them for the building up of the congregation.

The statement of the 1983 Wheaton Conference on 'The Nature and Mission of the Church in the World' says: 'Each believer has gifts given by the Lord that form a pattern which marks out our identity as individuals and our form of service in the body of Christ and in the world.... The Lord's gifts are discerned in use.' Since we are new creatures in Jesus Christ, even our 'natural' gifts are renewed by the Spirit. Gifts are discovered, developed and recognized in a task-centred setting.

7. Next to the *charismata* that are given to all believers, there are also the *offices* of the church. This is not the place to discuss the intricate relationship between *charismata* and office in the New Testament.¹⁶ I agree with Ronald Fung when he says:

The existence of some kind of specialized ministry, or more specifically of church officers, is attested for the primitive church in Jerusalem, for all the Pauline churches with the [possible] exception of Corinth, and for some of the churches in the General Epistles (1 Peter, James).¹⁷

I also agree with his view that *charisma* and office need each other and that there should always be a healthy tension between them. But what is of paramount importance in our present

¹⁶ cf. for instance Ronald Y. K. Fung, 'Function or Office?—A survey of the New Testament Evidence', in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 8 (April 1984); Ulrich Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt*, 1975.

¹⁷ Fung, 'Function or Office', 36.

discussion is the great need for the spiritual renewal of the office-bearers themselves.

The exercise of an office is not just a matter of natural capacity, even though such a capacity may well be used by the Spirit. According to the New Testament the office-bearer should be a man or a woman 'full of the Spirit and of wisdom' (Acts. 6:3). We should always remember that the office also belongs to the sphere of action of the Spirit and can function effectively only when the office-bearer himself is continually open to the working of the Spirit, and therefore is being renewed continually by the Spirit.

8. The last aspect to be mentioned here is the renewal of *theology*. Even though the congregation does not depend on theology for its existence—the congregation was in existence long before there was any official theology—it cannot be denied that the congregation is often deeply influenced by the prevailing theology. If this theology goes its own self-willed, unscriptural ways, it will lead the congregation into a spiritual desert. If it is healthy, because it is both scriptural and contextual, it can be a real asset for the renewal of the congregation.

On purpose I speak not only of the need for scripturalness but also for contextuality. God's revelation as it speaks through the scriptures always addresses us in our own particular historical and cultural situation and wants to be understood within the context of that situation. A renewed theology will not simply repeat what has been already said by former generations—such a pure repetition may well be the reason why so many orthodox churches are so little alive—but such

a theology will listen with 'new' ears because of the 'new' situation. It will undoubtedly hear the 'old' gospel, but it will also discover that this 'old' gospel has a 'new' relevance, and when this relevance becomes manifest in preaching, the congregation will again be captivated by the gospel and be led on the way to renewal.

VIII Structural Change

Does such renewal also mean that the *structures* of the congregation must be thoroughly altered? My answer is: this may well be necessary. On purpose I put it so cautiously, because too often one encounters the idea that the congregation will be renewed, if only we renew the structures. I disagree totally with this idea. Such a structural automatism is entirely foreign to the New Testament. It is out of harmony with the Spirit and his work. Moreover, a new structure that is imposed on a congregation usually fails to take hold in the congregation. Most often such action causes violent reaction with little accomplished.¹⁸ We should not, however, go into the opposite direction either, and assume that spiritual renewal and structural change are two totally unrelated things. This, too, is an oversimplification. Spiritual renewal means that things begin to move in a congregation and this movement certainly also includes its traditional structures.

We see this quite clearly in the Reformation of the 16th. century. When

¹⁸ Ronald Beyer, 'A Communion of Priests', in *The Reformed Review*, Vol. 22 (May, 1969), No. 4, 17. The whole issue is devoted to the theme of 'The Renewal of the Church'.

Luther rediscovers the gracious nature of God's righteousness and publishes it in his first short writings, he himself does not think for a moment of changing the structures of the church. But this change becomes unavoidable. The place and the function of the office-bearer simply has to change. The priest has to go and the minister of the Word has to take his place. In fact, the whole hierarchical structure of the church can no longer be retained and has to be replaced by a much more democratic structure. Something similar happened in the case of Methodism.

We should not be surprised by this. The Spirit is also the Lord of structures of the church. He is not bound to traditional, antiquated patterns, but simply renews them according to his own will. It is possible that, when he starts the work of renewal in our congregation, he will push us on to new forms of congregational life, which are better suited to the new spiritual life and also the new task.

IX The Purpose Of Renewal

For we must not forget that spiritual renewal has a purpose that goes far beyond the renewal of our personal spiritual life. The purpose of renewal is that the congregation becomes what it ought to be, namely, a *missionary* and *diaconal* congregation.

The Christian congregation has a twofold task: first of all, as the first-fruits of God's creation it should praise him in the liturgy and serve him by its sanctified life. Secondly, it is called to participate in the *missio* of Jesus Christ in this world. All four Gospels inform us that after his resurrection Christ commissioned his church to go out

into the world and to disciple all nations (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24; 47; John 20:21); and the Book of Acts begins with this very same commission, not as a matter of words only, but including the deed.

In this respect, too, the congregation has to follow the example of its Lord. He not only preached the gospel of the Kingdom, but also demonstrated it by liberating deeds. Likewise he charged his twelve apostles 'to preach and to have authority to cast out demons' (Mark 3:14, 15). Some thirty years later the apostle Paul speaks of what Christ has done through him, namely, 'to win obedience from the Gentiles, by *word and deed*, by the powers of signs and wonders, *by the power of the Holy Spirit*' (Rom. 15:18).

This combination of word and deed, of the missionary and diaconal activity of the congregation, also explains the tremendous expansion of the early church. The Dutch theologian Dr. J. Van Oort said: ' "Someone" spoke "somewhere" with "someone else".... The Christian faith was propagated from mouth to mouth, from home to home, from city to city, from province to province. After 110 AD Pliny stated that "this monstrous faith spread like a contagious disease".'

But it was not just a matter of words alone. The English church-historian Henry Chadwick writes about the early church, that 'the practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment, "See how these Christians love one another" (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to

the living death in the mines, and in social action in time of calamity such as famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war'.¹⁹

Spiritual renewal of the congregation will undoubtedly issue in new missionary and diaconal activities. I dare say that this is bound to happen. The Spirit for whose coming we pray when we seek the renewal of the congregation is the 'Spirit of mission'. As Hendrikus Berkhof puts it:

The Spirit forms the unity of the christological and the eschatological pole of God's saving work. He is the expansion of the divine saving presence over the earth. He is the way from the One to the many, from the middle to the end of the times, from the centre to the ends of the earth.²⁰

And in this world-embracing activity he wants to use us. In John 15 Jesus says that not only the Spirit will bear witness to him, but 'you are also witnesses' (vv. 26, 27). Here we encounter the same reciprocity which we mentioned before. Within the sphere of action of the Spirit we may be active too. But we remain—to our comfort and humiliation—always dependent upon the initiative of the Spirit. On another occasion Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit

of your Father speaking through you' (Matt. 10:19, 20).

X The Denomination

So far we have dealt largely with the local congregation. This is, I believe, the correct starting point. When the New Testament speaks of the church it usually means the local church. Paul writes that church life takes place at the local level, and when we speak about the renewal of the church we should indeed first of all think of the congregation *in loco*. But the local church is usually also part of a *denomination*. Is there any ground to expect the renewal of an entire denomination? I find this a difficult question to answer.

As we all know, the New Testament does not know the phenomenon of the denominational church. The word *ekklesia* refers either to the local church or to the universal church (especially in Ephesians and Colossians). Denominations are the result of history, and usually the fruit of a schism that occurred in a certain church. Although in some historical situations such a schism may be almost unavoidable and even may be an act of obedience to the Lord of the church, I cannot get away from the feeling that he Spirit cares much less for our beloved denominations than we do.

I am also afraid even that he finds it hard to renew an entire denomination! For unfortunately denominations are often dominated by all kinds of bureaucratic structures, which tend to oppose every attempt at change. This is true, not only of churches of the catholic type, with their hierarchical structures, but also of many Protestant

19 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1967), 56. Cf. my article 'The Church's Mission Today—The Unity of its Task', in *International Reformed Bulletin*, No. 51, Fall 1972, 2–14.

20 Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: Epworth, 1964), 35.

churches, proud of their 'low' ecclesiology. Visser 't Hooft points out that 'many Reformation churches defend their specific systems of organization or their ecclesiastical customs with a zeal that ought to be reserved for the defence of the faith itself'.²¹

And yet we should not lose courage. When the winds of the Spirit begin to blow, even the most solid structures cannot withstand them. When people and congregations within the denomination are touched by the renewing power of the Spirit, the denomination undoubtedly will notice the change and may open up to these new winds. When renewed people begin to work within these bureaucratic structures, even these structures may begin to serve the cause of the Spirit.

A good example is the Second Vatican Council. Prior to Pope John Paul XXIII's announcement of a new ecumenical council no one would have believed that any real change was still possible in the R.C. Church. After the first Vatican Council in 1870, with its declaration of the infallibility of the Pope when he speaks *ex cathedra* concerning matters of faith and morals, the structure of the R.C. church seemed hardened, so that most Protestants believed that renewal had become impossible. And yet it did happen. New winds of change, undoubtedly caused by the movement of the Spirit, began to blow and new doors were opened. It is equally amazing to see how the so-called charismatic renewal has been more prominent in the R.C. Church than in most of the Protestant churches. Even denominations are not a lost

cause, as far as the Spirit is concerned.

This is not to deny, however, that most of the larger denominations today are in such a spiritual state that renewal seems *well nigh impossible*. The greatest problem perhaps is the *plurality* or, even worse, the *pluralism* that is dominant in them. The message of the church, both in its preaching to its own members and in its speaking to the world, has become so blurred that people both in and outside the church hardly know what the message of the church is. If the denomination is to be renewed it is first of all necessary for it to submit again to the Word of God and to learn how to communicate this Word in all its clarity. As Visser 't Hooft puts it:

It is in listening to the Word of God in the Scriptures that the Church discovers again and again what God's design is and what its own place is in that design. Where else can it find out about the total plan of God and come to know what particular mission he has assigned to the Church? Where else can it come to realize the full contents of its own life and come to understand its own past and its own future?²²

We may add: Where else can it find the criterion for true renewal? Where else can it find the renewal itself?

XI The Ecumenical Movement

But even denominations are not the last word. As a result of the missionary movement of the 19th century the modern *ecumenical movement* came into be-

21 Berkhof, *Holy Spirit*, 111.

22 Berkhof, *Holy Spirit*, 93.

ing, issuing in 1948 in the World Council of Churches. To some evangelicals the WCC may be the least promising object of renewal. Some evangelicals regard it even as the prime example of apostasy and as the temple of the antichrist. I have no desire to enter into a discussion of the WCC and to offer a defence of it. As a matter of fact I share many of the misgivings and criticisms that are voiced in evangelical circles. And yet it cannot be denied that the modern ecumenical movement, notably in the form of the WCC, has brought to light essential aspects of the biblical teaching concerning the unity and renewal of the church.

Unity and renewal are closely related in the New Testament. Paul speaks to the Ephesians of the unity of the Spirit and goes on to mention the sevenfold character of this unity: 'There is only one Body and one Spirit, as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above us all and through all and in all'. And then he immediately adds: 'Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of God's gift.' Indeed, unity and renewal belong together.

But for the ecumenical movement just as for the local church and the denomination, it holds true that renewal is possible only when there is a return to, and obedience to, the *Word of God*. Already in the Old Testament we read that the people will be gathered from among the nations when they return to the Lord their God and obey his Voice (Deut. 30:2). Later on Nehemiah appeals to this word of Moses when the people are in exile (1:8, 9) and the Lord himself says through his prophet

Ezekiel that the unity of the people under the coming of messianic king will be a unity in following the ordinances and observing the statutes of the Lord (37:24).

In the New Testament we find the high priestly prayer of Jesus himself in which he asks his Father: 'Sanctify them all in the truth; thy word is truth' (John 17:16). The apostle Paul calls the church of the living God 'the pillar and bulwark of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15). It is one of the greatest weaknesses of the WCC that it has never stressed this aspect. It has never warned against those teachings that are in conflict with its own basis. I cannot recall ever having seen a statement of the WCC or any National Council speaking out against the new liberalism.²³ On the contrary, the WCC has always been very open to the latest theological fashions, including nearly every genitive theology under the sun.²⁴

XII Conclusion

True renewal is born of the union of *Word and Spirit*. Both are indispensable for true renewal. The Word tells us what the gospel is about. It tells us of God's mighty acts of redemption in both the history of Israel and that of Jesus and his church. It tells us of God's eternal plan of salvation and his will to unite in Jesus Christ all things in heaven and in earth (Eph. 1:10). But the activity of the Spirit is necessary as well. The human heart, left to its own devices, refuses to accept this gospel of renewal. This stubborn heart has to

²³ Cf. my books, *Reformation today*, 1968, 67 and *De Wereldraad in Discussie*, 1978, 19ff.

²⁴ See my *Wereldraad in Discussie*, 34ff.

be opened by the regenerating power of the Spirit.

The canons of Dort describe this regenerating work as a supernatural work, most powerful and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation and the resurrection from the dead (III–IV,12). People thus touched by the Spirit ‘actually believe and their will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by the will of God but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active’. This is true renewal indeed.

This same renewal will take place in the church when Word and Spirit become active in her. For such a renewal of the church we also need both the preaching of the gospel in all its fullness and a resurrection of the dead. One cannot help thinking here of Ezekiel 37 where we hear the Lord saying to his prophet that he has to prophesy to the dead bones in the valley (symbol of the people of Israel who are in exile and have lost all hope), so that they may live again. And indeed bones come together, bone to its bone, and there are sinews on them, and flesh and skin. But the bones are still without life. Then the prophet is commanded to prophesy again and call the breath, the *ruach*, from the four winds, ‘and the *ruach* came into them and they lived and they stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host’ (v. 10).

This prophetic picture is not, as often has been suggested, a prophecy of the eschatological resurrection of the dead,²⁵ but it speaks of the *spiritual re-*

birth of Israel. It is striking to note that this rebirth takes place in two stages (as in the case of the creation of the first man, according to Gen. 2:7). During the first stage their bones are addressed and then something wonderful does happen indeed: they become bodies again. But they are not yet alive. This happens only when the ‘*ruach*’, the Spirit, comes. Preaching alone is not enough. The Spirit must add his power to the preached word so that hearts of stone are made alive and people stand (spiritually) upon their feet.

When this happens another picture of Ezekiel becomes reality. I am thinking of the picture in Ezekiel 47, the picture of the new river of paradise that rises from the spring in the temple. It is a remarkable picture. It starts as a trickle coming from the temple. But soon the trickle grows into a brook. At first this brook is only ankle-deep, but in just over a mile it is a wide and deep river which can be crossed only by swimmers.

And then a second miracle happens. The river flows in the direction of the deep landscape of the Dead Sea region and it transforms it completely: the stagnant waters of the Dead Sea become fresh and swarm with fish (vv. 8, 9), and trees flourish on its banks, bearing new fruit every month (v. 12). Renewal often starts on a very small scale, but owing to the Spirit it has its own inherent, multiplying power. It produces new fruit in a landscape that so far was dead. And this fruit is not only for food, but also for healing.

Undoubtedly this picture is of an eschatological nature. It points, far beyond the return of Israel from the exile, to the total renewal of the earth. The river of paradise and the marvel-

²⁵ Cf. John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (London: Tynedale, 1969), 236; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (London: SCM, 1970), 509.

lous effects brought by it signify the transformation of this world into the garden of paradise.²⁶ But it is at the same time also a picture of every act of renewal which the Lord brings about in his church.

It always originates in the 'temple', in the act of reconciliation by Jesus

Christ; it starts from a small beginning but then grows into a wide and deep river; eventually it penetrates even into the barren world around the church. On the banks of the river of God's renewing grace there grow all kinds of trees, which produce fresh fruit, giving food and healing to all who come to this river. The renewal of the church is a blessing not only for the church itself, but also for the world around it.

26 Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 585.

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Lessons from Global Worship

Ron Man

KEYWORDS: *Missions, culture, biblical, ethnodoxology, church, glory, biblical authority*

THE GOAL OF THIS PAPER is to look at some of the developments in and perspectives on worship that can be observed in our present-day world. This is a huge and multi-faceted global phenomena but we can be encouraged that the body of Christ is magnificently varied and worships in an incredible variety of ways¹—to the glory and, one would assume, the *delight* of the Father.

I A Worship Reformation?

Whatever we call it, it is unquestionable that something big has been happening in worship in the evangelical church in the last fifty years. In 1961 A. W. Tozer wrote prophetically about what he deemed as the pitiful state of worship in evangelical churches:

¹ For many fascinating examples, see Paul Neeley's blog *Global Christian Worship* (globalworship.tumblr.com); and the YouTube channel of *Heart Sounds International* (www.youtube.com/user/HSIOM).

Worship is the missing jewel in modern evangelicalism. We're organized, we work, we have our churches, we have our agendas, we have almost everything. But there is one thing that the churches, even the gospel churches, do not have: and that is the ability to worship. We are not cultivating the art of worship. It's the one shining gem that is lost to the modern church. And, I believe, we ought to search for this until we find it.²

If Tozer were still alive today, he would undoubtedly be amazed, and at least to some extent gratified, at the developments in worship that he in part helped to spur.³ Many of these

² A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel* (reprint: Christian Publications, 1996).

³ Several years ago, I twice had the opportunity, at two different schools, to have lunch with a well-known teacher of worship. When I asked these men how they first became attuned to the importance of worship, they amazingly had almost the identical answer (paraphrased): 'When I was attending Bible college [two different Bible colleges], A. W. Tozer came to campus and spoke on *worship*; and it opened up a whole new world to me.'

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developments were focused in North America. In different corners of the evangelical world, Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, Bruce Leafblad, Ralph Martin, Robert Rayburn, and above all Robert Webber took up the call, followed later by many others. In the evangelical world (and beyond) we have seen an explosion in the last fifty years of:

- Worship writings of all sorts: inspirational, practical, silly, and scholarly. John Witvliet of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (himself a major contributor in this area) surveyed some of the scholarly contributions among evangelicals in a paper at the 2008 meeting of this group.⁴ Worship scholars such as the late Robert Webber and now Reggie Kidd have been regular contributors to *Worship Leader* magazine. And evangelical leaders such as John Piper, John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul and Bryan Chapell have weighed in on worship in print as well.
- Worship music and recordings. A vast array of new songs and styles; but also efforts to retain, revive and sometimes recast old hymns.
- Worship seminars and conferences. Again, of all sorts.
- Worship courses and degree programs on all levels of higher

education; e.g., there are presently at least twenty master's degree programs in seminaries and Christian universities with some sort of emphasis on worship.

- Worship scholarship, such as that encouraged by the new Biblical Worship Section of the Evangelical Theological Society; its stated aim is 'to encourage and model academic study that supports renewal and reform in the worship of evangelical churches and promotes education about worship in evangelical institutions'.
- Worship networks: in recent years the Calvin Institute has hosted two colloquia for evangelical worship theologians (with about 25 and 35 in attendance, respectively). And the Biblical Worship Section of ETS also has served to network those who participate in these sessions, and also others as the presented papers are posted online (etsworship.wordpress.com).
- And, of course, the so-called worship wars within individual churches and denominations. Every reformation has its casualties.

James White and Robb Redman⁵ among others have chronicled some of these developments.

⁴ John D. Witvliet, 'Grounding Corporate Worship in Scriptural Wisdom: Prospects of Recent Evangelical Scholarship', Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, 2008. (etsworship.wordpress.com All the papers from the 2007-2010 sessions are available on this website).

⁵ James F. White, *Christian Worship in North America: A Retrospective: 1955-1995* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997; reprint: Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007), especially chapter 9: 'The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church'; Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

II Worldwide Worship

Developments in evangelical worship awareness and focus have not been limited to North America or the English-speaking world.⁶ Many of the same advances, and more than a few of the same problems, can be observed around the world as well.

- Worship writings worldwide. Except for Canada and the U.K., most of the production of worship books in other countries has consisted of works translated from the English and published abroad. Thankfully, David Peterson's *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* has found its way into French, Spanish, Romanian, Russian and Bulgarian.
- Worship music and recordings worldwide. Much of this material is, in fact, directly or stylistically imported from the U.S. and the U.K., and now Australia as well; (Hillsong), often sung in English, though also translated. One consequence of modern forms of communication is the fact that, whether we like it or not, western contemporary music is now part of the culture and the 'heart music' of young people all over the world. Church leaders and missionaries must face this reality head-on in their work, even while encouraging indigenous forms of art and worship.
- Worship seminars and conferences worldwide. In the last two years I have personally taught at

three regional or national worship and church music consultations in vastly different parts of the world: the *Global Consultation on Music in Missions* in Singapore (July 2010) (a global event but with a decided Asian flavour); the *International Christian Music Summit* in Riga, Latvia (January 2011), drawing participants from Eastern Europe and nations of the former Soviet Union; and the *National Consultation on Church Music and Worship* in Pakistan (a strongly Muslim country!) (February 2011), given in two cities and drawing participants from across the country. (I was gratified that the organizers of these three events all saw the importance of solid biblical foundations, even while celebrating culturally rich and varied expressions of worship; hence the role I was able to play in these conferences, teaching on biblical foundations.) These are just a few examples of the kinds of things, unimaginable fifty years ago, now happening in so many different parts of the world.

- Worship courses and programs. While degree programs in worship are still mainly limited to the English-speaking world, there is a remarkable amount of teaching in this area going on around the world. This writer alone has had the opportunity to give courses and/or seminars on worship in over 30 countries in the past eleven years, and many others have been similarly involved in other countries as well.
- Worship scholarship. Again, this

⁶ See worr.org/worldwide_worship.php for a list and links of a number of different worship ministries in various parts of the world.

area is in its infancy, at least in the evangelical world. Two collections of essays from an international array of authors have made a contribution in this area.⁷

- Worship networks. Two examples from this author's personal involvement are: the *Europe Worship Link* (www.europeworshiplink.com), a network of worship leaders and teachers from across Europe, which sponsors gatherings for mutual encouragement and resourcing; and the *Eurasian Worship Alliance*, a network of missionaries involved in worship-related ministries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which stays in contact to communicate, coordinate and cooperate in this region of common interest. There are other networks, most operating on a national level, such as the *Music and Worship Foundation* in the UK (mwf.org.uk).
- Worship wars. Sadly, these have emerged as well, though perhaps not with the frequency or magnitude of such skirmishes in comfortable western churches, where we seem to have no weightier issues facing us. In places where the church is undergoing severe privation or persecution, there is little attention given to the kinds of style and music debates that sap so much energy in North

America particularly. Yet it is remarkable how consistently many of the issues show themselves in far-flung parts of the world as well. Generational issues are very much at the forefront almost everywhere, with the concomitant discussions about styles, instrumentation, etc.⁸

III Worship and Missions: The Rediscovered Relationship

The nation of Israel was called forth to be a unique worshipping people of the one true God. In Isaiah 43:21 it is designated as 'the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise'. In Exodus Moses repeatedly commands Pharaoh on behalf of God to 'let my people go, that they might worship [or 'serve'] me in the wilderness' (Ex. 7:16; 8:1,20; 9:1,13; 10:3, cf. also 3:12,18; 5:1,3; 8:8,27; 10:7,8-9,25-26).

Yet, as Abraham's call in Genesis 12:1-2 makes clear, God's intention was always to bless the entire world and bring them under his gracious rule (though the nation of Israel too often forgot this intended outward-looking aspect of their privileged position as the special people of God). The calling of all peoples to praise the one true God is a prominent theme in the Scriptures, especially in the book of Psalms. For example, in Psalm 67 (ESV) we read:

May God be gracious to us and
bless us and make his face to
shine upon us,

⁷ Donald A. Carson, editor, *Worship: Adoration and Action* (reprint: Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2002); Charles E. Farhadian, editor, *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2007).

⁸ By far the most common question posed to me when I am teaching overseas has to do with whether a particular style or type of music is appropriate for Christian worship.

that your way may be known on
earth,
your saving power among all
nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
Let the nations be glad and sing
for joy,
for you judge the peoples with
equity and guide the nations
upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

The Psalmist here obviously understands the Abrahamic Covenant, and sees God's blessings on Israel as a conduit for the blessing of all nations. And that blessing finds its focus and fulfillment in the praises and joyful songs of 'all the peoples'.

John Piper forcefully addressed the issue of worship's relationship to missions in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, as will be seen below. The title itself is taken from Psalm 67, and the book itself (especially the first chapter on missions and worship) reflects the Psalmist's concerns. But Piper was not the first in modern times to reemphasize this biblical theme. At InterVarsity's triennial Urbana conference in 1976, Edmund Clowney said in his keynote address:

It is my privilege to announce our international anthem... it is the doxology of the new mankind. One day the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, people and nation will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb on the other shore of the sea of fire (Rev. 15:2-3). But today God calls us to sing it here at Urbana: 'Declare his glory among the nations, his wonders among all the peoples'

(Ps: 96:3).

Praise his name, we are called to doxological evangelism: Salvation is of the Lord! Let that song die and we have nothing to sing to the nations. If we do not praise his name, we do not preach the gospel.⁹

Then at Urbana in 1981 Eric Alexander would take up the same theme, saying:

Worship and mission are so bound together in the economy of God that you really cannot have one without the other. No one can truly worship God and at the same time have an apparently total indifference to whether anyone else is worshiping him or not. True worship and true mission always go together. The glory of God is the only ultimate missionary motive.¹⁰

And on another occasion, Alexander in a sermon made the following startling statement:

The ultimate missionary compulsion is not simply that there are people who are dying without knowing Christ, nor is it that God has given us the Great Commission to go out into the world; it is that there are areas of the world, whether here or to the ends of the earth, where God is being robbed of his glory.¹¹

In 1993 Piper published *Let the Na-*

⁹ Edmund C. Clowney, 'Declare His Glory among the Nations' (Urbana, 1976). worr.org/images/File/Clowney%20Urbana%201976.pdf

¹⁰ Eric J. Alexander, 'Mission and Vision' (Urbana, 1981). [worr.org/images/File/Alexander Mission and Vision\(1\).pdf](http://worr.org/images/File/Alexander%20Mission%20and%20Vision(1).pdf)

¹¹ Eric J. Alexander, 'Worship God!' (unpublished sermon).

tions Be Glad, which he famously began with the lines:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their face before the throne of God, missions will be no more. Missions is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.¹²

Piper goes on to affirm that worship is the goal of missions:

In missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God.¹³

and also the fuel of missions:

Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish.¹⁴

These emphases have led to an historic rediscovery of the biblical relationship between worship and missions. Some of the effects have been:

- A new professional field devoted to 'the study of how and why people of diverse cultures glorify the true and living God', designated with the newly-coined term *ethnodoxology*. (*Ethnomusicology* has been around much longer, but it is a secular as well as a religious discipline.)
- A new breed of Christian mis-

sionary, assisting people groups in developing indigenous expressions of Christian worship that are reflective of and meaningful in that local culture (and often identifying themselves now as 'ethnodoxologists'). *Wycliffe Bible Translators*¹⁵ and its sister organization, *SIL International*, have led the way in this area; as well as deploying people for these pursuits, they also provide advanced training to prepare what they call 'Arts Consultants' through the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics.¹⁶

- Many involved in various aspects of this field have found mutual encouragement, resourcing and cooperation through a fellowship called the *International Council of Ethnodoxologists* (www.worldofworship.org). This from Robin Harris, President of ICE: 'ICE has close to 250 associates from (or in) over 70 countries on six continents. We are connected to over a hundred organizations: schools, seminaries, mission agencies, non-profits, and churches. Our associates from around the world are primarily

¹⁵ Wycliffe found that where its missionaries got their newly translated Scriptures sung in indigenous music forms, the churches grew rapidly; where this did not happen, the churches grew more slowly.

¹⁶ Courses offered include: Introduction to Language Structure, Language and Society, Second Language and Culture Acquisition, Cultural Anthropology, Audio and Video Techniques for Fieldworkers, Expressive Form Analysis, Research Methods for Performing Arts, Applied Arts.

¹² John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (3rd edition; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), p. 15.

¹³ Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, 35.

¹⁴ Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, 36.

teachers, students, missionaries and mission leaders, artists of all stripes, arts advocates, as well as pastoral staff and worship leaders from a broad spectrum of Christian denominations.’

- A renewed recognition on the part of missions organizations of the centrality of worship and the glory of God in the work of world evangelization. *Wycliffe Bible Translators*, for example, states as the first of its *Core Values*:

The Glory of God among the Nations. Our motive for Bible translation is that all the peoples of the earth would have the opportunity to pursue God and his glory.¹⁷

Other mission organizations are likewise emphasizing the priority of worship as both the goal and the fuel of their missions endeavours; *Crossworld*, for example, has used as its tagline on its website: ‘we worship—we love—we go’.

IV Worship and Culture

The issue of culture, variously defined as ‘the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group’¹⁸ to simply ‘the way things are done’,¹⁹ cannot be ignored (or escaped from) by the church. Worship breathes the cultural air in which it is practised. Aidan Kavanaugh has written that Christian worship ‘swims in

creation as a fish swims in water’.²⁰ Culture pervades how we think and act, regardless of whether we are aware of it or not.

1 A Worldwide Debate

As mentioned above, tensions about worship forms and styles arise in most cultures. Music and other cultural forms evoke strong emotions in most societies, and so the issue is not a negligible one.

Neither is it a new one. In the early church there was often a wide diversity of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds in one congregation (ethnic Jews, Greeks, Romans, ‘barbarians’; freemen and slaves (and slave owners). Certainly that diversity brought also a wide range of preferences and opinions about music and other worship elements. The congregation had no choice but to work through these issues; there was no option for people to switch to another church down the street with a different worship style; there was ‘*the church at Ephesus*,’ or ‘*the church at Corinth*’. There *was* no Second Church! With only one church option, believers were forced to learn to live and work together for their common goal of glorifying God.

Church history is likewise full of debates relative to worship forms and practices: What kind of music to use? Who should do the singing? Should the singing be in unison or parts? What kinds of harmonies are appropriate? What texts should or should not be sung? Should instruments be used

¹⁷ See www.wycliffe.org.

¹⁸ www.dictionary.com.

¹⁹ Author unknown.

²⁰ Aidan Kavanaugh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 4.

at all? And if so, which ones? All of these questions, and many more, have been hotly debated in churches down through the centuries; and new such areas for debate arise all the time.

2 The Bottom Line

Underlying these common issues that have surfaced in the midst of the global worship developments we have been discussing, and that are perennial issues of debate everywhere and in every age, is one basic question: How do we balance the need for biblical fidelity with the need for cultural sensitivity and relevance in our worship? Other ways of framing the question include: How do we bridge the historical and practical gap between the Scriptural mandates and our cultural context? How can our worship be 'in' the world but not 'of' the world? Where do worship and culture intersect?

I have encountered a Christian group that wanted to be deliberately *unbiblical* in its approach to worship. But just what does it mean to be *biblical*, and how is that to be played out in a given cultural context?

3 The Challenges

There are two primary issues that make the answers to these questions so difficult in all cultures.

a) The Silence of the New Testament

Every grounded and mature believer would maintain that the Scriptures must guide us as our final and supreme authority in understanding and shaping our worship. After all, worship is about God, and the Scriptures are

where he has revealed to us his nature and ways; worship is likewise for God, and the Scriptures are where he tells us what he expects of us creatures. People change; times change; cultures change; only in the pages of Scripture can we hope to find an unchanging standard for our worship. With all the debates about worship forms, styles and practices which continue to rage today in many places, the church of Jesus Christ desperately needs a unifying understanding of the unchanging, non-negotiable foundations of worship—and we must turn to the Scriptures for this purpose.

Yet even with this commitment to the Scriptures as our guide for worship, we immediately run into a problem when we go to the New Testament for models and guidelines for congregational worship. That problem has been summarized by John Piper as the 'stunning indifference' of the New Testament writers to issues of form and practice of corporate worship.²¹ We search the pages of the New Testament in vain for much in the way of specifics, much less structures or liturgies. Even in the epistles, where we might reasonably expect Paul and the other writers to address these issues as they write to guide and encourage brand new churches, we find frustratingly little.

We are left with a crucial question: Just what is it in the Bible that is supposed to govern and determine our worship? There are on-going hermeneutical debates as to how and to what extent the Old Testament, the New Testament, and early church history should inform and shape our present

²¹ John Piper, 'In Spirit and Truth' (sermon).

day understanding and practice of worship.²² But there is widespread agreement that the pages of the New Testament itself give little in the way of specific directions. Piper observes:

In the New Testament, all the focus is on the reality of the glory of Christ, not the shadow and copy of religious objects and forms. It is stunning how indifferent the New Testament is to such things: there is no authorization in the New Testament for worship buildings, or worship dress, or worship times, or worship music, or worship liturgy or worship size or thirty-five-minute sermons, or Advent poems or choirs or instruments or candles... . *Almost every worship tradition we have is culturally shaped rather than Biblically commanded.*²³

This last statement is a remarkable observation, and one with which Dan Block concurs:

In large measure, the reason many churches today are splitting over forms of communal worship may be found in the relative paucity of direct guidance that the New Testament provides. We want to be New Testament churches. The only trouble is ... the New Testament doesn't give us much specific instruction on how to do church, that is, the cultic gathering. Nowhere does the New Testament tell us to build churches,

to meet on Sundays, to have morning worship services, to open with a song and a prayer, to have a long sermon, and then to close with a benediction.²⁴

We may well ask, why did the Lord leave things so open by not stipulating in detail how corporate worship in the church should be practised? Piper makes an intriguing suggestion. He points out that Old Testament system was a 'Come and See' religion. Worship was centralized in Jerusalem, and worshipers had to come there, and at prescribed times. Even those from the surrounding nations were invited, but they had to come through Israel and to Jerusalem (and become Jews) in order to worship the one true God. Because worship under this system was localized geographically and temporally, the Old Testament gives extremely detailed and exacting prescriptions of how that worship was to be carried out. Exodus and Leviticus are full of minute detail concerning how public worship was to be practised.

In the New Testament, however, Piper points out, we have the opposite situation: we have a 'Go and Tell' system. We are to take the gospel to every nation, into every culture. And that may well be the reason why the New Testament does not spell out more in the way of specific worship practices: so that worship can be inflected in meaningful ways in each culture where the gospel takes root.²⁵

²² See Michael Farley's paper from the 2007 ETS Biblical Worship Section event, as well as the 2010 papers, at etsworship.wordpress.com.

²³ John Piper, 'Our High Priest is The Son of God Perfect Forever' (sermon). [italics mine]

²⁴ Daniel I. Block, 'The Joy of Worship: The Mosaic Invitation to the Presence of God' (Deuteronomy 12:1-14), audio message. (Published also in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April-June 2005.)

²⁵ John Piper, 'Our High Priest'.

It is a reasonable (though not unanimous) assumption that the virtual silence of the New Testament writers on matters of form and style for worship means that the Lord intends us to have considerable latitude and flexibility in these areas—from culture to culture, perhaps even from church to church. Yet our worship services still need to look like something—so how are we to make choices?

b) People Are Different

When it comes to making choices as to the forms and elements of worship, we immediately run into another difficulty. Music and the other arts are profound and powerful expressions; yet often there are wide divergences of opinion among people between and even within cultures as to their use in Christian worship, as to what is appropriate, meaningful and helpful.

The late Tom Avery, a pioneer ethnomusicologist with Wycliffe Bible Translators, drew the following insights from his field work and applied them to issues of worship music in our churches:

- It is common for people to feel very strongly about the music with which they identify, and to find the music with which they do not identify to be extremely distasteful.
- We live in a society where different generations may and often do have different musical cultures. (This is caused by the rapid rate of culture change experienced by society, probably unprecedented in the history of the world.)
- We have people in the same churches who partake of radically different musical cultures.

- Music is NOT a universal language.²⁶

This last point is a crucial one: not only does music sound different in different cultures, and indeed to different generations; but it can communicate widely varying things and elicit a wide array of different responses. Robin Harris expounded this point further in a recent *Worship Leader* article.²⁷

c) Caution

Given the silence of the New Testament, and the resultant freedom of expression that that silence seems to allow for, we need to be very careful about assuming that we have discovered the one right, God-honouring way to do worship (and even more careful about condemning those who do it differently). Reggie Kidd reminds us that

every group brings its own voice, but no group brings the official voice. One Voice sings above them all, and this Voice sings in all their voices, excluding none. His singular voice is distributed among a plurality of people. Just because there are so many dimensions to his own being, the multiplicity of their voices amplifies his song.²⁸

²⁶ Tom Avery, 'Worship Wars and Ethnomusicology' (Powerpoint presentation). worr.org/images/File/Worship%20Wars%20and%20Ethnomusicology%2020.ppt

²⁷ Robin Harris, 'The Great Misconception: Why Music Is Not a Universal Language', *Worship Leader* (November-December 2009). [worr.org/images/File/Worship%20Leader%20-All%20\(compressed\).pdf](http://worr.org/images/File/Worship%20Leader%20-All%20(compressed).pdf)

²⁸ Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids; Baker, 2005), 126.

There is One Voice, that of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, leading and empowering the praises in thousands of local expressions of worship among the worldwide people of God.²⁹

When the Bible is explicit in its directives, we need to be forthright and unbending; when the Bible is not explicit, we need to be open-minded. We should still look to the Scriptures for guidance (as we will consider below); but we also need to be careful to differentiate between what is truly biblical and therefore non-negotiable; and what is cultural (or culturally shaped), and therefore negotiable. That is not an easy task; but it is worth the effort.

3 Two Tools

Two tools have proven helpful in navigating these treacherous waters.

a) The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture³⁰

This statement was released by the *World Lutheran Federation* in 1996, and has provided many with a way to get a hold on the swirling issues surrounding the interface of worship and culture—both locally and globally. It summarizes its findings thus:

Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways:

First, it is **transcultural**, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture.

Second, it is **contextual**, varying according to the local situation.

Third, it is **counter-cultural**, challenging what is contrary to the gospel in a given culture.

Fourth, it is **cross-cultural**, making possible sharing between different local cultures.

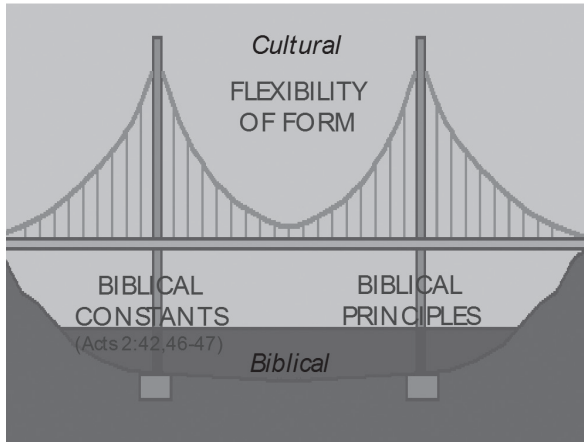
The *transcultural* nature of worship means that there are aspects of worship that do not (and should not) change from culture to culture. Thus many, including this author, have had the opportunity to teach on worship in cultures very distant and different from their own. There are biblical elements and principles of worship that, precisely because they are *biblical*, transcend culture and can be taught by someone from another culture.

But we do not want to be so totally transcultural that we ignore the cultural context in which we live (too many missionaries did that in the past and imported western ways of doing church, including worship). There are *contextual* elements that are appropriate to the particular culture in which the worship occurs. We have to be careful (regardless of where we come down on some of the hermeneutical questions) not to try to prescribe exactly how believers in another culture should practise worship—because we are not *from* that culture. Again, discernment is needed between what is truly biblical and what is an appropriately variable cultural expression—timeless truths and timely outworkings!

Contextualizing worship does not, however, mean that ‘anything goes’; worship should also be *counter-cultural* and reject elements of the culture that are deemed inappropriate for Christian worship. (Of course, debates continue about just where those lines should be drawn.)

²⁹ See also my book *Proclamation and Praise: Hebrews 2:12 and the Christology of Worship* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

³⁰ The entire document may be accessed at www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html.



And, more now than ever (because of globalization and modern communications), we have the opportunity to learn of and draw from the wonderful diversity of the larger body of Christ—in our own communities and across the world—and to grow in incorporating *cross-cultural* elements into our local celebrations.

The trick, of course, is that all of these four characteristics are (or should be) going on *at the same time*. The *Nairobi Statement* provides a helpful grid for looking at the practice of worship in our churches and considering how we can learn and grow in a fuller understanding and expression of worship; for different churches will be stronger in certain of these characteristics than in others.

b) The Bridge

Another tool for communicating the interrelationship of biblical and cultural aspects of worship is an illustration based on a *single-suspension bridge* (see picture above). This illustration applies equally to, and has been ef-

fectively used in, all sorts of different cultural contexts.

A single-suspension bridge (in this layman's understanding) is supported by two sturdy towers, which are embedded deeply and firmly in the earth so as to be immovable and to give stability to the entire structure. However, a considerable amount of the weight of the bridge is also borne by the suspension span, the cable stretched between the towers; this cable however, unlike the towers, has built flexibility so that it can adjust to winds, changes of the temperature, and the like.

The Two Towers: A Biblical Framework

Such a bridge can serve to illustrate the relationship between the Bible and culture when it comes to worship matters. The towers represent a sturdy, immovable framework of biblical truth. In spite of the New Testament's silence on matters of form, the Bible certainly gives some guidelines for worship; it is not 'anything goes'. As the picture suggests, the Bible speaks to some necessary, non-negotiable elements

of Christian worship ('Biblical Constants');³¹ and there are plentiful 'Biblical Principles' from both Testaments which can and should inform our worship practices.³²

The Suspension Cable: Cultural Latitude

However, as already noted, there is a wide range of worship decisions that are not specifically addressed in Scripture; and principles by definition must be applied in specific situations. This means that, from church to church, from culture to culture, and indeed from age to age, biblical worship may well (and indeed does) look very different as it is fleshed out in particular contexts. The suspension cable or span, with its built-in elasticity and flexibility, represents the freedom that the New Testament seems to allow for wise and prudent application of culturally meaningful expressions (always within the biblical parameters). The 'heart language of the people' is to be considered when making decisions about forms, styles, music and other artistic expressions of faith.

Below are some fascinating statements from church history that illustrate how different groups have acknowledged the need and allowed for cultural accommodation in worship practices:

Pope Gregory I sent Augustine of

Canterbury to England as a missionary about A.D. 596 with this advice: 'It seems to me that you should carefully select for the English Church, which is still new to the faith and developing as a distinct community, whatever can best please Almighty God, whether you discover it in the Roman Church, or among the Gauls, or anywhere else... . From each individual church, therefore, choose whatever is holy, whatever is awe-inspiring, whatever is right; then arrange what you have collected as if in a little bouquet according to the English disposition and thus establish them as custom.' (James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*, 44)

And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. (*Augsburg Confession* [Lutheran, 1530], Article 7)

The Master ... did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended on the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages)... . Because he has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices

³¹ What actually belongs under this classification will vary according to the hermeneutical grid one applies to a biblical understanding of Christian worship.

³² A list of such principles is suggested in my article 'Biblical Principles of Worship' (online at worr.org/by_ron_man.php); see also the Calvin Institute's 'Ten Core Convictions' at worship.calvin.edu/ten.

and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe. (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, 10, 30)

Article 34—Of the Traditions of the Church

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. . . . Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church, ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying. (*Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* [Church of England, 1563])

We certainly can see the application of this principle of Cultural Latitude (consciously or not) in the vast array of worship expressions seen down through the history of the Christian Church, and in churches around the world today. There have been, and are, an enormous variety in terms of architecture, atmosphere, form, structure, style, dress, music, liturgy, etc. As discussed earlier, recent developments in missions have given more weight to the importance of helping people groups to develop their own indigenous forms of worship expression, rather than simply borrowing and translating songs and other practices from the West (as was the practice for too long in many church planting contexts).

The virtual silence of the New Testament as to the specifics of congregation worship practice seems to allow for local churches, as the fundamental unit of the body of Christ on earth, to have considerable autonomy and freedom as individual congregations in working out the issues involving the balance of biblical constants and biblical flexibility in the worship of that church. That does not mean that it is an easy task, however—as recent history has amply demonstrated. The so-called 'worship wars' are symptomatic of the kind of danger into which freedom of this sort can cast us; and we might indeed be left wishing that Paul had just prescribed a set liturgy for all time and left it at that! God obviously wants his people to apply biblical wisdom and discernment in this, as well as in many other areas where he has chosen not to spell everything out for us.

It will take several things for a local church to successfully navigate these treacherous worship waters, among them:

- *Leadership.* The pastor and the elders/deacons/board must study worship in the Bible, and study their people as well, and seek prayerful conclusions.
- *Communication.* The careful solicitation of points of view from members of the congregation, while not the last word on worship decisions that must be made by the leadership, is an important step in leading the people as shepherds.
- *Teaching.* The pastor and other leaders must promote a biblical understanding of worship in the public teaching ministry of the Church. And if any kind of change

in worship is to be undertaken in the church, it is absolutely essential that the people are told the *why*, not just the *what*, of the change.

- *Principle-based decisions.* This relates to the second tower of the bridge illustration: just because the Bible does not give a lot of specifics about worship services does not mean that we have no biblical guidance at all. Clear biblical principles can be discerned, and this gives hope for agreement on a foundational biblical level within, and even among, churches. But principles by definition must be applied, and that is where the leaders must devote prayer for wisdom and balance in making application of the principles to their particular local church situation. Also, by definition principles may be applied *differently* by different people and in different situations; so we must learn to give grace to others in the church who would prefer a different application, and to other churches which apply principles differently to their situation.
- *'Semper reformanda.'* This Latin phrase means 'always reforming' and comes to us out of the Reformation; it expresses the importance of regularly and repeatedly subjecting our worship and other practices to the scrutiny of the Scriptures. Culture and traditions change; the Scriptures do not. A church's traditions should not be ignored when considering worship issues in that church; but neither should they be allowed to assume the level of au-

thority that is appropriate only to the Scriptures. As someone has said, 'Tradition is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master'.

V Global Worship: Lessons, Cautions and Blessings

Turning back to the *Nairobi Statement* once more, we can use its grid to guide us in some concluding applicational perspectives.

- *Culture matters (Contextual Worship).* We are as believers to be 'in', though not 'of', the world. Jesus was very conversant in the culture in which he lived during his earthly ministry: sometimes he conformed to it; sometimes he challenged it (when it went against God's ways); sometimes he outright contradicted it. But he was never unaware of it. Culture is not our enemy; it is in a sense 'the air we breathe', so we cannot ignore it. Christian worship 'is permeated with the sights and sounds and smells, the tastes and touch of our material world, and in this way it offers not a disembodied message of escape but rather an encompassing experience of a world redeemed and reconciled to God'.³³

Cultural diversity in worship is thus inevitable, and also positive. As John Piper has expressed:

The frightening freedom of worship in the New Testament is a

³³ John H. Erickson and Eileen W. Lindner, 'Worship and Prayer in Ecumenical Formation,' *Theological Education* Vol. 34, Supplement (1997): 23.

missionary mandate. We must not lock this gospel treasure in any cultural strait-jacket. Rather let us find the place, the time, the dress, the forms, the music that kindles and carries a passion for the supremacy of God in all things.³⁴

- *Scripture matters more (Transcultural Worship)*. Framing and controlling and protecting and guiding and correcting and enriching our worship practices must be a solid foundation of biblical truth and rigorous application of biblical principles of worship. Worship is, after all, about God and for God—and we must praise him ‘according to his excellent greatness’, as the Psalmist enjoins us (150:2). We must seek to ‘let the Word of Christ dwell richly among’ us (Colossians 3:16), by letting it infuse and regulate our worship, and find expression throughout the service in many different ways: most evangelical services need more of the Word read and sung and prayed and declared (this is a *worldwide* need). James F. White has incisively warned thus:

If we really believe, as we profess, that scripture is central to the Christian life, then it ought also to be central in our worship life. That Sunday bulletin is an important statement of faith. If the bulletin makes it clear that scripture is an important part of Christian worship, then

we can be sure people will get the message that the Bible is crucial in shaping their lives as Christians. But, when the role of scripture in worship is negligible, when scripture is used only to launch a sermon, what is communicated is that the Bible is marginal in Christian life, too. The use we make or fail to make of scripture in our worship says far more about Christian discipleship than we may realize.³⁵

- *We must rigorously differentiate between biblical injunctions and cultural inflections (Transcultural/Contextual distinction)*. We must always be aware of our Pharisaic tendency towards ‘teaching as doctrines the precepts of men’ (Matthew 15:9), which in this passage Jesus himself says leads to ‘vain’ worship. Many (if not most) worship debates and disagreements arise from not clearly discerning the difference here. When God has not spoken unequivocally to a subject, we must be very careful about thinking we have unerringly discerned his thinking. Tradition is not our enemy, but must always be held up to scrutiny in light of God’s Word, our only unchanging standard for worship and life.
- *We must discern our culture wisely and biblically (Counter-Cultural Worship)*. All that glitters is not gold. Missionaries are often faced with helping newly-reached peo-

³⁴ John Piper, ‘Our High Priest is The Son of God Perfect Forever’ (sermon).

³⁵ James F. White, ‘Making Our Worship More Biblical’, *Perkins Journal* 34.1 (Fall 1980): 38.

ples to determine what from the culture can be profitably reflected in their worship, and what should be rejected because it would distract or offend because of inseparable associations that are dishonouring to God and his truth; that challenge constantly faces us as well. Ronald Byars has wisely stated:

The gospel ought never to be entirely at home in any culture. If gospel and culture fit together as easily as hand-in-glove, then the likelihood is that the gospel has capitulated to the values of the culture... There must always be some tension between gospel and culture. The trick is to tune that tension just right, so that gospel and church can play a transforming role in its host culture. The gospel doesn't carry with it a culture of its own. It must always find its place in the culture of the time and place. Nevertheless, it always questions the local culture and holds it accountable before the cross.³⁶

- *We should practise local worship with a global mind set (Cross-Cultural Worship)*. God is not a local deity, and his church is a vast mosaic of people from many tribes, and tongues, and people, and nations.³⁷ Our worship should not

be monochrome and provincial.

- *We must focus above all on what truly pleases God in worship.*

First and foremost, we must rest in the fact that our worship is acceptable and pleasing to the Father because it is gathered up and perfected and offered up by his Son, our Worship Leader and High Priest, with whom the Father is *always* pleased. James Torrance reminds us that 'there is only one way to come to the Father, namely, through Christ in the communion of the Spirit, ... whatever outward form our worship may take'.³⁸

And, finally, we must always remember that 'man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart' (1 Samuel 16:7). Both Testaments make abundantly clear that God is much more concerned with our hearts than with the form of our worship.³⁹ God in his grace has provided a perfect worship for us to present to the Father in and through Jesus Christ; and we are to attune our hearts to our Saviour's, gratefully and humbly offering our worship through him as an appropriate 'Amen' to God's 'Yes' to us in Christ—for his glory (2 Corinthians 1:20).

³⁶ Ronald P. Byars, *Christian Worship: Glorifying and Enjoying God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 110.

³⁷ Some practical first steps in this direction are offered in my article 'Global Worship: What in the World Can I Do about It?' *Worship Leader*, November-December 2009, 82.

worr.org/images/File/Worship%20Leader%20-All%20(compressed).pdf

³⁸ James B. Torrance, 'Christ in Our Place', in *A Passion for Christ* (Lenoir, North Carolina: PLC Publications, 1999), 37.

³⁹ For more on this theme, see my *Worship Notes* 1.11 (November 2006). worr.org/images/File/1-11HEART.pdf

The Salvation of the Unevangelized in the Light of God's Covenants

Terrance L. Tiessen

KEYWORDS: *Exclusivism, accessibilism, mission, revelation, metanarrative, community, grace, church*

ARMINIANS (AND OTHER synergists) most naturally allow for the salvation of the unevangelized, because they characteristically believe that God wills the salvation of every human being and that he has graciously done everything possible to save the maximum number of people. For Calvinists (and other monergists), however, the situation is different. They believe that God has graciously chosen to save effectually a vast number of people who, if left to themselves, would have wilfully died in rebellion against him. If we believe that God has unconditionally chosen those whom he will save from out of sinful humanity, it is not logically problematic if God does not make available the means of saving revelation to those whom he has not purposed to save.

Following the lead of Calvin himself, therefore, many monergists have asserted gospel exclusivism, which gives no hope for the salvation of the unevangelized. But there has never been a consensus on this point among

Reformed theologians, for others follow Zwingli's lead. They assert that God can save people through Christ, by forms of revelation less complete than the gospel, if they are inculpably ignorant of it. This view is commonly called 'inclusivism' but I prefer the term 'accessibilism', as more descriptive. Many other Calvinists are agnostic about whether God saves any of the unevangelized.

Within a Reformed framework, how can we account for this difference between gospel exclusivists on the one hand and agnostics and accessibilists on the other?

I Perspectives on Gospel Exclusivism and Accessibilism

I find no texts in the Bible that state explicitly that *only* the evangelized will be saved, nor any that state explicitly that *any* of the unevangelized will be saved. Gospel exclusivists cite numerous biblical texts to support their position, but four problems are common in their interpretation of these texts: first, texts asserting the uniqueness of Christ as the world's only Saviour are

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read as assertions that knowledge of Christ is necessary to benefit from his saving work (e.g., Acts 4:12); second, texts asserting the saving efficacy of belief in Jesus are read as assertions that *only* such fully informed faith can save (e.g., the citation of Joel 2:32 in Rom. 10:13); third, Scripture is clear that all who believe in Jesus are saved and that all who *reject* Jesus remain condemned. But it is often not observed that texts which speak of not believing (i.e., rejecting) Jesus are in contexts where knowledge of him is assumed, and so these cannot be extended to refer to the unevangelized (e.g., Jn. 3:16-18); and fourth, the context of texts is ignored, as in Romans 10, where Paul rejects, as a possible explanation for widespread unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah, that Jews were ignorant of Jesus. So, this much cited text is not speaking of the unevangelized, though it does state clearly the necessity of revelation for saving faith.

This absence of texts explicitly stating gospel exclusivism is probably the main reason for widespread agnosticism on this point among evangelicals these days. I propose that the decisive factor accounting for some Calvinists affirming gospel exclusivism while others assert agnosticism or accessibility, is their different understandings of the metanarrative concerning God's saving program.¹

1 See J. Nelson Jennings, 'God's Zeal for His World', in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, eds. Morgan, Christopher W. and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 235, for a similar approach to this issue, though from a gospel exclusivist perspective.

1 The gospel exclusivist metanarrative

Stephen Wellum writes: 'In order for one to benefit from the saving work of Christ, Scripture teaches that one must exercise explicit faith in the covenant promises of God, now, given our place in redemptive history, centered in Jesus Christ.'² He states further: 'Scripture presents the work of the Spirit always in relation to the Son, entailing that when the Spirit is at work in people, his unique work *is to bring people to faith in Christ* which must always be viewed in a covenantally defined way.'³

Taking Wellum's reference to 'a covenantally defined way' together with his earlier statement, he looks to be explicitly asserting that, in order to be saved, one must know the particular revelation related to God's most recent covenantal activity. This raises the necessary revelational bar very high, for it entails a belief that, as God further reveals himself in the process of making new covenants, the knowledge derived from previous covenantal revelation ceases to be sufficient for saving faith.⁴

2 Stephen J. Wellum, 'Saving Faith: Implicit or Explicit?' in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, eds. Morgan, Christopher W. and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 146.

3 Wellum, 'Saving Faith', 165.

4 Cf., Francis Turretin *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Trans. George Musgrave Giger. Ed. James T. Dennison Jr. Vol. 1: First Through Tenth Topics (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1992), 402-03; Topic 4, Q XVII, # XXIII; John Piper, *Jesus: The Only Way to God: Must You Hear the Gospel to Be Saved?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 76; R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, 'A Particularist

2 The accessibilist metanarrative

Accessibilists may grant to agnostics (as I do) that Scripture does not explicitly declare that God saves particular individuals who have no knowledge of the revelation God gave in conjunction with his establishment of covenantal relationships. But we are not agnostic about this possibility, because we do find lines of biblical teaching that lead us to be hopeful about the expansiveness of God's saving work. We acknowledge the lack of examples or teaching concerning people saved completely beyond the reach of God's covenantal revelation, but we see this as completely expectable, given the narrow focus of Scripture—it was addressed to God's covenant people and told them what they needed to know for life and godliness in their particular contexts.

That nothing is said about what God was doing in the Americas, in east Asia, or in sub-Saharan Africa, at the time that he made his foundational covenant with Abraham, is not at all surprising. For God to have communicated to the people of Abraham's day what he was doing savingly among peoples of whom they were completely ignorant, in parts of the world of which they had no awareness, would have been far more surprising than Scripture's silence on this matter. To conclude from that silence, however, that God was

doing *no work of saving grace at all* in those areas of the world is unwarranted, unless Scripture specifically states this, which it does not.

A few factors stand out to me as particularly important in the accessibilist metanarrative that differentiate it from the big picture of gospel exclusivism.

a) The graciousness of the sovereign God

We have been impressed by the amazing graciousness of God who described himself as Yahweh, 'a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' (Ex. 34:6-7) and who is 'rich in mercy' (Eph. 2:4), whose redemptive work is directed toward the restoration of his creation.

Christopher Wright, noted for his biblical theological exposition of God's mission, writes: 'We have seen that the whole emphasis of the Bible lies on salvation being something that God has accomplished in history and that belongs to God in his sovereignty. It seems to me to be presumptuous for us to limit the sovereignty of God's grace to the evangelistic obedience of the church (or, more often, the lack of it).' Wright is unable to say 'that God is somehow unable or unwilling to save anybody at any time in human history, unless and until a Christian reaches them with an intelligible explanation of the story of the gospel'. If true, that 'would mean that in the end, ... the total number saved (by God) will be smaller than the total number evangelized (by us). And that *seems to restrict the operation of God's grace* to the limits of the operation of our human evange-

View: An Evidential Approach' in *More Than One Way? Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 240; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 41, 42, 46-47.

listic efforts'⁵ (emphasis mine).

Instead, 'the Bible gives us grounds to believe that the reverse will be true. That is, those who will have responded to explicit Christian evangelism will be a subset of the finally elect and redeemed. For *God operates in his sovereign grace to reach out to and touch people to the ends of the earth and at all times of history*.... What the Old Testament prepares us to expect—namely the appearance of God-fearing people in the most unlikely places (even among the enemies of God's people)—is replicated in the history of cross-cultural mission'⁶ (emphasis mine).

b) The covenant people as instruments of God

God's gracious covenants, since the fall, are all the outworking of his plan to restore his rule, to reconcile alienated bearers of his image through redeeming them from sin, and ultimately to restore his creation in a new heaven and earth. The covenants are thus the context in which God's *objective* acts of salvation are done. God's covenants, though made with particular people, are always in pursuit of his extensive gracious purposes. They bring about communities which are God's primary agents in his redemptive program, though not all members of those communities are saved. The covenant people are set aside as a special priestly people for the blessing of the nations, as a light to the nations, to minister salvation to them. Fulfilment of this

missionary role depends upon their being personally in saving relationship to God and living in obedience to his covenant requirements.⁷

In God's *subjective* acts of salvation, individuals are reconciled to God through faith, on the ground of God's objective redemptive act in Christ. From Abraham onward, this work of reconciliation is carried out by God as part of his *normal or ordinary* work in the midst of his covenant people, first Israel and then the church. But God does not restrict his subjective saving work in individual lives to the boundaries of the covenant community, even though his saving of people outside of that community may rightly be dubbed *extraordinary*.⁸

c) Saving faith and knowledge of the divine self-revelation

D. A. Carson softens his usual gospel exclusivism when he states: '*Most of the pre-Christ believers are those who enter into a covenantal, faith-based relationship with the God who had disclosed himself to them in the terms and the extent recorded up to that time*' (emphasis mine).⁹ But accessibilists

⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God: Celebrating the Bible's Central Story* (Nottingham, Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 176.

⁶ Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God*, 176.

⁷ Particularly helpful for demonstration of the role of the covenant people as instruments in God's mission are Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), and John Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994).

⁸ Neal Punt deftly addresses the question 'Will only covenant members be saved?' in *A Theology of Inclusivism* (Allendale, Mich.: Northland Books, 2008), 171-78.

⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 298.

can push the window open further, by proposing that *no one lives outside of one of God's covenantal arrangements* even if that covenant is limited to the one made with Adam and reaffirmed with Noah.

The *critical issue* is whether the line of redemptive history applies across the entire population at a time, regardless of their knowledge, that is, of whether they are aware of the revelation connected to the latest covenant God has made. I believe that we must take into account not only God's providence relative to his redemptive historical timeline, but also his providence relative to the spread of knowledge through particular divine revelation.

If God had made knowledge of the latest covenant revelation necessary for saving faith, a very peculiar situation would have arisen. God's fulfillment of his covenant promises to Abraham is central to God's saving action in the world. But, in choosing Abraham, God states his intention to bless 'all the nations of the earth' (Gen 18:18), through his covenantal relationship with Abraham and his descendants. If one must know this new revelation that God has made to Abraham (or later parties to further covenantal developments) then each new revelation actually makes smaller the reach of God's saving work! With each new covenantal revelation, the circle of people *able* to be saved because of Christ's atoning work, and by the illuminating and enabling work of the Spirit, grows *smaller*.

This gospel exclusivist thesis runs counter to the expansive tenor of God's stated intentions in making covenants with particular people and groups. It is doubtful that God narrowed his sav-

ing work to the small part of the world aware of the covenant with Abraham and his descendants, thereby excluding from his saving work a large part of the world until such time as the church would reach them with the new covenant gospel, hundreds and even thousands of years later. God's interest in all the peoples of the world began long before the church had grown sufficiently around the world to get the gospel to many people groups.

Romans 2:12-16 makes clear that people's duties are defined by the covenant revelation they have received, which defines the covenant relationship with God in which they exist. For good reason, Protestants defend the *sufficiency* of God's revelation in Scripture. I propose that we can also speak of universal revelation as sufficient relative to God's purposes in self-revelation. John Frame enunciates the critical principle at work here: 'At any point in redemptive history, the revelation given at that time is sufficient.'¹⁰ This is an excellent general principle, particularly if we keep in mind that individuals do not all live at the same point of redemptive history, epistemologically. The chronological line and the epistemological line coincide only for those who have received God's latest revelation.

Frame observes that even though universal revelation was sufficient, God added to it 'by speaking to Noah, Abraham, and others'. He did this because 'Noah needed to know more than Adam did. The history of redemption is pro-

¹⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. A Theology of Lordship Series. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2008), 161.

gressive. In Noah's time, God planned to judge the world by a flood, and Noah had to know that. The Adamic revelation was sufficient for Adam, but not for Noah... Noah needed more, for he had additional duties. He needed more in order to do God's will in his time.¹¹ A major point concerning the role of God's covenants is being made here—a significant factor in them is that they entail duty, the doing of which is essential if the work God has chosen to do through his covenant people is to be accomplished. Frame notes that 'Scripture, then, is clear enough to make us responsible for carrying out our present duties to God'.¹² The same can be said about all revelation. This is extremely important because it underlines the point that responsibility is proportionate to revelation—thus, a person who has only the revelation God gave to Noah is required by God only to respond appropriately to *that* revelation. Whatever means God uses to communicate his truth to people, it suffices for God's purposes for those people.

d) Salvation through Christ

Salvation was accomplished solely through the Christ, the son of Adam, of Abraham and of David, the one mediator between God and humankind. Anyone who has ever been saved, is now saved, or ever will be saved, is saved because Jesus died in their place, satisfying God's righteousness, and because Jesus rose again from the dead, as public demonstration of his vindication and hence of the vindication/justifica-

tion of all who are 'in him'. In the centuries between God's covenant promise to Abraham and his covenant heirs and the coming of the Word incarnate, God progressively revealed himself through prophets within the covenant community, and he typified the saving work of Christ in the system of sacrifices offered in the tabernacle and then the temple which was God's dwelling place—a place to which the nations of the world could come and worship the one true God (cf. Solomon's prayer concerning 'foreigners', in 1 Kings 8:41-43).

But those whom God has saved are not all members of the Abrahamic or new covenant communities; some may not even know about these communities. From this starting point, we are as hopeful for salvation as Scripture allows us to be and so the lack of specifically gospel exclusivist texts speaks loudly.

II Covenant as ground of the hope of salvation

Since we believe that God will save all those whom he has chosen to save, and since we know that God is gracious and merciful in his eternal nature, we are naturally hopeful concerning the final numbers of the inhabitants of the new earth, who will be there because they were chosen by the Father, to be redeemed by the Son, and illumined and given faith through the Spirit. The saving work of God throughout human history is the outworking of the eternal purpose of God that has been described appropriately as a covenant between the members of the Trinity (Eph. 1:3-6).

11 Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 161.

12 Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 150.

III Covenant obligations and blessings

The Spirit of God enables and elicits saving faith in the lives of individuals in accordance with the situation of each one. The essence of saving faith was always the same, but the theological content of that faith varied with the individual's situation. The hope shared by accessibilists is grounded in the belief that God's saving work is not co-extensive with his formation of a covenant people. Some whom God has chosen to save in Christ by the Spirit are saved by God within covenantal relationships less advanced than those which are focused on the development of the missionary people who are God's normal instruments in the proclamation of God's fullest revelation to date. D. T. Niles rightly asserted that 'the mission of the Church is a mission *within* the mission of the Holy Spirit',¹³ and Adam Dodds correctly affirms that 'the Spirit's mission is not coextensive with the church's mission but broader in range and scope'.¹⁴

Herman Bavinck notes that restoration of sinners to communion with God 'requires grace, which in biblical revelation assumes the form of a covenant' and 'this covenant begins immediately after the fall',¹⁵ with the enun-

ciation of God's covenant of grace in Genesis 3:15. Salvation was available immediately—it did not wait for God's covenant to be made with Abraham, though that covenant was foundational in the redemptive historical program that reached final fulfilment in the Mediator of the new covenant. Christ was not only the fulfiller of the Abrahamic covenant and of the Sinaitic covenant, he was the second Adam.¹⁶

This framework of the covenant of grace provides the context for hopefulness that some of the unevangelized will be saved. The elect have always been saved by grace through faith, but the faith required by God, like the obedience required by God, is an appropriate response to the revelation God has made available. Because the standard to which Israel was held was the particular covenants that God established with them, Israel's prophets warned their people of the blessings or curses that would follow covenantal obedience or covenant breaking.¹⁷ But, for those who are ignorant of the latest covenantal revelation, the terms of their relationship with God are therefore determined by the revelation God has given them, which, in some instances, is the revelation given under a less developed covenantal administration.

Geerhardus Vos writes:

¹³ D. T. Niles, *Upon The Earth: The Mission of God and the Missionary Enterprise of the Churches* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), 71; cited by Adam Dodds, 'The Mission of the Spirit and the Mission of the Church: Towards a Trinitarian Missiology', *ERT* 35/2 (2011): 224.

¹⁴ Adam Dodds, 'The Mission of the Spirit', 224.

¹⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics. Vol 3: Sin and Salvation in Christ*. General ed. John

Bolt; trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 193.

¹⁶ See Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation*, 226-27.

¹⁷ See, for example, F. C. Fensham, 'Covenant, Alliance', in *New Bible Dictionary*. Second edition. J. D. Douglas, ed., N. Hillyer, revision ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1982), 242-43; Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (BakerBooks, 2006), 46-53.

[Abraham's] kind of faith is a faith in the creative interposition of God. It trusts in him for calling the things that are not as though they were [see Rom. 4:17-23]. This does not, of course, mean that the objective content of the patriarch's faith was doctrinally identical with that of the N.T. believer. Paul does not commit the anachronism of saying that Abraham's faith had for its object the raising of Christ from the dead. What he means is that the attitude of faith towards the raising of Isaac and the attitude towards the resurrection [of Christ] are identical in point of faith able to confront and incorporate the supernatural.¹⁸

Most significant for our consideration of the unevangelized may be the situation of those saved prior to the Abrahamic covenant. Robert Reymond finds 'indications of this faith in the Messiah's future deliverance even in pre-Abrahamic times'. He cites the reference to Enoch in Jude 14 and posits: 'One must conclude that Jude viewed the Messiah as present (in his preincarnate state) and active throughout the history of the Old Testament.'¹⁹ Reymond posits that 'Abel's parents know about the need for a blood "covering" before God' from 'their observation of God's killing an animal, even before they were banished from the garden of Eden, and making for them covering garments from the skin of the animal

(Gen. 3:21) and most likely by his own direct instruction to them. This divine work, coming as it did hard on God's *protevangeli*um (Gen. 3:15), according to which the Seed of the woman would destroy the Serpent's power through his own death work, illustrated the "covering" significance of that Seed's death.'²⁰

I find this proposal significant with regard to animal sacrifice for the appeasement of God, among the unevangelized. This may well be part of the communal memory of primal particular revelation. It is a good reminder that those who, by virtue of their revelational situation, live their relationship with God under the administration of the creational covenant, may not be restricted to the universal revelation provided in God's creative and providential work or in the conscience. Testimony to, or recollection of, the particular revelation made to Adam and Eve and later to Noah may be widespread even where it is blurred by generations of tradition not informed by Scripture, and it may be instrumental in the Spirit's saving work among these people.

IV Salvation between Adam and Abraham

Jeffrey Niehaus asserts that 'all humans live under the benefits of the Adamic covenant (and its renewal in the Noahic covenant) and are all accountable to God as his children.'²¹

¹⁸ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1954), 99-100; cited by Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 536.

¹⁹ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 534.

²⁰ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 534.

²¹ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, 'Covenant: An Idea in the Mind of God', *JETS* 52/2 (June 2009), 228; cf. also 244, re: a Babylonian, 'whose only

In the statement of God's gracious promise that is fundamental to all his later covenantal arrangements (Gen. 3:15-19), no new commands are given nor conditions stated. The obligations placed upon humankind in the creation covenant are assumed and reaffirmed—the consequences of their disobedience are described in terms that clearly assume the continuing obligation of the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply and steward the earth (Gen. 3:15-19).

The fact that all humans live under some divine covenantal administration, at least the covenant of creation, makes this the most basic place for us to consider what God may be doing savingly among people whose *only* knowledge of God derives from the covenant of creation. The work of God's grace in the lives of those who live cognitively under the creation covenant is a fruit of Christ's atoning work, as is all 'common grace' and, 'as long as it counters any type of evil and is purposefully performed in ways that help and heal, is connected either knowingly or unknowingly with the *missio Dei* in the world'.²² Having said this, it is worth reminding ourselves that we are limited in our ability to define the line between common and special grace.²³

"covenant relationship" to the Lord was under the Adamic and Noahic covenants'; see also Jeffrey J. Niehaus, 'Covenant and Narrative, God and Time', *JETS* 53/3 (September 2010), 557. Cf., Wright, *The Mission of God*, 214.

22 Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, trans. and ed. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 4; cited by Dodds, 'Mission of the Spirit', 224.

23 Cf. Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 100.

Writing concerning the means by which the covenant of grace was administered from Adam to Abraham, A. A. Hodge finds evidence 'that this administration of the covenant of grace reached many of the people of the earth, during this era', in 'the history of Job in Arabia, of Abraham in Mesopotamia, and of Melchisedec in Canaan'.²⁴ Similarly, Gerard van Groningen observes that 'after Yahweh had given absolute assurance to Noah and his sons that the creation covenant would continue, there are not many direct references to it again. But its presence and role are constantly and consistently present'.²⁵

Before the covenant with Abraham, we have numerous examples of people in saving relationship with God. Abraham himself had been justified by faith before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:10-11), and Hebrews 11:8-9 indicates that it was 'by faith' that Abraham had set out from Ur, some 25 years before God's covenant with him in Genesis 12:1. Jeffrey Niehaus correctly observes that 'Abram was indeed in covenant with the Lord—but under the Adamic covenant and, more proximately, under the Noahic covenant... . He is already Abram's Suzerain under the Noahic covenant, and has every right and freedom to give him commands and/or make promises to him'.²⁶

Other individuals of particular note include: Abel (Gen. 4:4; Mt. 23:35), Enoch (Heb. 11:5-6; Sirach 44:16), Noah,

24 A. A. Hodge, *Outlines*, 376.

25 Gerard Van Groningen, 'Covenant', in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 126a.

26 Niehaus, 'Covenant and Narrative', 544.

(Gen. 6:9; 7:1; Heb. 11:7-8; cf. Ezek. 14:14, 20; Sirach 44:17; Mt. 24:37-39; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5), and Job (cf. Ezek. 14:14, 20).

Hopefulness that God may be working savingly among people whose only possible covenantal relationship with God is the covenant of creation, established with Adam and confirmed with Noah, may be found in Jeffrey Niehaus's reason for considering even the original covenant of creation among 'God's overall program of covenants that lead to renewal', because 'redemption is implied in creation. That is, because of God's character, God as Creator has an ultimate covenantal commitment to restore all that he has created, including a new heavens and earth and a new humanity. Put another way, the new heavens and earth of Rev. 21:1 are a result of God's original gracious covenant commitment, which was in place when he made the original heavens and earth (Gen. 1:1).'²⁷

Taking into account this 'ultimate covenantal commitment' of God to the restoration of his fallen creation, we should actually be surprised if God excluded from the application of Christ's saving work all those who are inculpably ignorant of God's special covenants with Abraham and those that followed on it, including the new covenant. The establishment of the new covenant was brought about by the obedience of the second Adam, which undoes, for all who are in him, the disobedience of the first Adam and the many acts of human disobedience that followed from it. The

descendants of Abraham who had the faith of Abraham were saved by faith because of the righteousness of Christ. Likewise, descendants of Adam who have the sort of faith possible for Spirit illumined people who relate to God under the covenant of creation, were (and are) saved by the righteousness of the second Adam, even though all of these were necessarily ignorant of the way in which God would eventually bring about within human history the *ground* upon which he could be just while justifying sinners. All of them will someday worship the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:13).

Every divine revelation that a person receives (whether it is universal, particular and universally normative, or particular and of limited applicability) calls for a faith response, and God justifies those who, by his grace, respond with the faith that God seeks, appropriate to the content of the revelation. The minimum is clearly defined in Hebrews 11:6, the belief that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

V Abrahamic Covenant

The purpose and effect of God's covenant with Abraham is the formation of a missionary community set up by God as an instrument through whom he will bless the nations, rather than the development of a community *within* which God will *exclusively* do his saving work. That covenant was for the blessing of the nations, and for the undoing of the curse that had come upon the human race through the failure of Adam to obey the very basic requirements of the covenant that God had made with him and, in him, with the whole race

²⁷ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, 'An Argument against Theologically Constructed Covenants.' *JETS* 50 (2007), 272.

(Rom. 5:12-19).

Enjoyment of the full blessing of any of God's covenants requires knowledge of the covenant, so that no one experiences the full benefits of the Abrahamic covenant as fulfilled in Jesus, until they have the new covenant faith that requires knowledge of the Mediator of that covenant. *But* eventually this will happen for all who have saving faith, even if its realization must await the moment of their meeting Christ at death.

After God's covenant with Abraham, we have examples of people in saving relationship with God but outside of the covenant community. Like Abraham himself, a Gentile who worshipped Yahweh could be saved, without being circumcised as a member of the Abrahamic covenant community, but he would not then be part of the people who were set apart by God to be his priestly ministers in the world. Even under the old covenant, there were Gentile God-fearers, and Gentiles were not excluded from the hope of salvation after the special covenant with Israel was established. Bryan Widbin finds 'never a hint that Israel saw "the fear of God" among the nations as something less than a redemptive experience. She accepted it on both practical and theological grounds. Israel's exclusive calling was to be a testimony to the nations. What happened apart from that was Yahweh's business.'²⁸

In Romans 4:11-16, it is clear that

the *quality* of Abraham's faith, not its knowledge content, was the key in his justification. Those who have faith of that quality, like the list of men and women in Hebrews 11, are deemed righteous by God, despite the very different ways in which their faith is shaped by the knowledge of God that they were given. Where this provides a ground for hopefulness concerning the unevangelized is that those among them whom the Father chose in the Son, and in whom the Spirit produces repentance and the faith prescribed by the revelation they had received are beneficiaries of the atoning work of Christ, the promised Seed of Abraham, because they have the 'faith of Abraham', in its *context-appropriate manifestation*. In this way, the 'many nations' of which Abraham is father are more numerous even than our awareness of God's work in the world gives us reason to rejoice in. All of these will be among the 'many' who 'will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven' (Mt. 8:11 NRSV).

God fearers during the time of the patriarchs included people such as: Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7)²⁹ and Lot. Sarah and Ishmael are an important case study in this regard, at the time when God identified Isaac as the heir of the covenant promise to Abraham. Here, we see very clearly that the nature and purpose of the covenant community is not primarily that it is the body of the saved but that it is the community through whom

²⁸ R. Bryan Widbin, 'Salvation for People Outside Israel's Covenant?' in *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard*, ed. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Mich.: Baker, 1991), 82.

²⁹ See Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 77.

God normally and primarily pursues his mission in the world. As a 13 year old member of Abraham's family, Ishmael was given the sign of the covenant, indicating his inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant community (Gen. 17:17-21). When God instructed Abraham to accede to Sarah's request that Hagar be banished and cut off from inheritance (Gen. 21:1-20), Ishmael was part of Abraham's household and included in the covenant community but, with the implementation of Sarah's request for banishment, Ishmael is cut off from the covenant community and hence from the blessings of the covenant, in particular, from being the line through whom the natural people of the covenant are descended.

The critical issue, therefore, is what significance banishment from the covenant people had, relative to salvation. In God's covenant promises to Abraham, nothing is said about salvation, as such. Being in the Abrahamic covenant entailed a special relationship to God, but there is no indication that it was the only relationship in which people received saving grace. Thus, we cannot assume as a matter of course that Hagar and Ishmael were unsaved because of their removal from the covenant family. Though we have not yet seen evidence either of faith or of unbelief on Ishmael's part, we have certainly seen that Hagar had a personal relationship of dependence upon God and an appreciation for God's care. From the description of her time in the wilderness, I gather that she had a saving trust in God. Hagar's banishment from Abraham's family put her outside of the covenant community but its purpose was to remove Ishmael from the line of covenant descent (a consequence of

God's choice of Isaac for that role), not to make a statement about their salvation/condemnation, i.e., about their relationship to God.

In later provisions under the Mosaic law, being cut off from the covenant community was often based upon sinful behaviour that indicated radical unbelief. In those cases, it was a statement both that these people were not in saving relationship with God, and that they were no longer part of God's missionary people. In the case of Hagar and Ishmael, the second of these was true but there is no indication that the first was true. The critical thing within the Mosaic covenantal context is that people were being cut off because they failed to fulfil the obligations of the covenant. Means were provided to restore them to the covenant community. But it would be a mistake to extrapolate, from the procedures at work within the covenant community, conclusions about the status of people who had never been a part of that community. Furthermore, in the case of ceremonial impurities that led to alienation from the community, it seems quite implausible to deem such people 'unsaved'. The orientation of the individual's heart, as evident in obedience/disobedience was critical in the latter regard.

Esau is another interesting case study. With reference to what John Frame dubs 'historical election', 'Isaac is chosen over Ishmael (Rom. 9 vv. 7-9), and Jacob over Esau (vv. 10-13).'³⁰ But Frame notes that 'we cannot say on the

³⁰ Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of God. A Theology of Lordship Series* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 333.

basis of Scripture that either Ishmael or Esau, or the national groups formed by their descendants, are eternally reprobate. Paul is not distinguishing here between historical and eternal election. Rather, he is focusing on the principles that these two forms of election have in common. In both cases, election is by grace, apart from works (v. 12). In all these cases, election is in accordance with God's purpose (v. 11) and calling (v. 12). Esau is reprobate (whether historically or eternally) before he is born (v. 11), hated by God (v. 13).³¹ This is an excellent illustration of the importance of accurately representing the purpose of God in choosing those in the covenant line ('historical election'), which is not to be conflated or confused with 'eternal election', even though God's sovereignty in both cases is equally clear.

VI Mosaic Covenant

A new point of election occurs at Sinai. In Genesis 17:7, God had established an eternal covenant between himself and Abraham and his descendants, 'but now God expands his election to Israel: "I will take you *as my own* people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians" Ex. 6:7 (italics are Walton's). They are now God's chosen people, chosen to reveal him to the rest of the world, as the context indicates. They have become the "revelatory" people of God.³²

Prior to God's establishment of the

covenant at Sinai, he had acted mightily to deliver Israel from their bondage in Egypt, a fact to which God refers in the beginning of the Decalogue. Exodus describes a massive power encounter between Yahweh and Pharaoh, so that, in the narrative of the plagues in Exodus 7-14, the motif recurs that 'YHWH, the God who would make himself known to the Israelites by delivering them, would simultaneously make himself known to Pharaoh by overthrowing his oppression.'³³ Aptly, Christopher Wright sums up the situation: 'Clearly, the motivation from God's point of view was not only the liberation of his enslaved people but this driving divine will to be known to all nations for who and what he truly is. The mission of God to be known is what drives this whole narrative.'³⁴

Israel was chosen by God to be his instrument in blessing the nations by means of God's self-revelation in and through this people, but the covenant community was not the boundary of God's saving work during that period.³⁵ Outside the covenant community during the Mosaic period, we meet Jethro (Ex. 18:1, 11), Rahab (Josh. 2:9-11; 6:23; Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25), and the resident aliens who lived within Israel in Moses' time (Num. 15:14-15; cf. Ex. 12:48-49).

VII Davidic Covenant

Perhaps Hiram, King of Tyre was saved

³³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 93.

³⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 95.

³⁵ As C. Wright says, the election of Israel was 'fundamentally missional, not just soteriological' (*Mission of God*), 263.

³¹ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 333.

³² Walton, *Covenant*, 65.

(see 2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Chr. 14:1; 1 Kings 5:1; 2 Kings 5:7; cf., 2 Chr. 2:11-12). Others that we know about include: Gentile God-fearers referred to in Psalm 118:4 and other places in the Psalter which call the nations to praise God; Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:3-4); Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:15-19); at least some among the Ninevites (Jon. 3:10); and Ebed-melech (Jer. 39:15-18).

Particularly interesting is the case of people saved in the time of Jesus, but prior to the establishment of the new covenant in his blood and the inauguration of the church at Pentecost with the gift of the Spirit. This is a transition period in which God continued to do a saving work in the hearts of people who were not members of the Abrahamic covenant community. Of similar interest is the way in which the maturation of saving faith is observed in the lives of people within the covenant community as God revealed to them the identity of Jesus. Not all who were saved by their Abrahamic faith were illuminated by the Holy Spirit immediately to grasp the identity of Jesus or the meaning of his teaching. Thus the Gospel of John continually speaks of people 'believing', even when those people had previously 'believed'—there is a growth of faith as there is a growth of knowledge, both objectively and subjectively, within the life of the saved.

The experience of the eleven of Jesus' disciples whose salvation is certain makes us aware of the importance of drawing a distinction between being 'saved' and becoming a Christian. Scripture indicates that there is a moment in the life of each person who is saved when they move from darkness to light. The experience of the first dis-

ciples of Jesus illustrates for us, however, just how difficult it is to identify that moment.

VIII Salvation Under The New Covenant

If I am on the right track in regard to my earlier reflections regarding the exclusion of Hagar and Ishmael from the covenant, when we move to the new covenant situation, we can likewise see the local church (a new covenant community) as having two aspects: it is a community of those who are believed to be saved, having been united to Christ by faith—the church of Christ visible and local, and it is the community that God has blessed with a fullness of revelation and a commission to be agents of God's mission in the world. It is a category error to confuse these two aspects, making the church not only the community graciously called by God to be agents of his mission in the world but also the *exclusive* community of the saved.

In short, Scripture clearly states that all who believe and obey God's revelation are saved and that all who *reject* God's revelation remain under condemnation. In numerous texts (such as John 3), gospel exclusivists hear a judgment of those who do not believe, where Scripture is speaking only of those who *receive* the particular revelation, not of those who are ignorant through no fault of their own. In concurrence with a long tradition of New Testament interpretation, I understand Romans 2:12-16 to be a reference to Gentile God-fearers, who do not have the law of Moses but whom God will judge according to the law written on their hearts.

Examples of saved people outside the church are found in Acts. These include: the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39), and possibly Saul of Tarsus.³⁶ Cornelius is a particularly interesting case study and is probably the most important individual in the New Testament for the focus of this inquiry. Although he lived at the time of Jesus and became a Christian after Pentecost, Cornelius exemplifies the Gentiles who lived outside the community of the old covenant people of God but who worshipped their God. In Luke's narrative, we learn that he was a 'devout man who feared God', he 'gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God' (Acts 10:2); his 'prayers and alms' had 'ascended as a memorial before God' (Acts 10:4); and meeting him brought Peter to the realization that 'in every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to him' (10:35).

In its context, the primary meaning of Peter's statement is that 'God is not prejudiced in restricting salvation to a particular nation'.³⁷ The critical question remains, however, whether Cornelius would have gone to be with

Christ if he had died *before* his encounter with Peter. One line of gospel exclusivist interpretation asserts that he would have gone to hell. It hears a clear statement that Cornelius was not saved, in the instructions of the angel to Cornelius which told him that Peter would give him a message 'by which you and your entire household will be saved' (11:14). If one starts with a gospel exclusivist assumption, the salvation spoken about by the angel is identified as the experience which follows upon Peter's preaching; people are not saved, therefore, until they actually encounter Christ.³⁸

Other gospel exclusivists, however, have proposed that Cornelius was saved before Peter arrived but that his case is exceptional.³⁹ But a problem is created for gospel exclusivism, by Aquinas, Calvin, Turretin and more recent exclusivists who follow this course: one 'exception' leaves us wondering whether there might be others.

Why should we not grant that someone today who had the faith of Abra-

36 Cf., *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 49-50, 54, 82, 98-99 and J. M. Everts. 'Conversion and Call of Paul', in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 162.

37 Bruce A. Demarest, 'General and Special Revelation: Epistemological Foundations of Religious Pluralism', in *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*, 2nd ed., eds. Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce Winter (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 191. Cf., Carson, *Gagging of God*, 307.

38 Cf. Wells, *God the Evangelist*, 23; John R. Stott, "Dialogue, Encounter, Even Confrontation", in *Faith Meets Faith*, Mission Trends No. 5, eds. Gerald H Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 5:167; John Piper, *Jesus: The Only Way to God: Must You Hear the Gospel to Be Saved?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 81-84, 87; Walter Kaiser, 'Holy Pagans', 139).

39 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.10, a.4, ad3, cited by Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 114; John Calvin, *Commentary on Acts*, (commenting on Acts 10:4); *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Library of Christian Classics, vols. 19-20 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.17.4; Francis Turretin (*Institutes*, 1.4.19).

ham, and who could have no greater faith given his knowledge, would be saved? Once that principle is accepted, there is no good reason not to extend the reach of his saving grace to others who had the faith acceptable to God, though they lived, epistemologically, even prior to God's covenant with Abraham.⁴⁰

The twelve disciples of John the Baptist whom Paul met in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7) provide a further interesting case.⁴¹ The issue for us now is whether or not they were already 'saved' before receiving the Spirit of the risen Christ. My own conclusion is that these were old covenant believers who had received John's baptism of repentance but who had not been baptized in the name of Jesus, the one who would baptize them with the Spirit. They were even less knowledgeable concerning Messiah than the followers of Jesus who had gathered in the upper room, in Jerusalem, awaiting the gift of the Spirit. They typify the old covenant believer, after the epochal sending of the Holy Spirit, who has still not received the new covenant Spirit personally. When Paul had taught them further, they were baptized in the name of Jesus and, as the Spirit came upon them, they spoke in tongues and prophesied, just as the 120 had done on the day of Pentecost. This was, therefore, not an experience of subsequent baptism with

the Spirit by people who had already been united with Christ by the indwelling of the Spirit. They had previously had an old covenant experience of the Holy Spirit's saving work, like that which John the Baptist had known, and they now moved personally into the new covenant experience of the Spirit and were united with the body of Christ, being baptized in his name.

The situation in Ephesus raises the question: 'When (if ever) does salvation cease to be possible for Jews with an Old Testament faith and for God-fearing Gentiles who do not know of Jesus?' J. N. D. Anderson asks: 'Might it not be true of the follower of some other religion that the God of all mercy had worked in his heart by his Spirit, bringing him in some measure to realize his sin and need for forgiveness, and enabling him, in the twilight as it were, to throw himself on the mercy of God?'⁴² J. I. Packer responds to Anderson's question:

The answer seems to be "yes." It might be true. Who are we to deny it? If ever it is true, such worshippers will learn in heaven that they were saved by Christ's death and that their hearts were renewed by the Holy Spirit. They will join the glorified Church in endless praise of the sovereign grace of God. Christians since the second century have hoped so, and perhaps Socrates and Plato are in this happy state even now. Who knows?⁴³

⁴⁰ Cf., R. W. F. Hootton, *Christianity and Other Faiths: An Evangelical Contribution to Our Multi-Faith Society* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 24.

⁴¹ Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 197.

⁴² J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 101-02.

⁴³ J. I. Packer, 'What Happens to People Who Die Without Hearing the Gospel?' *Decision*, January 2002, 11.

IX The importance of the church's missionary work

When expressing an accessibilist understanding of salvation, it is essential to underline the importance of the missionary obligation of the new covenant community. The church is empowered by the Spirit of the risen Christ, and given a commission to disciple the nations, by the Lord himself. It is God's *ordinary or normal* means of reaching the lost with the gospel message in response to which the Spirit elicits the faith in that Jesus that saves individuals and makes them part of the new covenant community of God's people through whom new covenant revelation reached them.⁴⁴

Gospel exclusivists are afraid that an accessibilist understanding will cut the nerve of the church's evangelistic mission.⁴⁵ That concern is commendable, for it would be very sad if any teaching reduced the church's commitment to serve God energetically in his mission in the world. But, if gospel exclusivism is really a significant motivator, and if the New Testament authors were gospel exclusivists as those concerned believe, it is very surprising that the New Testament nowhere offers gospel exclusivism as motivation for evangelistic mission, despite frequent reference to the truths that *did* motivate the apostles to proclaim the gospel wherever and whenever they could.

Gospel exclusivists often seem to assume that if people can be saved

through universal revelation, there is no need for Christian mission, but John Sanders rightly points out that although God does reach people through his witness in creation, 'he wants much more for their lives. He desires that we all receive the blessing that can come only through a personal relationship with Jesus.'⁴⁶ It is wrong to say that the whole episode in the house of Cornelius is 'superfluous if Cornelius already has salvation'.⁴⁷ It would, perhaps, be superfluous if eschatological salvation were God's only goal for people, but God not only wanted Cornelius to be 'acceptable' in old covenant terms, he wanted him to receive the new covenant gift of the Spirit and to become part of the new covenant people of God in which the wall between Jew and Gentile is broken down.

Paul's passion to 'win' as many as possible (1 Cor. 9:19-23) is instructive. Although the verb to 'win' has been taken to refer to Paul's goal of *converting* 'as many as possible' (v. 19), including Jews and Gentiles (vv. 20-21), it cannot refer only to their conversion, since in verse 22 he speaks of his aim of winning 'the weak', a designation which should be understood of Christians (rather than non-Christians; cf.

⁴⁶ John Sanders, 'Responses', in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 145.

⁴⁷ Cf. William J. Larkin Jr., 'The Contribution of the Gospels and Acts to a Biblical Theology of Religions', in *Christianity and the Religions: A Biblical Theology of World Religions*, Evangelical Missiological Society Series, no. 2, eds. Edward Rommen and Harold Netland (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1995), 281.

⁴⁴ See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Vol. 1. Jesus and the Twelve*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 423-24.
⁴⁵ Cf., Köstenberger, 'Gospel for All', 216.

Rom 5:6) whose consciences trouble them about matters which are not in themselves wrong (cf. 1 Cor. 8). Paul's goal of winning Jews, Gentiles and weak Christians has to do with their full maturity in Christ and thus signifies *winning them completely*. To win Gentiles has to do with his ultimate purpose for them, namely, their being brought to perfection in Christ on the final day. Nothing short of this will fulfil Paul's ambitions for them. Similarly, his goal of winning 'weak' Christians has to do with their full maturity and blamelessness at the second coming.⁴⁸

Paul's vision to see Christians brought to full maturity in Christ can obviously be extended to indicate the importance of bringing into the church those whom God has graciously reconciled to himself outside of the church, so that they can come to understand the glorious work of God's grace and grow to full maturity in Christ. It is, after all, one of the tasks of congregations of believers in Christ to nurture one another, through the gifts given to us by the Spirit, until we all grow up into the fullness of Christ.⁴⁹

It is because 'God has summed up and concentrated the vastness of his grace in creation and Israel in his action in Jesus of Nazareth' that 'the whole world has a right of access to such grace. So generosity and love

compel Christians to share the unsearchable riches of Christ.'⁵⁰ William Abraham therefore considers it to be 'only right that those who have already responded to the light of God that they have received outside the gospel should know of the true source of that light'. Such people 'should also have access to the full measure of God's grace and power, which is made available in Jesus Christ',⁵¹ and, I would add, through the distinctive new covenant gift of the Holy Spirit which we receive as we are incorporated into the body of the risen Christ, the church.

We must not underestimate the importance of the formation of the church, as a community of those who are consciously endeavouring to be obedient to Christ in every avenue of life. Donald Macleod notes that those who are freed from sin by Christ's atoning work

become themselves an irresistible force for social change. They can never themselves become oppressors of others; or be cowed into silence by the blusterings of earthly potentates. The saving grace which produces free individuals also produces free communities... . The Christian is free: free because Christ has died. It is the life lived out of this freedom (including our prophetic witness, our cross-bearing and our willingness to be nothing) which changes the sinful structures.⁵²

This should bring home to us a

⁴⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*. New Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 11, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 181.

⁴⁹ William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 220-21.

⁵⁰ Abraham, *The Logic*, 221.

⁵¹ Abraham, *The Logic*, 221.

⁵² Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*. Contours of Christian Theology. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 259.

dimension of God's purpose in the church's evangelistic mission which is missed if we focus only on the salvation of individuals and assume that our mission work is less important if God can save individuals without it. Wonderful things happen to communities which are transformed by the gospel, as they follow Christ together and seek to do his will socially, as well as personally. God does not only want to save individuals, he wants to build churches as communities which give the world a small foretaste of the shalom of God which is produced when the kingdom of God breaks into our history. The manifestation of God's gracious work in the life of these communities of the redeemed is itself a powerful witness to the world which longs for God's shalom, even when they are unable to name it.

X Conclusion

Summing up, I propose that a study of God's covenants, their purpose and their effect, provides us with a metanarrative that fits accessibilism better than gospel exclusivism. Salvation was objectively accomplished by Jesus the Christ, the second Adam, and the one in whom all God's covenant promises are fulfilled, so that God's great

and gracious purposes for human redemption and cosmic restoration are brought to glorious completion. God formed a special people, the covenant community, particularly beginning with Abraham and on through the church. But membership in that community was never the boundary of God's redemptive work, and knowledge of the revelation which God had entrusted to that community, for the blessing of the world, was not necessary for the Spirit to create saving faith in the people's hearts.

Everyone lives under the administration of one of God's covenants and is judged by God according to the requirements pertaining to that covenant. Likewise, the faith that pleases God is the sort of response that God requires of a person with the particular knowledge and privilege with which he has graced that person. We whom God has blessed with the knowledge that enables membership in the covenant community must strive to bear witness to God's work in Christ, wherever we can, thereby being God's instruments in his work in the world. Much as we long for everyone to know, now, the joy of life in Christ and in his church, we can rejoice in hopefulness that God's saving work is even greater than the awareness of any of us.

They are not all Martyrs Islam on the Topics of Dying, Death, and Salvation in the Afterlife

Christine Schirrmacher

KEYWORDS: *Instruction, sin, revelation, obedience, faith, suicide, martyrdom, sharia, mourning, judgement*

WITHIN ISLAM, THE topic of dying, death and salvation in the afterlife is a theologically meaningful and today also politically delicate topic as some Muslim groups which we brand 'Salafi' or 'Jihadi' have shaped its meaning according to their specific convictions. Theologically, the topic of death and dying is of major importance because it is closely related to the issue of forgiveness and salvation and even more to the question of whether a believer already during his lifetime on earth is entitled to be assured of his entering into paradise after death.

Although, on one hand, the Koran leaves no doubt that Islam is the only true religion superseding 'abrogated' religions like Judaism or Christianity

and correcting their perceived 'distorted' scriptures, the question whether the single believer can face death without being concerned about God's judgement upon him in the hereafter cannot be too hastily answered in the positive. Jihadi groups benefit from this 'unsolved' question in Islamic theology insofar as they promise to guarantee the martyr dying in a suicide operation acceptance by God even without being questioned by the angel of death.

The following article will explain the concept of death, martyrdom and mourning as it is expanded in the Koran, the Islamic tradition and Islamic theology and contrast it with fundamental concepts of biblical teaching.

I The Meaning of Death and Dying in Islam

The question of a religion's understanding of death and dying presup-

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poses the question of the meaning of human life, and within monotheistic religions, in turn, it presupposes the question of the relationship between God and mankind. From the viewpoint of the Koran and Islamic theology, this life has its basic meaning in being preparation for the life hereafter. Mankind is a creation of God and limited in his knowledge. Mankind is reliant upon the guidance of God, the eternal and almighty One, who is to be basically distinguished from mankind and is alien to man in his essence. The task of mankind is to recognize God as Creator and Judge, to submit to him and be devoted, that is to say, to be 'Muslim', to keep to his commands and to sculpt life here in view of the hereafter.

Mankind is seen in the Koran as weak (Sura 4:28) and volatile (Sura 30:36). He easily becomes fainthearted (Sura 70:19-20), is hasty (Sura 17:11), unknowing (Sura 33:72) and prone to evil (Sura 12:53). He is thus in need of instruction but not basically a sinner. Given the correct guidance, he is in the position of doing the right thing and is not as a matter of principle 'sold as a slave to sin'.¹ He indeed becomes guilty of individual sins, but he does not find himself in the situation of being separated from God. For that reason deliverance and reconciliation with God are not indispensable in order to be able to live according to God's commands.

He is, if under Islamic instruction as 'guidance' (Sura 2:97), basically in the position of living according to God's commands. Evil and the seduc-

tion of sin come upon him from outside by Satan's whisperings, but he can withstand it if he takes 'refuge' (Sura 7:200) in God. Since, according to consensus opinion within Muslim theology, every person is born a Muslim, the 'guidance' given by Islam is actually only a return to one's original destiny: a life led according to the commands of Islam is in accord with God's actions in creation.

Since Jews and Christians acknowledge God as Creator, Islam grants them the status of 'people of the Book' (Sura 3:199). That is to say, they are people who had in the past been given a revelation of God in the form of the Old and New Testaments. Still, they 'blaspheme' (Sura 5:72-75) in that they pray to Jesus as God's son and deny Mohammed the recognition of being the 'seal of the Prophets' (Sura 33:40). For that reason, at the end of the time of his pronouncements in Medina, Mohammed increasingly considered Judaism and Christianity to be forged. Islam, on the other hand, was no longer just one of the revelatory religions but rather the one true 'religion before God' (Sura 3:19) that displaces and corrects Judaism and Christianity.

As adherents of the true religion of Islam, Muslims generally assume that they will go to paradise after their death. There is, however, no personal certainty, since a personal promise of salvation for the individual believer is found neither in the Koran nor in the texts handed down as tradition. The omnipotence and absolute sovereignty of Allah, the uncreated One, as well as his basic dissimilarity to people, his creatures, prohibit people from foretelling God's actions and thereby limiting his omnipotence. This is due

¹ Compare the remarks on the Koran's conception of man in Theodor Adel Khoury, *Der Koran. Arabisch-Deutsch* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 12:446 ff.

to the fact that 'human speech can only speak humanly, that is to say, inadequately, about Him because it is location-oriented'.²

II. The Four Ways of Dying

Death unavoidably stands at the end of each human life, and the day of death has been determined by God. Four ways of enduring death are to be distinguished from each other and are viewed differently from the point of view of Islam: violent death at one's own hands (suicide); violent death at the hands of another person (accident, manslaughter, murder); violent death by self-sacrifice (the martyr's death); natural death.

1. Violent death at one's own hands (suicide)

In Islamic theology suicide is unanimously condemned. It is an independent decision to which an individual as a created being is not entitled. In the action of suicide, mankind assaults a life that he did not call into being: 'Since an individual did not create himself, not so much as a single cell within his body, the life of a person does not belong to himself.'³

Moreover, killing oneself stands for personal doubt with respect to God's care and provision. It represents cowardly avoidance of the tests which God

has intended for mankind, thus being an indication of weakness of faith. The person who commits suicide evades the test of his patience and perseverance in the here and now.

The Koran does not clearly speak about taking one's own life,⁴ but tradition unmistakably condemns it as a form of unbelief and threatens the person who commits suicide with eternal punishment.⁵ Muslim theology also unanimously condemns him who sets an end to his own life, as it is a 'pretension to a right to which mankind is not entitled' and as 'the pinnacle of spiritual and mental confusion and disintegration'.⁶ For many theologians, such as the former Sheik of al-Azhar, Mahmud Shaltut (d. 1963), taking one's own life carries more weight than the killing of another individual. It is a 'pathological deviation from [the law] of the inviolability of the individual'.⁷

2. Violent death at the hands of another person (accident, manslaughter, murder)

Violent death does not itself require

⁴ Sura 4:29 is possibly aimed directly against suicide: '...nor kill yourselves'.

⁵ According to Thabit bin Ad-Dahhak's tradition, for example, in Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 8, Book 73, Number 73, <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/search.html> (March 2, 2009).

⁶ According to Birgit Krawietz's summary of Arabic fatwas in the 20th century, *Die Hurma. Scharierechtlicher Schutz vor Eingriffen in die körperliche Unversehrtheit nach arabischen Fatwas des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991), 92.

⁷ Mahmud Shaltut, *al-qatl wa-l-intihar*, (Beirut: 1983, 415-422); quoted by Krawietz, *Die Hurma*, 94.

² Erwin Gräf, 'Notions of death within the framework of Islamic anthropology', in Johannes Schwartländer (ed.), *Der Mensch und sein Tod* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 126-145, here 129.

³ Jusuf al-Qaradawi, *Erlaubtes und Verbotenes im Islam* (München: SKD Bavaria, 1989), 277.

a separate explanation. This is due to the fact that from a theological point of view, for the victim there are no other consequences that arise than with death by natural means.

With respect to the perpetrator, it can briefly be said, however, that murder and manslaughter fall under the category of crime calling forth retaliation (Arabic *qisas*), i.e., crimes against the body and life of a person. According to the notion of the sharia, murder and manslaughter do not violate God's law but rather only human law. As a result, both offences are severely wrongful acts, but they are not capital offenses. Capital offences would call for the death penalty. According to the provisions of the sharia, what is called for is to inflict the same injury, that is, killing the guilty person. If the person who can rightfully inflict the retaliatory injury waives his right, the penalty can be converted into a payment of blood money (Arabic *diyya*) and a religious penance such as, for example, additional fasting (Sura 2:178-179). In a legal sense, only individuals who are of majority age and who are in full control of their mental faculties are guilty.

According to sharia law, retaliation (or vengeance) means inflicting the same injury or killing the murderer or the person who committed manslaughter. Insofar as a person is deliberately killed, the family of the dead individual can demand the killing of the guilty person. However, it is only the nearest male relative who is allowed to make this request, and it is he who is then allowed to conduct the killing of the guilty party under the supervision of a judge. In the process the principle of equity strictly applies: a woman for a woman, a slave for a slave. 'O ye who

believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder: The free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman ...' (Sura 2:178). If equity cannot be produced, then according to the guidelines of the sharia no retaliation is allowed to be exercised.

In most countries shaped by Islam, the penalty of retaliation according to the law of the sharia is not practised, at least not through the judiciary. In an environment that has been shaped by tribal customs, blood vengeance is in part practised. However, in Iran where the sharia was reintroduced in 1979, blood vengeance has found its way into legislation: the blood price for a Muslim man is at the moment 100 faultless camels, 200 head of cattle or 1,000 muttons, 200 Yemeni robes and 1,000 Dinar or 10,000 silver dirhams.⁸ For a woman, one-half of the amount applies. As a general rule, the amount for a non-Muslim is also less.

3. Violent death by self-sacrifice (the martyr's death)

How is a martyr's death defined? Does a martyr's death occur where the believer is placed in front of the choice of renouncing his faith or dying? Or is it at the point where a believer places himself in a combat situation—without the prospect for survival—in order to offer his life for his convictions? While the Christian understanding of martyrdom relates to the former, martyrdom as it is propagated in jihadism is dominated by the latter definition.

⁸ Silvia Tellenbach, *Strafgesetze der Islamischen Republik Iran* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 96-97.

The majority of Muslim theologians would not categorize the martyrish activity of a Muslim bomber as suicide, but rather as a defence of—in particular in Palestine but also in Afghanistan and Iraq—‘oppressed’ Islam. From this perspective a suicide bomber does not conceive of himself as an individual committing suicide, where in the afterlife God’s punishment awaits him. Rather, he conceives of himself as a soldier and defender of Islam, who, like the first followers of Mohammed in Medina, is called to place his life at risk in order to end the oppression of the Muslim community (Arabic *umma*) by aggressors. Indeed it is also the case that Islam does not permit the killing of the innocent and principally makes calls for peace. According to the jihadist interpretation, however, due to the attempts of western countries to attack Islam up to the point of its destruction, the time of the peaceful propagation of Islam has been replaced by the duty of every person to fight jihad. It is only in this way that the system of justice, the sharia, can be installed over all people.

From this point of view, the martyr sacrifices himself for a higher goal. He gives his life ‘in the way of God’, which is in jihad. This justification is offered by the Koran, since several verses in the Koran connect dedication to God, and death that results from it, with paradise:

Therefore, when you meet the unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks; at length when you have thoroughly subdued them, bind (the captives) firmly ... but those who are slain in the way of Allah,—he will never let their deeds be lost. Soon will he guide them and improve their condition, and admit

them to the garden, which he has made known to them. (Sura 47:4-6)

According to the outlook taken by the Koran, the martyr only apparently dies, so for that reason one must not mourn for him:

Think not of those who are slain in Allah’s way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance from their Lord. They rejoice in the bounty provided by Allah: and with regard to those left behind, who have not yet joined them (in their bliss), the (martyrs) glory in the fact that on them is no fear, nor have they (cause to) grieve. (Sura 3:169-170)

After his death, a martyr does not have to put up with the torment of questioning by the angels of death. His faith is elevated beyond each and every doubt. For that reason, according to the largely agreed upon opinion of Muslim theologians, he goes directly after his death to paradise without any prior waiting time or possible detention in hellfire. He is not subject to the otherwise ritualistic washing of the dead but is rather laid to rest in his blood-stained clothes at the location of his death (and not in a cemetery).

a) Islamic Mystics’ Yearning for Death

The motive of yearning for death is also something known from Islamic mysticism. The mystic, after he has killed off his temporal desires via asceticism, desires death, since with death his union with God and his own ‘de-becoming’ (Arabic *fana*) begins. The most famous early mystic of Islam, al-Husain ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922), wrote:

Kill me, oh my friends,
Since only in death is my life!

Yes, in death lies my life!
 Truly it is the highest grace,
 Extinguishing oneself to waft away,
 And I recognize it as the worst,
 To cling fast to this life.
 The soul is weary,
 To still live in decay.
 Kill me, yes, and burn me,
 Whose members wretchedly
 quiver!⁹

4. Natural Death

The most frequent form of death is of course natural death, which in the Koran as well as in tradition has been comprehensively dealt with as an issue. Death is preceded by the life that God, the Creator of all life, has given to all people. He has made mankind out of the earth (Sura 20:53-55) and from small seed (Sura 22:5). God brings people forth from the mother's womb and makes them grow. He has thought out numerous ways for mankind: '... and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age' (Sura 22:5). For everyone, however, life here on earth is a 'test', so that God can recognize (Sura 67:1-2) whether the person shows him gratefulness and honour or is unthankful and in self-aggrandizement views himself as the measure of all things. In spite of the personal responsibility of the individual, which the Koran simultaneously emphasizes, God has assigned some

to salvation and others to misery (Sura 35:8). Everything is 'written down' (Arabic *maktub*), that God is the cause of all things: *kull-u min Allah*—everything comes from God. He is the one who brings forth life and causes death (Sura 2:258). Death marks the end of the period of man's testing on earth, to whom God turns in mercy and pity.

When man is created, his time of death is appointed at the same time, too. 'So death is not itself a punishment',¹⁰ however unavoidable it may be. In the same way that God brings man into being, so he also brings about his death: 'Every soul shall have a taste of death ...' (Sura 21:35). Man cannot escape death (Sura 62:8), nor can he avoid it (Sura 4:78). People 'return' to God after their death (Sura 2:156), in order that after a time of sleeping¹¹ they will be raised up after their death (Sura 2:56) and called to judgment. After this the unbeliever is condemned to death, while the believer can go into paradise, depending upon whether his faith and actions are accepted by God.¹²

Death, then, marks the line of separation between this world and the afterlife. For the believer it is the gate to

9 From Annemarie Schimmel, *Nimm eine Rose und nenne sie Lieder* (Köln, 1987), 253, quoted in Hortense Reintjens-Anwari, 'Der Tod aus islamischer Sicht' in Constantin Barloewen (ed.), *Der Tod in den Weltkulturen und Weltreligionen* (München: Diederichs, 1996), 169-200, here 186.

10 John Bowker, *The Meanings of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 105.

11 Most experts are of the opinion that the deceased rest until the trumpet is sounded for the final judgment, Pierre-Antoine Bernheim and Guy Stavrides, *Welt der Paradiese—Paradiese der Welt* (Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 1992), 222.

12 Also summarized in Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 81.

a life of joy in paradise, while for the unbeliever it is the gate to eternal torment. In a certain sense, the unbeliever is already 'dead'¹³ in this life, since he does not recognize the reality of God. He has to fear death, since with death and the subsequent judgment his final sojourn in hell fire begins. At the same time, the believer can hope for God's pity. The believer already knows here that he is committed to God: 'My life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the cherisher of the worlds' (Sura 6:162).

According to the Islamic notion, death is not the wage for sin, that is to say, the 'wages of sin'. It is the virtually logical consequence of dying and the appointment that man has with resurrection and judgment: 'death is planned into the creation.'¹⁴ The actual assignment that man has behind this world's ephemeral life and death is to recognize the reality of God, since 'from the beginning, life and death are indeed instruments of God's providence'.¹⁵

a) Death's Entry

From the very beginning, God has set the day of death of each and every person and retrieves him at that time to go into the afterlife (Sura 56:60-61). Every person knows that death will surely

befall him (Sura 21:35), but no one knows the hour of his death. If death has neared a person, then the Muslim believer should, as far as it is possible, carry out the ritualistic washing. If he becomes weaker, Koran texts might be recited, his head placed in the direction of Mecca, and the confession of faith whispered to him shortly before his death. Whispering the confession of faith ceases after the dying person has repeated it once himself. The confession of faith should be the last words uttered before death, since Mohammed is supposed to have said: 'Whoever says as his last words before death "*la ilaha illa llah*" [There is no God but God], enters the garden of paradise.'¹⁶

According to folk Islam's understanding, in the afterlife the dead individual, while he is still lying in the grave, is asked by two angels the following questions about his faith: Who is your God? Who is your prophet? What is your religion? Where do you face in prayer? Only if the individual can answer these questions and can profess belief in Islam with the confession of faith can he cross over a bridge, which in tradition is described as sharper than a sword and thinner than a hair. Unbelievers plummet from the bridge into hell and its fire.

When death occurs, the dead individual's eyes and mouth are closed while prayers are offered for his merciful reception in the afterlife. A lamentation for the dead individual is then struck up. However, many theologians

¹³ According to Jacques Waardenburg, 'Death' in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), Vol. 1, S. 505-511, here 510.

¹⁴ Reintjens-Anwari, 'Der Tod aus islamischer Sicht', 169-200, here 174.

¹⁵ Jacques Waardenburg, "Leben verlieren" oder 'Leben gewinnen' als alternative in prophetischen Religionen" in Gunther Stephenson (ed.), *Leben und Tod in den Religionen: Symbol und Wirklichkeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaft Buchgesellschaft, 19852), 36-60, here 47.

¹⁶ Quoted in Abdul Aziz Kamal, 'Islamisches Recht für den Alltag', 37 Fortsetzung, in *al-Islam. Zeitschrift von Muslimen in Deutschland* Nr.2/2000, 16-18, here 16.

condemn signs of excessive mourning such as the tearing of clothes or buffeting one's breast or face, since these are signs of a deficiency in one's faith.

As far as it is possible, the dead person is washed and perfumed by relatives of the same gender,¹⁷ and under certain circumstances the hands and feet are coloured with henna. Husbands are allowed to be washed by their wives. Not all theologians allow a woman to be washed by her husband, since marriage ends with the death of the wife. What this means is that the man is no longer legally married.

Refraining from washing is considered a sin. For that reason, if the washing of the corpse has been neglected and the corpse is already in the grave but not yet covered with dirt, it should be taken for a washing. Up until the time of the burial, which if possible should be on the same day as the day of death, the dead individual should not be left alone. Relatives keep watch at the side of the deceased, and under certain circumstances an imam or a mullah as well. Prayers are spoken, and lamps and perhaps incense are also burned.

The corpse is wrapped in linen cloths, which are preferably white and which are precisely specified according to composition, size, and number. The shroud can be the pilgrim's robe of the deceased, with which the individual made the pilgrimage to Mecca. These special fabrics are made by women who have gone through menopause: in this way it is ensured that the fabrics have

not been manufactured by someone in a condition of ritual uncleanness.

Basically a corpse should be prepared for burial immediately upon death. The burial should occur as soon as possible, which in the best case is the same day. By touching the corpse as well as by carrying the catafalque, a ritual uncleanness arises. This uncleanness has to be removed via a ritual washing before the involved person is allowed to touch the Koran again or carry out prayers. The funeral prayer is spoken over the corpse, which includes the petition for forgiveness for the dead individual. The family or loved ones of the individual who has passed away participate under the direction of a qadi or imam.

III The Burial

After the burial prayer, the corpse is quickly laid to rest. With a funeral cortege, which if possible should be conducted on foot and should consist of neither a horse-drawn carriage nor a motorized vehicle, the dead person is brought to the cemetery. If the deceased person is a male, prayer can be conducted for him along the way in a mosque. After that, the deceased should be interred in a burial ground that is purely Muslim or at least reserved for Muslims.

It is an honour to be one of the pallbearers. Passers-by on the street can also accompany the deceased person for a portion of the way, even if they were neither a personal acquaintance of the deceased nor related to him. According to the convictions of folk Islam, carrying the catafalque serves to have sins forgiven. This funeral procession is normally made up exclu-

¹⁷ Washing the dead supposedly originated in pre-Islamic times: M. Abdesselem an 'Mawt', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 6:910-911, here 911.

sively of men, since according to tradition women are prohibited or at least strongly frowned upon for participating in the interment. In the case where it is the interment of their husband or child, they generally remain at home. To be sure the Islamic confession of faith can be recited at the grave, but loud expressions of mourning and loud recitations from the Koran are frowned upon.

When interred, the deceased is laid on his right side with his head in the direction of Mecca. Those present fill the open grave with dirt and pray again for forgiveness for the deceased. Koran texts are recited and instruction is again given to the deceased about the confession of faith, so that the individual is able to give answers to the questions posed by the angels of death regarding his faith.

Cremation is not admissible, even where it is the desire of the deceased. The deceased should be buried unscathed, which makes the scientific use of the corpse for research and teaching purposes practically impossible.¹⁸ Placing stones or decorative elements on the grave is not allowed, and naturally the same goes for a cross.

According to the Muslim notion, the eternal rest of the deceased may not be disturbed. For that reason, Muslim graveyards are not allowed to be reused after 20 to 30 years. This conception has led to conflicts when Muslims—as today is the case with the absolute majority—are not transported to the home country for their burial but rather are buried in German cemeter-

ies. As a rule, reuse after a period of time is intended in German cemeteries. Almost everywhere in Germany, burial without a coffin, which is common in Islam, is ruled out.

With respect to subsequent expressions of sympathy and visits from friends, neighbours, and relatives, men and women traditionally remain in separate places. Men are visited by men and women by women. Women are taken care of by female neighbours and relatives. Food is brought to the family, and men read Koran texts and commemorate the deceased. Alms are also distributed.

IV Mourning

Mourning is allowed in Islam, but according to the opinion of theologians it should be composed and restrained. It should not be expressed excessively loudly and hysterically. According to Islam, black is not a colour of mourning. Basically what applies in this situation of loss is the same thing that occurs in the case of other momentous events (such as, for example, a birth), namely that neighbours and relatives offer help and support and do not leave those who mourn alone. Indeed, for the initial period of time, they assume their care.

The family to which the deceased belonged now becomes a house of mourning for three days. A widow may mourn over her husband for four months and ten days.¹⁹ After a spe-

¹⁸ Medical students in Saudi Arabia are supposed to only have corpses from abroad made available to them in their studies.

¹⁹ Also according to Marwan Ibrahim Al-Kaysi *Morals and Manners in Islam. A Guide to Islamic Adab* (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), 181.

cific period, approximately forty days after death—or again after a year has passed—a funeral banquet is held for relatives and loved ones, and in every case it involves a larger community of people. Under certain circumstances it is an event in which even the entire village participates.

1. Moharram Mourning Ritual

A special form of mourning ritual consists of Shiite Ashura memorial services in the month of Moharram, in which the violent death of the prophet grandson of al-Husain in 680 A.D. is commemorated. Ashura stands for the Shiite belief in suffering and sacrifice of a just person who died at the hands of an oppressor and brought about redemption. On Ashura al-Husain's martyrish death is observed. Al-Husain was Mohammed's grandson, Ali's son, that is, the son of the fourth caliph (successors of Mohammed) and final male descendant in the direct line of Mohammed. In 680 A.D. in the vicinity of the city of Kerbela he was defeated in battle against a Sunnite led army. Partisans of al-Husain from the city of Kufa did not assist him in the battle, but rather they allowed him to solely carry out the fight against the superior Sunnite forces, so that he hopelessly lost to his enemies. For many centuries, al-Husain's death reinforced the Shiite view that the caliphate had been wrongfully assumed by the Sunnite majority.

The Battle of Kerbela marked the demise of the long standing Shiite hope since the time of Mohammed to gain the command over the Muslim community and to take over the caliphate. The prophet grandson al Husain, according to the Shiite notion, the innocent one—

indeed the sinless one—suffered injustice and death, so that the 'wrongful ones' were able to gain dominance. For that reason, al-Husain's death as the designated Shiite ruler is of enormous importance for the Shiite community up until the present day. This importance finds its expression in the elaborate Ashura ceremonies. When a Shiite cries for the Martyr al-Husain at the Ashura ceremonies, he is expressing preparedness to take upon himself the same martyrdom which al-Husain took upon himself.²⁰ The thought of martyrdom is for that reason very closely tied to Shiite theology.

Ashura ceremonies last for the first ten days of the month of Moharram. Plain, often black, mourning clothes, the recitation of verses which speak about al-Husain's suffering, songs of mourning, theatre performances, street processions, and self-flagellation with swords or chains, by which much blood is spilled, are all part of the ceremonies.²¹ Individuals who cut their uncovered shoulders and backs with chains do so as a sign of mourning over the martyrdom of imams and over their own wretched situation as oppressed people.²² Individuals who cut themselves with swords do so on the

²⁰ Heinz Halm, *Die Schia* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 177.

²¹ Compare Hildegard Müller's detailed descriptions: 'Studien zum persischen Passionspiel' (Freiburg: Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, 1966).

²² According to Gustav Thaiss regarding Iran, Gustav Thaiss, 'Religious Symbolism and Social Change: The drama of Husain' in: Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints and Sufis. Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972/1978), 349-366.

head and forehead, and in the course of injuring themselves fall into a frenzy and a trance. Others rhythmically hit themselves on their breasts. Through the pain and the spilling of blood al-Husain's suffering is imitated, and whoever does this receives an interest in his sacrifice and redemption. Today the performers of the passion play re-enact the scene of this wrongful murder.

The emotional presentation of the suffering, pain, mourning, and shedding of blood is thus at the centre of the Ashura ceremonies. At the climax, the actors portraying al-Husain's enemies are sometimes meant to be attacked and killed by the audience in this dramatic enactment. Even today in the course of the plays, time after time there are victims of death to lament. It is not seldom the case that in locations where there are mixed Sunnite and Shiite populations there are disturbances when in the course of the ceremonies the Shiite believers curse what to them are the first three wrongful caliphs.

At the same time the Ashura ritual is also a penance ritual, with which the believer clears away his immeasurable guilt from not having sacrificed himself together with al-Husain at Kerbela as parts of the Shiite community did not.²³ In 684 the first 'penitents' are said to have visited al-Husain's grave and sought atonement for their faithlessness in 680.²⁴ This thought has remained alive until the present day:

After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, one was able to see on television how Iranian soldiers who returned home from Iraqi captivity as prisoners of war grovelled to his grave and in tears begged for forgiveness that they had not died in battle.²⁵

The shrine in Kerbela, around 100 kilometres southwest from Baghdad, is up to this day one of the most important Shiite pilgrimage sites. As is the case with Mecca and Medina, foot may not be set upon this area by non-Muslims.²⁶

Presentations of passion plays are considered commendable, but the observers as well are not passive but rather active participants in the play. As signs of mourning and despair, they throw dirt on their heads. Some tear their clothes, break out in tears, and injure themselves. They participate in al-Husain's suffering and ask for forgiveness for their own sins and those of the Shiite community. The shedding of tears for suffering individuals gives God pleasure:

Tears that are shed for them have a distinct charismatic value. They are ... a condition for the personal salvation of the Shiites. Every sinner has to have shed at least one tear for al-Husain in the course of his life. The grace which is acquired is all the greater, if the shedding of blood is combined with weeping.²⁷

²³ Heinz Halm, *Der schiitische Islam. Von der Religion zur Revolution* (München: C. H. Beck, 1994), 31.

²⁴ According to Wilfried Buchta, *Schiiten* (Kreuzlingen/München: Diederichs, 2004), 62.

²⁵ Buchta, *Schiiten*, 32.

²⁶ Müller, 'Studien zum persischen Passionspiel', 38.

²⁷ Müller, 'Studien zum persischen Passionspiel', 160.

2. Mourning at the Graves of Saints and Martyrs

Other forms of mourning are expressed when visiting family members as well and shrines, where shrine visits are combined with the wish to receive a blessing of spiritual power (Arabic *baraka*), help from the respective saints, and answers to prayer for the gracious entry of deceased family members into paradise or for an end to the agonies of the deceased in hellfire. Visiting graves, for example at the time of the fast at the termination of Ramadan, is also not rejected by orthodox theologians if it is done with the goal of bringing death to one's attention.²⁸

V The Judgment

Numerous verses in the Koran as well as tradition speak of a resurrection after death and judgment. The notion that after 'calling to account' (Sura 14:51) every person has to answer for his faith and action in this life does not in all probability originate with pre-Islamic conceptions of faith. On the contrary, old Arabic poetry places the main emphasis on life in this world²⁹

²⁸ Thus the well known guide to correct Muslim behaviour by Marwan Ibrahim Al-Kaysi, *Morals and Manners in Islam. A Guide to Islamic Adab* (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), 171, recommends visiting graves if believers are thereby reminded of the reality of death, but believers should not participate in any un-Islamic practices, such as, for example, touching the graves in order to receive a blessing of spiritual power.

²⁹ Tilman Nagel, 'Das Leben nach dem Tod in islamischer Sicht', in Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (ed.), *Tod und Jenseits im Glauben der Völker* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1978), 130-144, here 131.

and on the destiny to which mankind is helplessly handed over.³⁰ This is the case even if a certain faith in life after death had to have been known among pre-Islamic tribes.³¹

1. The Judgment: The Koran

In Islam, belief in a final judgment belongs to the most basic articles of faith. Together with the belief in God, the books, the prophets, and the angels, it is one of the five widely recognized basic foundations of faith. The Koran is very emphatic in the way that it clearly points out the final seal that comes with a person's death: he belongs either on the side of the believers, who go into paradise, or on the side of the evildoers, who are destined for hell. A decision regarding faith after one's death, and with it a warding off of eternal punishment, is no longer possible (Sura 23:99-100).

Sura 23:101-115 reports on the despair of him who will be thrown into the fire. God makes it again clear to the lost ones that they have misjudged the gravity and the meaning of faith (Sura 23:115). According to tradition, on one side of the scale is a scroll with a catalogue of the acts of the deceased recorded by angels in a book (Sura 82:10-12). On the other side is only a tiny piece of paper with the Islamic confession of faith that outweighs all of a person's sins.³²

³⁰ According to T. Emil Homerin, 'Echoes of a thirsty owl: Death and afterlife in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry', in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 44/1985, S. 165-184, here S. 167.

³¹ According to M. Abdesslem, 'Mawt', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 6:910-911, here 910.

³² Nagel, 'Das Leben nach dem Tod in islamischer Sicht', 130-144, here 138.

The notion that thereafter all people have to cross over a very long bridge that is sharper than a sword and thinner than a hair supposedly arose in Iran.³³ Believing Muslims are able to cross over it unscathed and reach paradise. Unbelievers plummet from the bridge into hell and into a fire.³⁴ Admittedly there are a number of theologians who hold that the bridge and the scales upon which the works of man are placed, and even the torment of hell, are not to be understood literally. Rather, they are only symbols that figuratively represent the righteousness of God or man's responsibility before him.³⁵

2. The Judgment: As Tradition has It

These relatively brief statements in the Koran are extensively complemented by Islamic tradition. So it is that around the 9th century A.D. the idea developed that the dead would be asked about their confession of faith³⁶ by two dreadful angels, Munkar and Nakir.³⁷ According to the tradition, whoever is not a Muslim and cannot

say the confession will be struck by them in the grave. Also Muslims who are guilty of grave sins are punished for a while in hell fire.³⁸ Prior thereto, at the instant when a person dies, the angel of death (*malak al-mawt*) Izra'il³⁹ appears before the deceased. He is one of the four archangels⁴⁰ and takes the individual's soul (Arabic *ruh* or *nafs*).

Izra'il has his place in the fourth of seven heavens, upon which his foot rests, and the other rests upon the bridge between paradise and hell.⁴¹ He has 4,000 wings and four faces, and his body consists of eyes and tongues.⁴² Different traditions mention additional angels of death. Izra'il does not know man's time of death. However, he does know who belongs among the believers and who does not.⁴³ 'When the day of man's death approaches, Allah causes the leaf on which the man's name is written to fall from the tree below His throne. Izra'il reads the name and has to separate the person's soul from his body after 40 days.'⁴⁴

³³ Compare the explanation for the acceptance of this notion in Islam in Josef Henninger, 'Spuren christlicher Glaubenswahrheiten im Koran', *Schriftenreihe der Neuen Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* X. Schöneck/Beckenried (CH), 1951, 95, note 138.

³⁴ Tilman Nagel, *Der Koran* (Einführung-Texte-Erläuterungen) (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1983), 191.

³⁵ Hermann Stieglecker, *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1962/1983), 766-768.

³⁶ Nagel, *Der Koran*, 191.

³⁷ Both names are mentioned only a few times in tradition.

³⁸ Other theologians deny the possibility of a time of questioning and punishment in the grave prior to the resurrection. Examples in Stieglecker, *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam*, 734ff.

³⁹ However, only tradition and not the Koran mentions this name.

⁴⁰ The names of the others three arch-angels are Jibril, Mihâ'il, and Israfil.

⁴¹ A. J. Wensinck. "Izrâ'il", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 4:292-293, here 292.

⁴² A. J. Wensinck alludes to the similarity this description has in Jewish apocalyptic literature. "Izrâ'il", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 4:292-293, here 292.

⁴³ A. J. Wensinck. "Izrâ'il", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 4:292-293, here 293.

⁴⁴ A. J. Wensinck. "Izrâ'il", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 4:292-293, here 293.

VI Intercession at the Last Judgment: The Koran and Folk Religion

The question of whether it is possible to offer intercessory prayer (Arabic *shafa'a*) for an evildoer or a sinner so that this individual is set free from hellfire is answered in a multi-layered manner. Firstly the Koran fundamentally rejects the intercession of deities (e.g., Sura 10:18). The possibility of lodging intercession for an unbeliever is also rejected (e.g., Sura 2:48+123+254). Some verses deny the possibility of offering intercession as a general principle:

Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds except the companions of the right hand, (they will be) in Gardens (of delight): they will question each other, and (ask) of the sinners: 'What led you into hell-fire?' They will say: 'We were not of those who prayed; nor were we of those who fed the indigent; but we used to talk vanities with vain talkers; and we used to deny the day of judgment until there came to us (the hour) that is certain.' Then will no intercession of (any) intercessors profit them. (Sura 74:38-48)

At the same time the Koran also mentions, however, that God himself can offer intercession: 'To Allah belongs exclusively (the right) to grant intercession: to him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: in the end, it is to him that you shall be brought back'. (Sura 39:44) As a result, a number of theologians conclude that Muslims who have fallen into grave sins will be thrown into hell for a limited amount of time, and can later be delivered through intercession.

In folk Islam the idea has emerged that Mohammed can be an intercessor for believers. The opinion is that from the first verses of Sura 17 (an allusion to Mohammed's so-called ascension to heaven into God's presence) one can conclude that Mohammed intercedes before God. Since Mohammed resides in God's immediate presence, he has the opportunity to ask God for leniency with respect to sinners in judgment.

Already during his life, appeals for intercession were brought forward to Mohammed.⁴⁵ In folk religion, the prevailing opinion is that angels (Sura 40:7-8) or in particular esteemed men (more seldom women) in Islamic history are able to offer intercession as martyrs or saints. This is based on specific verses such as: 'And those whom they invoke besides Allah have no power of intercession; only he who bears witness to the truth, and with full knowledge.' (Sura 43:86). Many believers make pilgrimages to the graves of saints and bring sacrifices or take vows. Among the saints are, for example, the first four caliphs and the founders of the mystic orders.

So it is that in the classical written tradition the basic possibility of intercession is granted. For instance, the following is stated there: 'If a congregation of one hundred Muslim souls say the Salat (prayer) for a Muslim and ask for all his sins to be forgiven, they will surely have their prayer answered.'⁴⁶

In summary, there are several pos-

⁴⁵ Stieglecker, *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam*, 680.

⁴⁶ Quoted in A. J. Wensinck. 'Shafa'a,' in *Enzyklopädie des Islam* Vol 4 (German version), 268-270, here 269.

sible answers to give from the Koran and tradition to the question: 'Is it possible to offer intercession after a person dies?':

- Intercession for unbelievers is impossible (Sura 19:85-87).
- Intercession through other deities is impossible (Sura 10:18).
- Intercession by God is possible for believing Muslims (Sura 39:44).
- Intercession by angels is perhaps possible (Sura 21:28).
- Intercession by Mohammed is perhaps possible (tradition and folk Islam).
- Intercession by saints, martyrs, and prophets is perhaps possible (folk Islam).

VII Death in the light of Christian Scripture

Compared to Christian Scripture, there are similarities as well as differences in Islamic theology. In the Bible, death on one hand has a negative connotation as the enemy of mankind (1 Cor. 15:26). It is described as the consequence of God's wrath (Ps. 90:7;11) and a curse (Gal. 3:13) so that on earth man's heart is filled with fear because of death. The Bible openly speaks about mourning which is caused by the loss of a beloved one (Luke 8:52).

On the other hand, believers in Christ know about the second reality behind death and dying: their existence will not be extinguished but only transformed. They are assured of God's love and mercy through Jesus' intercession for them (Heb. 7:25), whereas the Muslim believer has no promise of salvation except general statements of

Allah's omnipotence and mercy—if he has done enough good deeds while on earth.

Death according to biblical teaching brings about the end of the physical life and the separation between body and soul. While the body is buried, the soul is called to the Last Judgement—here we find outward similarities to Islamic teaching which is due to Muhammad's contact and controversy with Jews and Christians on the Arab Peninsula after he started to preach Islam in 610 A.D. However, the believer in Christ does not assume that he can earn his salvation or impress his creator by good deeds; he is saved by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9) through the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Another difference between Islam and the Christian faith is the factor that the Qur'an describes man as weak (Sura 4:28) and volatile (Sura 30:36). Such weakness can be straightened out by an (Islamic) education and guidance on the right path of Islam. Biblical teaching, on the other hand, makes it clear that man is not weak, but lost and unable to do good deeds (Rom. 7:18). Therefore, according to Scripture, man cannot be educated or guided on the right path and make himself a better person, but needs salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). He is assured already in his life on earth that his sins are forgiven and God has adopted him as his child (John 1:12-13). So death, according to the biblical faith, does not mean the big question mark, but the comma—leading to life in eternity in the presence of God (Rev. 22:4).

The consequences of these differences may be diverse. It is true that church history might have seen Christians who were all too confident that

they were once and for all saved, even if sometimes only because of membership of a Christian congregation. In Islam on the other hand, people might be quite anxious and filled with fear in the face of death which strictly speaking theologically does not allow more than hope to the remaining family that

God will have mercy on the deceased. Because of this uncertainty, some Muslims may, besides by other factors, be driven into Jihadi groups, whereas Christians, if they remain true to their faith, will mourn the loss of a loved one but rejoice in the certain hope that they have entered into the presence of God.

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Fundamentalisms and the Shalom of God: An Analysis of Contemporary Expressions of Fundamentalism in Christianity, Judaism and Islam

Clinton Stockwell

KEYWORDS: *Protestantism, modernism, eschatology, Zionism, nationalism, Jerusalem, Palestine*

EACH SEMESTER IN Chicago, I introduce the students that I serve to a particular text of scripture, Jeremiah 29:7. The text reads as follows: 'But seek the welfare (shalom) of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare (shalom), you will find your welfare (shalom).'

The context for the verse is that ancient Israelites found themselves as captives and exiles in a foreign land. This people faced several choices. They could flee, and attempt to leave Babylon and try to make it back to the homeland, a fate that they managed to achieve 70 years later. They could rebel, and try to take over the political apparatus in the city, though they had

little means to do so. Third, they could remain in the city as exiles, and do as Jeremiah suggested, live in and seek the peace and welfare of the city where they were exiled.

For Jeremiah, the pursuit of shalom was the goal for the ancient Israelite exiles. Though the Israelites of Jeremiah were exiled and captive in the ancient city of Babylon, they were encouraged, even mandated, to seek the peace of the city, for in its peace, they would find their peace. In short, it was in the collective interest of the ancient Israelites to seek the peace of the city where they resided, for their peace was interconnected with the peace of the whole. So, shalom implies interconnectedness, a certain interrelationship with a city (and society as a whole) and with other peoples who represent different histories and cultural traditions.

A shalom society means that peace

is not only the norm, but it is the essence of social and political practice. It means that those less fortunate, including the 'widows and the orphans', the 'strangers and the aliens', and the 'poor and oppressed' (all biblical categories) are attended to. In short, rather than fleeing the city, Jeremiah implored the exiles to settle in the city, plant vineyards, build houses, raise families, celebrate marriages—to live in the city as 'resident aliens' or perhaps as 'situated exiles'.

There are several individual authors who have written rather extensively about shalom as a biblical ideal. These include, Jack L. Stotts, Roger S. Greenway, George W. Webber, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Bruce W. Winter, Cornelius Plantinga and Mark R. Gornik.¹ These writers, among others, recognize that shalom and the call to pursue the peace of the city and of society in general is a mandate. Plantinga argues that shalom captures the ultimate intention of a God-willed society. Shalom is 'the way it's supposed to be'.

¹ Jack L. Stotts, *Shalom: The Search for a Peaceable City* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1973); Roger S. Greenway, *Apostles to the City: Biblical Strategies for Urban Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979); George W. Webber, *Today's Church: A Community of Exiles and Pilgrims* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and as Citizens* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994); Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Mark R. Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

They [Old Testament Prophets] dreamed of a new age in which human crookedness would be straightened out, rough places made plain. The foolish would be made wise, and the wise, humble. They dreamed of a time when the deserts would flower, the mountains would run with wine, weeping would cease, and people would go to sleep without weapons on their laps. People would work in peace and work to fruitful effect. Lambs could lie down with lions. All nature would be fruitful, benign, and filled with wonder upon wonder, all humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God.²

Christian Fundamentalism in the United States.

In February of 2006, I had the fortune to attend a conference on: 'The Psychology of Fundamentalism', in Chicago. It was sponsored by the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. While recognizing the positive features of conservative religion, this conference nonetheless explored the impact of the extremes inherent in fundamentalism, particularly in the Muslim and Christian worlds. But even in the conference description, there was some latitude on the word's meaning:

Religious fundamentalism is one of the most powerful forces in the world today. In some ways, funda-

² Cornelius Plantinga Jr. *Not the Way It's Spomed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 9-10.

mentalism improves people's lives. For many individuals, their strict religious beliefs give them a sense of meaning and encourage them to be caring and benevolent. But for others, fundamentalism can have dire consequences for adherents, as well as for those deemed 'enemies' of the belief system.

Historically, 'fundamentalism' described a unique historical movement in US-based evangelical protestantism. Humphreys and Wise³ describe how in the US, fundamentalism was a reaction to emerging cultural trends in the US culture. The leaders of fundamentalism in America included a variety of scholars, including Gresham Machen, James Orr, and B.B. Warfield. They were not dispensational premillennialists. Warfield and A.A. Hodge were actually postmillennial. Warfield believed that evangelical work in the present would usher in the coming Kingdom. They represented a variety of theological perspectives, though Warfield and Machen were influenced by 'Scottish Realism', or the 'common sense philosophy' that gave 19th century Protestants confidence that they could discuss and argue via reason for the truth of scripture and for the God-hypothesis. Others, such as R.A. Torrey and A.T. Pierson, were dedicated to evangelism and Protestant missionary activity.

Despite its diversity, as a late nineteenth century and early twentieth century movement, fundamentalism

was a reaction to higher criticism, modernism, evolution and theological liberalism.⁴ In its first use, 'fundamentalism' was not viewed in a pejorative manner. It would be like stating what was essential, fundamental or necessary to the faith. It was assumed that evangelical Christians would be in wide agreement. The fundamentals included the inspiration and authority of the scripture, the belief in miracles, the virgin birth of Christ, and the deity of Christ. For the first group of fundamentalists, it was enough to believe simply in the return of Christ.

The name fundamentalist was derived from a 12 volume collection of essays written from 1910-1915 by 64 British and US scholars and ministers, called *The Fundamentals*. By 1919, this group had founded the 'World's Christian Fundamentalists Association'. After World War One, the confidence that Protestant missions would lead to world conversion, or the belief that progress and the march of the gospel would bring on a millennial kingdom was on the wane. With the violence of the Great War, Protestants were sceptical that any social gospel would make a difference in the world. John Nelson Darby's dispensationalism and premillennialism began to take hold among those who called themselves fundamentalists. 'In the 1920s, simple belief in the Second Coming of Christ qualified as fundamental, but in the 1930s one might have to believe in Christ's pretribulational and premillennial Sec-

³ Fisher Humphreys and Philip D. Wise, *Fundamentalism* (Macon, Ga.: Smith and Helwys, 2004).

⁴ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

ond Coming.’⁵

Premillennialists believed that the world was getting worse, and that the world systems would collapse into the battle of Armageddon, and the true believers would be raptured just before the Great Tribulation. Revivalists like Dwight L. Moody or Billy Sunday sought to save individuals for heaven, and were less concerned about making the world better for the here and now. Further, the Scopes Trial led to the 1920s ‘fundamentalist controversy’ where fundamentalists militated against evolution and therefore, presumably, against science.

Scholars in the post World War II era like Ernest Sandeen or Norman Furniss saw in fundamentalism a pervasive anti-intellectualism. Fundamentalists also seemed to adopt a social ethic that decried movies, Hollywood, public drinking, smoking, card playing, loose morality, sexual perversion, and anything that seemed to challenge a literal interpretation of the Bible. George S. Marsden argues that the central characteristic of fundamentalism historically was its vigorous anti-modernism.⁶ In the 1970s, evangelical scholar Francis Schaeffer argued that ‘secular humanism’ was a grave threat to Protestant orthodoxy. Schaeffer went on to place the ‘pro life’ (anti abortion) issue centerstage for conservative evangelicals. Schaeffer was militantly against abortion, and argued

that abortion stemmed from ‘secular humanism’.⁷

Fundamentalists in the post World War II era embraced dispensational premillennialism, and this version achieved academic respectability at the Dallas Theological Seminary. Theologians who gravitated to Dallas placed dispensational premillennialism as the centerpiece of fundamentalist theology. Hal Lindsay, a graduate of Dallas, popularized dispensational premillennialism in his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). In 1980, the President of the Dallas Theological Seminary, John F. Walvoord, wrote a book, *Armageddon: Oil and the Middle East Crisis* (HarperCollins, 1980). In this book, Walvoord argued that Armageddon would occur in the Middle East, and this war would be the result of an international conflict over oil. Other professors at the Dallas Theological Seminary, like J. Dwight Pentecost, championed the writing of biblical prophecy. In the past ten years, the authors of *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, Timothy F. LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (Tyndale House, 1986) reintroduced ‘bible prophecy’ to a wide reading audience that has gone beyond the conservative evangelical reading public. Terms like ‘rapture’, ‘millennium’, ‘antichrist’, or ‘second coming’ are now part of popular religious lore. The ‘Left Behind’ series now has twelve volumes and is a huge best seller.

Today, many fundamentalists have been on the forefront of the so-called ‘culture wars’ in America, insisting that Christians should become in-

⁵ Timothy P. Weber, ‘Fundamentalism’ in *Dictionary of Christianity in America (DCA)* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 464.

⁶ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

⁷ Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2005).

volved politically to save America as a Christian land. Hallmarks of religious fundamentalism include the pro-life movement, Christian home-schooling, a belief in American exceptionalism, and a foreign policy that is determined in no small part by the particular reading and interpretation of bible prophecy and the end times as advanced by Dallas Theological Seminary. While the bogeyman of American fundamentalists today is 'secular humanism', fundamentalist writers link several issues together

By the 1970s they had identified new enemies and supported new causes. They organized to oppose secular humanism, the decline of traditional values, feminism, legalized abortion, homosexuality, and the elimination of prayer in public schools. They even revised the old anti evolution crusade by sponsoring legislation to provide equal time for what they called 'creation science'.⁸

Dogmatic believers sometime question the validity of science, demonize those who disagree with them, and some may adopt violence to advance their views or to react to threats. In the *American Heritage Dictionary*, there are two definitions of fundamentalism. Definition number one states that fundamentalism is a 'Protestant movement characterized by the literal truth of the Bible'. Definition two states that fundamentalism is 'a movement or point of view characterized by rigid adherence to fundamental or basic principles'. Fundamentalism often combines literalism with absolutely certainty, what

Roy A. Clouser calls the 'encyclopedic assumption', the belief that scripture, and fundamentalist interpretations of it, reveal truth on every conceivable topic.

Michelle Goldberg, author of *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (2006), thinks that Evangelicals are perhaps 30% of the total US population, but that only 10-15% (half or less than half the total) are 'fundamentalists' in the way she uses the term. Still, she argues that this group has a disproportionate influence on the US government, and she is particularly concerned about what some have termed 'dominion theology', reconstructionism, theonomy, and apocalypticism that together comprise a movement she calls 'Christian Nationalism'. This group is adverse to any form of pluralism, and believes that the doctrine of the separation of church and state is a contrivance to keep 'fundamentalists' out of power. Note, what Goldberg is describing is not extreme sects such as the KKK or the various 'Christian identity' movements, but rather evangelicals with power who are impacting US domestic and foreign policy.

In another recent book, *American Theocracy*, Kevin Phillips notes how fundamentalist leaders have had a strong influence on George W. Bush's presidency, especially with respect to domestic policy (environment) and foreign policy (the invasion of Iraq and the single minded support of Israel).⁹ For these writers, fundamentalism has

⁸ Weber, 'Fundamentalism', *DCA*, 465.

⁹ Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (New York: Viking, 2006).

had a disproportionate effect on US government, particularly with respect to US foreign policy.

Jewish Fundamentalism: Zionism and the Birth of a Jewish State in Israel

Fundamentalism is found in each of the great world religions that stem from the patriarch, Abraham. Judaism is divided into three main groups, Conservative, Orthodox and Reformed Judaism. However, none of these groups should be confused with Zionism. Zionism is the Jewish nationalist movement that focuses on the rebirth and renewal of the nation state of Israel in the land of Palestine. Modern Zionism emerged in the late 19th century in response to the persecution of the Jews in Eastern and Western Europe. According to the Anti-Defamation League, Zionism 'continues to be the guiding nationalist movement of the majority of Jews around the world'. Further, it is probably true that most US residents support the Jewish state. There are many who have strong connections to a successful state for economic and political reasons. Also, many evangelical Christians or Christian fundamentalists' support for Zionism derives from their view of bible prophecy and adherence to premillennial eschatology. These include 'Christian Zionists' who are convinced that the restoration of the Jewish state is the fulfillment of prophecy.

The origins of Zionism may be traced to Moses Hess (1812-1875) and Theodor Herzl (1860-1904). Herzl is the more significant figure. Theodor Herzl moved to Vienna in 1878 and received the Doctor of Laws from the University of Vienna. He first encoun-

tered anti-semitism while studying at the University of Vienna, and this experience coloured his life. In the play, *The Ghetto* (1894), assimilation to the secular or Christian civilization was rejected as a solution. In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was accused of treason. Herzl witnessed mobs crying, 'death to the Jews' in France. As a result of this experience, he began to argue that the only solution was for Jews to immigrate to a land that they could call their own. Herzl later published the book, *The Jewish State* (1896) to argue that the solution to the Jewish problem was not individual, but national and political. This was the birth of 'Political Zionism'.

The term 'Zionism' comes from the hill of Zion where the original temple of Jerusalem was situated. Zionists seek to establish a Jewish homeland with geographical boundaries. However, Zionism includes several orientations: 'spiritual and cultural; work ethical; Marxist; and Orthodox Jewish'. The central motif is the notion of founding a homeland for the Jewish diaspora, which has been exiled to Babylon, Europe and the world since the sixth Century BCE. Other motifs in Zionism include the expectation of Messiah, socialism (Kibbutzim), nationalism, and Jewish religious identity. Zionists appealed to European powers to support a nation state in Israel. Early Zionism in Herzl's time was secular in nature, and looked for a nation like other nations.

Zionism in Palestine

While not all Zionists are fundamentalists or racists, it is clear that Zionism

reflects the convergence of two dangerous forces, fundamentalism and nationalism. Jewish historian and Zionist supporter Solomon Grayzel critiques the convergence of such forces in the Arab world, even as he minimizes it among Zionists. Grayzel critiques Islamic fundamentalism as follows:

But nationalism's usual concomitants are racialism and religious uniformity. Consequently, the struggle for independence was everywhere accompanied by anti-Jewish words and acts, the excuse being that Jews were Zionists and therefore anti-Moslem. Ancient Jewish communities were broken up as a result, and obstacles were placed in the way of exiled Jews going to Israel.¹⁰

Grayzel argued that the state of Israel was necessary because of the resurgence of Arab nationalism. At the very same time that a Jewish state in Israel was being considered, Jewish people in Arab nations such as Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and other places were repressed due to Arab and African nationalism. Following the holocaust in Europe and liberation from colonialism in Africa and the Arab world, more persons were forced to migrate to Israel.

Not all Jews, of course, accept Zionism. and not all accept a Zionist interpretation of history such as one finds in Grayzel. In recent times authors like Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (1999,

2004); Ian S. Lustick, *For the Land and for the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (1988); and most recently Gershon Gorenberg, author of *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (2000), and *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977* (2006), have called into question the legitimacy and the impact of Zionism, especially Zionist fundamentalism.

For these authors, most Jews are not Zionists, and most Zionists are not fundamentalists. Zionism in this perspective is viewed as a skewed reinterpretation of Judaism and has been a chief force of destabilization in the world. Shahak and Mezvinsky argue that Jewish fundamentalism in Israel is not as well known as Arab fundamentalism, which is virtually identified with terrorism; or Christian fundamentalism, which is influenced heavily by a literal interpretation of Bible prophecy and the end times.¹¹ Yet, Jewish fundamentalism is just as deadly and disturbing and is a major contributor to destabilization in the Middle East and the world at large. When Yitzak Rabin was assassinated by Yigael Amir in 1995 in Israel because the former 'wanted to give Israel to the Arabs', Rabin's death was applauded by a minority in Israel as necessary for the sake of 'true' Jewish religion. Such violence illustrates the danger in religious fundamentalism as a movement that focuses on preserving an ideal version of the past. 'The basic principles of Jewish fundamentalism are the same as those found in other

¹⁰ Solomon Grayzel, *A History of the Jews: From the Babylonian Exile to the Present* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 818.

¹¹ Weber, 'Fundamentalism', *DCA*; Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More. Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (New York: Belknap Harvard University Press, 1992).

religions: restoration and survival of the “pure” religious community that presumably existed in the past.’¹²

Shahak and Mezvinsky go on to describe characteristics of Jewish fundamentalism. These include a messianic tendency, opposition to human freedoms, especially freedom of expression in Israel, support of occupation of Arab lands, support of discriminating policies against Palestinians, the repression of and opposition to democratic values, and the condemnation of homosexuality and lesbianism. Further, Jewish fundamentalism has adopted an extreme form of biblical literalism, arguing that the destiny of Israel requires Israeli control of all lands from the Suez Canal to lands west and south of the river Euphrates, including the Sinai Peninsula, Jordan, Lebanon, most of Syria, much of Iraq and Kuwait. Christian fundamentalists (Christian Zionists) share the views of Jewish fundamentalists. They believe that it is Israel’s destiny to control these lands as natural frontiers, and that the repression of Arabs and ‘sexual deviants’ is consistent with a theocratic state. Not only do Jewish fundamentalists strive for religious purity and for geographic expansion, but they also believe in religious, moral and racial superiority. Beliefs in superiority feed policies that discriminate against Muslims, alternative sexualities, and non-Jewish people.

Perhaps the most radical of fundamentalist groups in Israel in the post 1967 era is the *Gush Emunim*. The Gush Emunim (Block of the Faithful)

is a right-wing ultra-nationalist, religio-political movement. It was formed in March 1974 in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. A major focus of the Gush Emunim was to support and establish Jewish settlements on the West Bank of the Jordan River. From 1977-1984, the Likud Party (of Menachem Begin) gave Gush Emunim resources to develop settlements on the West Bank. This group believes that the West Bank is part of biblical Judea, and, along with Samaria, constitute the lands of ancient Israel. Because Gush Emunim believes in ‘the literal truth of the Bible and total commitment to the precepts of modern secular Zionism, it may be called Zionist fundamentalism’.¹³ Zionism was historically a secular movement, but the Gush Emunim succeeded in combining the idea of a nation-state with religious fundamentalism.

Adherents to Gush Emunim ideology are opposed to democracy and to the rule of civil law. Like fundamentalists in Christianity and in Islam, this group appeals to a ‘higher’ religious ideology. They believe that their interpretation of the Torah transcends democracy and the laws of a secular state (secular humanism again). Officially, democracy is acceptable as long as it can be practised in the context of Zionism, but if the two polities collide, Zionism takes precedence. Zionists are willing to tolerate a civil society in the interim, but in the end, like other fundamentalist movements, they look to a theocratic

¹³ Ehud Sprinzak, *Gush Emunim : The Politics of Zionist Fundamentalism in Israel* (American Jewish Committee: Institute of Human Relations, 1986), 4.

¹² www.geocities.com/alabasters_archive/jewish_fundamentalism.html?200631.

state ruled by a strict interpretation of the Torah.

Today the political and spiritual principles of the Gush Emunim are prevalent in Israel. For Sprinzak, 'it would not be erroneous to speak today of the invisible kingdom of the Gush Emunim, which is acquiring the character of a state within a state'.¹⁴ In 1978, Amana, Gush Emunim's official settlement organization, was established. Amana was able to gain political support from Menachem Begin, and Ariel Sharon worked with Amana while aggressively pursuing a 'creeping annexation' of 'biblical' lands. However, Gush Emunim was never completely happy with Likud, because it perceived Begin and Sharon as too secular, lacking Gush's religious perspective.

Lustick believes that Jewish fundamentalism is wider than the Gush Emunim. However, he concedes that the Gush Emunim captures the basic force and ideology of Jewish extremism in Israel. He writes that for all practical purposes, contemporary Jewish fundamentalist ideology in Israel is 'the ideology of Gush Emunim'.¹⁵ Jewish fundamentalism is grounded in several basic beliefs, including the sanctity of the land of Israel, its low view of Muslims, Israel's isolation rationalized as proof of its chosenness, and divine providence.

Among the core beliefs for Jewish fundamentalism is the acceptance of the 'abnormality of the Jewish people'.

Lustick notes that Leo Pinsker and Theodor Herzl argued that the Jews should become like other nations, a nation within other nations. This was essentially a secular solution to a global political problem. The solution for Herzl was not to assimilate but rather to establish a homeland. Jewish fundamentalists go beyond Herzl by arguing that Jews should not seek a process of normalization as a national culture. Jews should embrace their own abnormality, and their own peculiarity. Key to this understanding is the notion of chosenness and exceptionalism. For Zionists, Jews are unique; they are not normal, and they are endowed with a unique destiny, distinct from every nation that has ever existed. For Jewish fundamentalists, their religious values cannot be found in civil society or even in reason, but in a 'theonomous scale rooted in the will of the Divine architect of the universe and its moral order...'¹⁶

Jewish fundamentalists eschew the vain search for normalcy. Rather, they see themselves as unique, special carriers of the divine purpose of redemption for themselves and for the earth as a whole. Their ideology supports not only national defence but military aggression if it means that their destiny is to be fulfilled. 'It is this intimate connection between what is felt as transcendently imperative and what is perceived as one's personal, political duty, that is the distinguishing mark of a fundamentalist political vision.'¹⁷

The danger of the fundamentalist

¹⁴ Sprinzak, *Gush Enumim*, 19.

¹⁵ Ian S Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988), ch IV (www.sas.upenn.edu/pennicip/lustick/index.html).

¹⁶ Cited by Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord*, IV, 2.

¹⁷ Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord*, 11.

mind is its conviction that reality is bound to follow ideology and not vice versa. Facts can therefore simply be disregarded. For Jewish fundamentalists, the Palestinians do not exist, the Arab countries do not count, world public opinion is rubbish, and the US government is merely a nuisance. The only reality that counts is Jewish redemption, which is imminent—to be realized by a massive *aliyah*, the negation of the Diaspora, and the building of the Third Temple. Throughout Jewish history there have been true believers like Gush Emunim who were convinced that the Messiah was at the door. Fortunately these messianic believers were in most cases few and isolated. Their messianic vision was not translated into operative political programs. However, this may not be the case with Gush Emunim.¹⁸

Muslim Fundamentalism in Modern Palestine

Most Muslims are not fundamentalists, and even fewer are committed to a terrorist program. Neither is Islam a homogenous religion. For, not only are there Sunni, Shia and Sufi groups in Islam, but there are many others. Also, Islam has historically evolved in very different ways, responding to the divergent national contexts where Islam is found. So, Islam in Turkey is very different from Islam in Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Syria or Egypt. Each of these countries has experienced a very different historical evolution of Islam.

Islam means to surrender to God,

Allah in Arabic. It rejects polytheism. The word Islam is a derivative of the word, *salaam*, which means peace in its fullest sense. *Salaam* means freedom from all harm, so that the greeting, *assalumu aliakum* wishes the recipient peace, and specifically health or freedom from harm or danger. So, as in Christianity and Judaism, rightly understood, peace has an important meaning for Islam. Historically, there are numerous examples of Islamic tolerance regarding Christians and Jews as fellow 'peoples of the book'. The history of conflict between the world religions is not the only story of the relationship between them.

Like Christian and Jewish fundamentalists, Islamic fundamentalists believe that the problems of the world are the result of secularism. They believe that the path to peace and justice occurs only by returning to the original message of Islam. Islamic fundamentalists hold to a high view of moral purity, and are scandalized by western permissive attitudes toward dress, sex, food, and material consumption. Many are resentful of western presence and interference in the Middle East, particularly over oil reserves in Arab lands. Many also allege that the United States in particular sides exclusively with Israel, and has had a one-sided foreign policy against Arab interests. Fundamentalist Islam rejects the equality of men and women. It rejects secularism and rejects the doctrine of the separation of church and state. This is similar to fundamentalism in Christianity and Zionism. Further, some Muslim groups reject the right of Muslims to leave their religion, including in particular the acceptance of Christianity or any other non-Muslim religion. In

18 Sprinzak, *Gush Emunim*, 31.

some countries, it is against the law to proselytize or to even practise a non-Islamic religion.

Perhaps the most significant religious symbol of fundamentalist conflict among world religions is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Muslims believe that the Temple Mount is holy, as it was the place where Muhammed ascended. Christian fundamentalists believe it is holy, because, after the building of a new temple, Christ will return to the site. Jewish fundamentalists believe that the Temple Mount is holy, and that a new Third Temple must be built for the Messianic age to begin. Jerusalem is a place of Messianic dreams and expectations. Gershom Gorenberg writes that such millennialist expectation is a prescription for violence.

For redemptive Zionists, physically possessing Hebron, Jericho, Shiloh, Old Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount proved that the final act was under way. Watched through a very different theological lens, the conquest had the same meaning for premillennialist Christians in front-row seats. Both literalism and the false hope of history's end fed the enthusiasm. Those two fallacies were joined with a third ancient error: That God could be owned by owning a place.¹⁹

To Islamic fundamentalists, Israel is an alien body in the heart of Arab and Muslim worlds and the vanguard of western hegemony in the Middle East. If the establishment of Israel in 1948

was the first major event in the recent Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the second event was the 1967 war and the defeat of a coalition of Arab nations by Israel. The occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank has led to the wholesale displacement of Palestinians. Muslims believe that this has happened because of the impact of secularism on Muslims, and the failure of Muslims to unite and embrace true Islam.

A third event was the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. This is perhaps the most significant event in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The revolution in Iran demonstrates a successful development of Islam as a viable alternative to western secularism. Iran has also provided the rest of the Muslim world with a model of what it means to be a Muslim-controlled state. In the 1970s, a fourth factor was the decline of the effectiveness of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (the PLO). The PLO failed to achieve an independent Palestinian state, and it failed also in uniting more moderate Muslims against Israeli settlements—what Goshem Gorenberg calls an 'accidental empire'.²⁰ Abu-Amr writes that the PLO's 'consequent evolution from ideological purity to political pragmatism created an ideological vacuum that was soon filled by [radical] Islam, the only available alternative'.²¹

A fifth critical historical event in Palestine was the emergence of the

¹⁹ Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 248.

²⁰ Gershom Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006).

²¹ Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (<http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/ht/d/ContentDetails/i/2971>).

Palestinian popular uprising in 1987, called the intifada. The intifada, for Abu-Amr, has been the most important factor in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The intifada defined Islam as a nationalist, political movement of resistance against Israel. Its political objectives became organized in the charter of Hamas, and has been characterized often by violent resistance to Israeli settlements with the goal of liberating Palestine from Israeli control. Abu-Amr argues that Jerusalem and the Muslim religious sites (including the Temple Mount) are holy, and that Palestinians must control these sites. Writes Abu-Amr:

Israel's declared insistence on considering a 'united Jerusalem' as the eternal capital of Israel is likely to complicate efforts at finding a common denominator between the Palestinians and the Israelis regarding an acceptable agreement on the city.... Jerusalem may continue to be an issue of severe contention between the two sides..... If control over Arab Jerusalem, and definitely over Muslim religious sites, is not granted to the Palestinians, the Arabs, or the Muslims, the city will remain a source and a symbol for Muslim resentment, indoctrination, mobilization and perhaps agitation and struggle.²²

John L. Esposito calls Islamic fundamentalism 'Islamic Revivalism' and outlines its 'ideological worldview' as follows:

- Islam is a total and comprehen-

sive way of life. Religion is to be integrated to politics, law and society.

- The failure of Muslim societies is due to its departure from the straight path of Islam and its acceptance of western values and secularism.
- Renewal of society requires a return to Islam, the Quran and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad.
- Western inspired civil codes must be replaced by Islamic law.
- Although Westernization is condemned, science is not, although science is to be subordinated to Islamic beliefs and values.
- The process of Islamization, requires a struggle against corruption and social injustice (jihad).²³

Esposito notes that Islamic fundamentalism often goes beyond even these tenets to urge adherents to fight Zionism, the western crusader mentality, and to move toward establishing an Islamic system of government. As such, a jihad against unbelievers is warranted, even necessary, and Christians and Jews are generally regarded as 'infidels' because of their connections with western neo colonialism and Zionism. A major goal is to rid Muslim lands of these forces of colonization.²⁴

Conclusion

Fundamentalisms of all faiths share some similar characteristics. They

²² Ziad Abu-Amr, 'The Significance of Jerusalem: A Muslim Perspective', *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Vol. 2:2 (1995); www.pij.org.

²³ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165.

²⁴ Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 166.

reject modernism and with it, secularism. They seek to return to a former utopian era and to the root teachings of their faith. As a result, fundamentalists yearn for a previous era, even a state that returns to 'conventional, agrarian gender roles, putting women back in their veils and into the home'.²⁵ In more extreme forms, fundamentalism attempts to replace secularism with some form of theocratic state, be it Zionism in Israel, Sharia law in Islam or 'Christian nationalism' in the US. Moreover, fundamentalists seem to share a literalism and an encyclopedic breadth when it comes to the interpretation of a sacred scripture. They seek clarity and certainty when certainty is illusory. They tend to believe that only a particular 'chosen' group of people can interpret scripture in the right way. As Gorenberg points out, such literalism is not only dangerous, but could turn out violently, particularly for groups who are disappointed that a timeline for the end times has not materialized, and as a result they may believe that it is up to them to help the process along.

We live in a time when extremism is confused with religious authenticity, and not just in Protestantism. Purveyors of 'literal' readings of sacred books claim to represent old-time religion, unadulterated by modernity. Yet literalism, apparently a mark of a conservative, is often the method of millennialists who look forward to an entirely new world. They place prophetic texts at the center of religion—and insist that

the words must be read as factual, tactile accounts of the future.²⁶

Fundamentalism is a widespread phenomena. While as a movement, it began in the United States with the 'fundamentalist controversy' of the early 19th century, fundamentalism as a religious ideology described here has been around since tribal and pre-historic times. While not all Jews, Muslims or Christians are fundamentalists, and not all fundamentalists are violent, fundamentalism is nonetheless a powerful and pervasive force in the world today.

In 1893, Chicago hosted the World's Parliament of Religions. It was perhaps the first time that Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and others met and discussed their distinctiveness and similarities under one roof—peacefully and civilly. Among the attendees was one Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb of New York City. Granted, he was an American Muslim, but nonetheless he perhaps raised a standard for all of the world's religions and for all the world's peoples to emulate.

We should only judge of the inherent tendencies of a religious system by observing carefully and without prejudice its general effects upon the character and habits of those who are intelligent enough to understand its basic principles, and who publicly profess to teach and follow it. If we find that their lives are clean and pure and full of love and charity, we may fairly say that their religion is good. If we find

²⁵ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 166.

²⁶ Gorenberg, *The End of Days*, 245.

them given to hypocrisy, dishonesty, uncharitableness, and intolerance, we may safely infer that there is something wrong with the system they profess.²⁷

The Shalom of God as described in the Old Testament strives for similar goals. Shalom in the Old Testament describes a peace that is interconnected with prosperity, and this prosperity ideally extends to all members of a society. Today, in response to the conflicts that exist between religions and other social groups, we desperately need a theology and a worldview that can somehow foster a respectful meeting of peoples across boundaries and ideologies with the charitableness that Imam Webb describes.

If shalom means peace, prosperity and well-being for each constituent member, including the immigrant (sojourner/alien) or the the poor (widow and orphan), then to what extent can

any nation-state measure up to the standard of God's shalom? The Torah demands that the most vulnerable be protected, and this protection extends particularly to the most vulnerable of any society (usually widows and orphans, certainly women and children). The great text regarding the judgment of the nations found in Matthew chapter 25 in the New Testament is an expression of this standard. There, the question is whether or not a nation-state has provided for the thirsty, the homeless, the hungry, the sick and the imprisoned. Shalom is therefore the standard by which nations are judged.

A 'shalom' society is a society where even the visitor is protected, where even the 'alien' and the 'enemy' can prosper. Shalom means that all peoples can come to the table to dine and share gifts with one another. The Old Testament notion of shalom is not just a good idea, but it could be a norm and a standard for all nations, especially for those who represent the Abrahamic religions. For Cornelius Plantinga, Jr, shalom is therefore not merely a plausible norm for society. Rather, Shalom is 'the way it's supposed to be'.

²⁷ Cited in J.W. Hanson, editor, *The World's Congress of Religions: Addresses and Papers* (Philadelphia W.W. Houston and Company, 1894), 524.

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**Bonhoeffer for Armchair
Theologians**
**Stephen R. Haynes and
Lori Brandt Hale;**
Illustrations by Ron Hill
Louisville: WJK, 2009.
Pb, pp 169
ISBN 978-0-664-23010-4.
Reviewed by Joshua Iyadurai.

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page 93

‘Which Bonhoeffer?’ is the question the authors raise in their conclusion. As an Asian, I see Bonhoeffer as a contextual theologian through the lens of the Western authors. The authors have blended the life and profound theological insights of Bonhoeffer skilfully in *Bonhoeffer for Armchair Theologians*. They have shown

that theology is grounded in concrete situations that postulate theologizing is not for armchair theologians. Stephen R. Haynes is Professor of Religious Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee Lori Brandt Hale is Associate Professor of Religion and Director of General Education at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Haynes and Hale have presented the life and thought of Bonhoeffer in a style that appeals both to academics and the general public The illustrations by Ron Hill, a freelance illustrator and cartoonist, adds witticism. The authors have sketched the life of Bonhoeffer chronologically, contrary to other biographies which begin with his execution by the Nazis. His remarkable achievement of completing his dissertation within 18 months at the age of twenty-one is highlighted which can be an inspiration for budding theologians. Though Bonhoeffer was greatly influenced by Luther and Barth, his critical

reflection of them was evidently present in his thoughts. His deep concern for theology rooted in context is seen in his comment on his professor's sermon, 'shallow religious babble for forty-five minutes', and his claim that if theological propositions could not be explained to children then they are worthless. The authors have portrayed Bonhoeffer as a man who struggled to follow the will of God and his theology emerged out of his life's struggles.

The authors have grouped Bonhoeffer's theological thoughts into four chapters: Christ Existing as Community. Costly Grace, *Stellvertretung* (vicarious representative action) and Ethics as Formation, and Religionless Christianity. 'Christ Existing as Community' is '[a]s the congregation gathers and experiences together God's grace in word, sacrament, and service, the church as community becomes the presence of Christ in the world' (p.78). The emphasis on the sociological or community dimension in understanding church leads to understanding of self in dialogical relations. Christ existing as community is not eschatological but here and now in the visible community. Bonhoeffer precedes postmodernists by defining self as relational and emphasizing the community dimension.

The distinction between costly grace and cheap grace is 'costly grace acknowledges the correlation of grace and discipleship while cheap grace misses this correlation altogether' (p. 103), The concept of *Stellvertretung* (vicarious representative action) is central to Bonhoeffer's theological insight: 'Religionless Christianity'. He called for a perspective from below, that is from the victims' point of view. This is to be practised not only within the Christian community but in the world, Christ is the model in vicarious representative

action and thus makes it a law of life for all human beings.

The authors point out that for Bonhoeffer, 'Christ is not a principle or program: Christ does not teach an abstract ethic. Rather Christ was really and concretely human, committed to serving the needs of real humans in specific situations' (p. 114). The religious or pious do not get involved in the problems of real life. But Bonhoeffer argues that religionless Christianity demands, '[c]hurch must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, *to exist for others*' (p. 138).

Bonhoeffer for Armchair Theologians is a must for pastors, seminary students, theologians, social and political activists and anyone who is concerned about the injustice around us. It clarifies what it means to be a human being and it inspires for action. This book portrays a theologian who made sense in his context with his theological insights which emerged from his context at the cost of his life.

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The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion

Elmer J. Thiessen

Downers Grove Ill.: IVP Academic,
InterVarsity Press, 2011.

ISBN 978-0-8308-3927-8

Pb., pp 285, appens, bibliog., index

*Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird, Centre for
Early Christian Studies, Brisbane, Australia*

In this book, Professor Thiessen has provided, to use his own words describing an earlier work, 'a serious explora-

tion of the ethics of proselytizing', especially as it relates to religion. This is no touristy rush through the woods, but a careful walk, taking note of various criticisms, and alternative approaches to the issue. He also highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the rationale of those bodies which are committed, as a matter of conscience, to the compulsion to proselytize as voiced by our Lord in what is called 'the great commission'.

In reading this volume, at first I felt somewhat uneasy, the question being raised for an evangelical as to what do we do with that inner compulsion of the Spirit—'we are not able not to speak the things we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20)? The presentation of negative positions, arguments and examples in the opening chapters suggested that the author does not think there is much room for proselytising in the scheme of things. As I progressed through the volume those fears were allayed. It became apparent that Thiessen was concerned not so much with the legitimacy of proselytising in itself, as with the manner in which it is done. In the end, it must be said that here is a balanced analysis of a topic that has come to the forefront of public attention in recent years as the result of the upsurge of militant atheism on one hand, and the religious pluralism that has risen in volume with the expanding multiculturalism occurring in many western nations.

Thiessen's net is thrown wide, taking in such areas as academic arguments, philosophical positions, liberal objections, and comparison with other proselytising religions. Mindset or attitudinal states are discussed as being critical to the practice. Thus, there are discussions on rationality, coercion in its various forms, human dignity, tolerance, cultural sensitivity, social mores, humility, motivation, and truthfulness.

All these are carefully and graciously handled. Even the cults are treated with integrity and empathy, with Thiessen suggesting that much of the opprobrium heaped upon them is quite unjust, being coloured by the extreme cases that hit the journalistic headlines.

It is of note that Thiessen mounts a solid defence of religious proselytising, pointing out that persuasion is a normal part of life as we know it. We meet it daily in the superfluity of the market advertising that clogs our existence, and in our homes from our parents, in our schools from our teachers, and certainly among the elite of our universities. One might add that the world-wide web and the offshoots it has spawned is becoming, if not already having arrived, as the prime tool of persuasion. Thiessen suggests that contact with persuasion is inescapable. Not only so, but he holds that persuasion is a vital instrument of development and progress. Something so helpful and universal should not be viewed as an ogre. In arguing against the widespread antagonism to persuasion that has arisen since the Enlightenment, he insists that the real issue is the ethics that are employed in persuasive efforts.

Perhaps the most useful contribution of this work is the list of ethical criteria that is provided. Fifteen items, commencing with 'Dignity' and moving through the various items to end with the 'Golden Rule', are presented as being principles that should be applied in the praxis of religious persuasion. These are discussed at length in two of the chapters and listed in abbreviated form in an appendix. It is clear from the two items mentioned above that Thiessen is focussed upon the value of the recipients and care for their true welfare.

Thiessen does not limit himself to

abstractions. The discussion is appropriately referenced, and includes a number of judiciously used anecdotes, thus connecting the text to the realities of life itself. Also, an extensive bibliography of approximately four hundred items is a rich source from which to pursue further studies on this issue. For the serious scholar, in addition to the bibliography, there are sixteen pages of a literature review covering the ethics of the various areas that relate to the topic, e.g. communications, journalism, marketing and sheep-stealing. This is an excellent guide to finding one's way through the material that is relevant to the issue. All in all, this is a well-argued and illuminating study of an issue that is vital to the future of the faith.

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La nuova evangelizzazione. Una sfida per uscire dall'indifferenza

Rino Fisichella

Milano, Italy: Mondadori, 2011

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Hb., pp. 146, index

Reviewed by Leonardo De Chirico, Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione, Padova, Italy

The New Evangelization is the buzzword for much of what happens at the Vatican. It could well become the catchword of Ratzinger's entire pontificate given the attention that it is receiving. Benedict XVI instituted a new Pontifical Council in 2010 entirely dedicated to the New Evangelization. The latter is mentioned in nearly all his speeches and is slowly but steadily becoming the overarching theme of many projects sponsored by the Vatican.

In this book The President of the newly

created Vatican department, Msgr. Rino Fisichella, spells out the significance of the New Evangelization and offers an interesting perspective on the direction that this initiative is going to take. Fisichella was professor of Fundamental Theology (i.e. the Catholic way of defining a discipline linking Apologetics and Systematic Theology) for many years and then Rector of the Lateran Pontifical University, one of the major and most prestigious academic institutions in Rome. After spending much of his life reflecting on the often turbulent relationship between faith and the modern world, Benedict XVI called him to lead the Vatican efforts towards mobilizing the Catholic Church towards the New Evangelization.

Fisichella makes clear that the New Evangelization applies to those countries where the Catholic Church was established in ancient times and where the first proclamation of the gospel resounded many centuries ago. He acknowledges the fact that the word 'evangelization' and the vocabulary around it has been treated with suspicion in Catholic circles due to its 'protestant' usage and overtones. Mission and catechesis were more traditional and preferred terms for a long time. It was only after Vatican II that the language of evangelization began to be used.

The expression 'New Evangelization' was coined by John Paul II in 1979 and subsequently achieved a technical theological meaning. Its specificity has to do with its recipients, i.e. the masses that have been baptized in the Catholic Church but have 'lost a living sense of their faith'. The goal of the New Evangelization is to call them back to the mother church.

Fisichella embarks on the attempt of analyzing what has caused such a

transition to practical unbelief. The root of the western crisis is the transformation of the process of secularization in a strong movement towards secularism. The former is a sociological process which reflects pluralism, the latter is a new dogmatic religion which is anti-Christian. This new stance forgets the rich 'synthesis between Greek-Roman thought and Christianity' and replaces it with an ideology of religious indifference and relativism. In a telling comment, Fisichella argues that 'the pathology that afflicts the world today is cultural' and is to be entirely attributed to secularism.

This is a standard reading of western cultural trends from a traditional point of view. What is striking in Fisichella's otherwise nuanced reconstruction is the lack of self-criticism as far as the Catholic Church is concerned. It seems that the charge of the present-day crisis lies in secularism only, whereas churches seem to bear no responsibility. Even when he deplores the profound ignorance that most people show as far as the tenets of the Christian faith is concerned, he skips over the rather obvious point about who is to blame (at least partially but truly) for it. Are we sure that European churches do not bear any responsibility in today's spiritual and cultural crisis, especially when they claim to have 70 per cent plus of baptized in most countries? Isn't there something wrong in their theology of Christian initiation? Isn't there a problem in their catechetical impact? Isn't there something awkward in their witness to the gospel? In the end, are churches blameless in the western spiritual turmoil? For Fisichella, the issue is not even mentioned.

The New Evangelization is needed because the west has turned away from its Christian roots and it is time to reverse the tide. According to Fisichella, the bat-

tle ground is cultural, the issue at stake is anthropological, the task before the church is to promote a New Humanism, i.e. a more advanced synthesis between Christian values and the Greek-Roman heritage through the rediscovery of the virtue of coherence on the part of Christians. The New Evangelization will be a means to achieve this ambitious goal, a goal that Benedict XVI wholly embraces and proactively spearheads.

So far, the narrative of the New Evangelization does not contain crucial biblical words like repentance from past and present mistakes, confession of sin, conversion to Jesus Christ. If the New Evangelization is to bear its fruit there is no other way than the biblical one.

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Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defense of Desires and Emotions for Faith
Clifford Williams

Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2011
ISBN 978-0-8308-3899-8
Original edition 2011
Pb., pp 188, index

Reviewed by Marshall T. Brown, Evangelical Theological Seminary, Prague, Czech Republic

We are whole persons created by God with both emotions and reason that work in tandem as we trust God to satisfy our deepest needs. Christian apologetics are often 'evidential' in nature: addressing a person's intellect and seeking to prove the reasonableness of belief in God. This well-worn path can be perceived as a heartless and sterile science. Is there more to apologetics than merely amassing proofs for the existence of God and the truth of Christianity? In

this book, Clifford Williams believes so: 'Humans are at least as much creatures of existential needs as creatures with minds', he writes. 'Faith must include the satisfaction of those needs.' Wanting to satisfy needs that God placed within us is, for Williams, about living as God designed us to live.

By repeatedly reiterating his thesis—namely, that the ideal way to secure faith in God is through both need and reason—he shows that his is not a purely existentialist approach to apologetics. He constantly supplements a 'needs-oriented' apologetics with reason. He addresses four objections to the existential argument, yet his 'concessions' to their inadequacies seem to serve as foils to drive home his conviction that while needs exert a drawing power for faith in God, yet the process is never void of the certifying ability of reason.

Williams adeptly instructs us on a whole gamut of existential elements used to reason a person towards faith in God. His writing style and the content of his book underline his pedagogical skills as professor of philosophy at Trinity College in Deerfield, Illinois. He skilfully guides us through a myriad of philosophical arguments and acquaints us with numerous philosophers, all the while keeping technical jargon to a minimum, thus making his book accessible for a wider audience. He also offers many life-stories to illustrate his subject matter; a well-suited device though not all are equally helpful.

He persuasively articulates philosophical matters, yet less so theological ones. The topics of 'faith' and 'needs' intimate this weakness. He frequently writes about 'acquiring' or 'securing' faith in God as well as 'needs' being the cause of faith. More often than not, he seems to propound a man-centred theology

rather than God-centred. Occasionally, he expresses the notion that God puts needs within us. However, the 'faith in God' component of his argument seems to detract from any notion that God is the one who satisfies our needs as we come to him in faith—a faith that the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians (2:8-9) as being, along with grace, a gift from God.

The structure of his book is straightforward. First, comes the thesis (ch. 1), and then the author defines 'needs' and the mechanics of an existential argument for believing in God (ch. 2-3). Third, he defends his thesis against four objections to an existential argument (ch. 4-7) and faith in God as consisting partly of emotions (ch. 8). He concludes (ch. 9) by making three assertions: 'we should let ourselves be drawn to faith in God by need; we do not always do so; and having emotions is part of what makes life spectacular.'

While his book in places reads with a more man-centred theological orientation than I could embrace, nevertheless, I find it helpful and well-balanced in arguing for an apologetic approach that addresses the whole person: both mind and heart. He has helped to put the heart back into apologetics and defend the legitimacy of needs, emotions and reason for faith in God.

Williams' approach is not novel. He utilizes Pascal as an example of one philosopher who has influenced him. He reminds us that Pascal's aim in his *Pensées* is to persuade people to become Christians. He does so firstly, by using evidential arguments and secondly, by employing existential ones. As to the latter, Pascal points to the loss of mankind's true happiness, enjoyed at creation and shattered by the fall, that has become this infinite abyss of craving

or need which man on his own incessantly fails to adequately satisfy. Why? Because it is a craving or need that 'can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself'.

Existential Reasons is a book that will help us reunite the emotions of our heart with the reasoning of our mind in faith toward God: the only infinite and immutable object that fully satisfies our craving for true happiness. I think this book has a viable place in our lives and ministries as we strive to grow in faith towards God and implore others to pursue God through faith in Jesus Christ.

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Early Libyan Christianity Uncovering a North African Tradition

Thomas C. Oden

Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011
ISBN 978-0-8308-3943-8
Pb, pp 334 illus, bibliog., index

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,
Evangelical Review of Theology*

Here is a passionately presented case for recognizing the importance of Libya specifically (and North Africa generally) as a key player in the history of Christianity (and later for Islam). It is the third in a series of books (and the most personal one so far) in which veteran theologian, Thomas Oden, appeals for the academic community and wider Christianity to overcome centuries of neglect and even prejudice on the question of African Christianity. He vigorously explains that Libya had 500 years of Christianity during which it was responsible to a considerable degree for many of the most important pioneering

theological and practical influences on early European and Eastern Christianity (which flowed on to affect all of Christianity).

For the last twenty years, the author, assisted by many colleagues, has been working with early texts of Christianity in his 'Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture' project. He has also been involved in extensive travel in the region. In the process he has come to the conclusion that much archaeological and literary evidence about the virility of Christianity in Libya in the first five hundred years of the faith has been overlooked or even suppressed, resulting in a misleading picture of the early church. Much of the archaeological data is still not readily accessible or even known to experts in the field or ordinary students. However, as more discoveries are made and sites and texts become familiar, the story of the important role and influence of Christianity in Libya is revealing itself. Oden is convinced it is a story that needs to be told for the benefit of African Christians in particular, and Christians worldwide, not to mention the Libyan people themselves and the adherents of the faith that followed Christianity in the region, Islam.

The author first of all sets the scene for his project and for this book, which arises out of a lecture series he was invited to give on the topic at an important Islamic university in Libya (and given in other forms elsewhere). He then explains the rich pre-Christian and pre-Hellenistic cultural heritage of the area. There follow descriptions of the earliest people in the Christian story with Libyan connections including the famous Simon of Cyrene, the apostle Mark (who is the subject of Oden's second book in this series), and some of the earliest Christian missionaries associated with the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch. This

all shows Christianity in Libya as a native movement with strong links to the key churches of the earliest days of the movement. In fact it was 'the Cyrenaic core of leadership [of the early Church] that launched the international mission of Christianity'.

The book then goes on to discuss the pre-Nicean period when Libya and North Africa supplied influential figures in the development of Christian theology and practice, including Tertullian, Pope Victor and Sabellius; there are fascinating links too with emperors and civic leaders of the Roman world. This data gives further support for Thomas Oden's overall thesis (discussed in his first book on the topic) that the flow of ideas and influence was from the south (Africa) to the north, thus countering the dominant Euro-centric ideas of this part of Christian history.

The longest chapter of the book by far deals with 'the most important philosophical mind from early Christian times in Libya', the 'African wise man', Bishop Synesius (c365-413). Another chapter gives an overview of five centuries of Christianity in Cyrene in particular, and then there are two chapters surveying archaeological and other evidence right across the country.

The concluding chapters summarise and reinforce the author's case, emphasising that 'Christianity in North Africa has an older history than its European and American expressions', that it 'has set precedents for later western Christian communities, such as ecumenical consensus formation' [especially in relation to Christology], and has 'spawned enduring ideas and achievements'. While the arrival of Islam in AD 643 changed much, Christianity did survive through subsequent years, often heroically, and tangible evidence of the early period is

now becoming known.

Oden concedes that not all the data is yet available, and neither can all the arguments be made with certainty. However, through his extensive experience in the field and with the available evidence, he is convinced that telling the story is important for African Christians who need no longer remain in ignorance of their heritage. It is also important for Libya itself and for inter-faith relations in the region and globally. Oden appeals for more people to take up the task of researching and telling this story, especially young African scholars. It is to be hoped that this 'sampler' (which does bear the marks of origins in the lecture room), will prove to be the stimulus the author intends, and that in time, the finer details of the complex history of this area, only sketched in this book, can be more fully understood.

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The Forgotten Jesus and the Trinity You Never Knew

Damon W.K. So

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010

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Pb, pp 244

Reviewed by Graham McFarlane, London School of Theology.

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www.Jesus-Trinity.co.uk

This is an intelligent book on the story and meaning of Jesus. It is the kind of book you would want to give to someone not only searching for the truth of the Christian faith but who can also carry

a good read. It is the overflow of the author's PhD thesis but it is not an academic tome. Rather, it embodies what the late John Stott demonstrated in his own teaching ministry—deep thinking in order to produce simple teaching. As the author reminds us, his desire is not to produce abstract and propositional thinking but a narrative—a story—about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is located in the here and now—of 21st century discrimination baked in the furnace of human selfishness and self-interest—and the need for a solution. That solution is Jesus, the one sent by the Father and empowered by the Spirit. As such, then, the story of Jesus is inextricably connected with the identity of the Father who sent him and the Spirit who enabled him. What is so refreshing about this book is that the missional imperative of the gospel is brought back into its proper setting—not surprising given that the author is Research Tutor at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

The book falls into four clear sections. Three centre on Jesus with a final look at the Trinity and human society. We are firstly introduced to Jesus the Teacher. Here So unpacks a series of antitheses concerning human life, sexuality, marriage, truth and peace. With these he demonstrates the radical and uncompromising nature of Jesus' teaching. What I liked specially about this section was the fact that So ties the content of Jesus' teaching with the question of authority: Jesus can teach with authority because he is sent from and by the Father. However, and very helpfully, So takes the reader further—to Jesus the Practitioner. Here the reader is exposed to several aspects of the practical dimension of

Jesus' teaching, whether in healing, the kind of people he mixed with, his view of Sabbath, how he related to the outsiders and children. Again, So does not pull any punches about the radical nature of Jesus' praxis—put bluntly, it offends the religious, and especially those in religious leadership. Little has changed.

Next, the author develops the character of Jesus. He is the Humble Servant. Here the reader is taken through the inner motivation and character of Jesus. First, we look at Jesus and his temptations and his identification with a needy humanity around him. Then we move into a very clear and helpful presentation of the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. Again, what makes So a good read is the fact that he makes all this meaningful and direct. Anyone looking for a good resource for a series of group studies would be hard pushed to find a better place to look—think ahead—Lent groups! This book will be a great help.

Finally, the book ends on an exploration of the identity of the God whom Jesus reveals. What I particularly appreciated about this section is the way in which Damon sets the story of God the Trinity in the human need he unpacks in his introduction. It is a humanity that needs to be freed—freed from its own moral referencing, its insatiable self-interest, its disregard for the poor, and its constant conflicts. This is the mess in which the gospel takes root and shape. This is the context of mission. This is what church is all about. And this book is a timely and helpful push for those concerned enough to read it that there is indeed a Jesus who has been forgotten in today's pluralistic and relativistic world and a Trinity that has definitely never been known by many.

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Micah's Challenge

The Church's Responsibility to the Global Poor

Edited by Marijke Hoek and Justin Thacker

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(Micah 6:8)

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Richard Gibb is Assistant Minister of Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh, UK.

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