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Editor's Introduction: Expand Your Mind Here!

Christians have a widespread problem: we tend to read only things we agree with. Evangelicals don't read liberal theology, and vice versa. Politically active Christians read sources that reinforce their own policy positions. Few of us ever read texts from other religious traditions.

Of course, Scripture and other works that build up our faith should be our top reading priority. But we can't understand, appreciate or engage with other perspectives if we never expose ourselves to them. Besides, the best way to discover our own blind spots is to interact with people who see the world differently.

This *ERT* issue offers rigorously argued articles designed to challenge just about anyone's thinking. It opens with two articles on changes in theological education. If your three years of MDiv studies at a traditional seminary were the most formative years of your life, these articles might be unsettling. Read them anyway.

Simon Chan is editor of the *Asia Journal of Theology* and a Pentecostal who draws heavily on Orthodox spirituality. As a result, he provides a perspective you may not have encountered. Read him.

Thomas K. Johnson presents a carefully considered but sometimes provocative view on how to present ourselves as Christians in the public square. Gene Daniels tackles the contested issue of how to use the Qur'an when sharing the gospel with Muslims. Francis Samdao introduces us to Federico Villanueva, a prominent Philippine theologian who thinks modern Christian spirituality is truncated by our lack of lament. And Fritz Melodi invites evangelical pastors to consider trading in their button-down shirts and blue jeans for clerical robes.

I hope you like this issue, but even if you don't, you certainly can't call us narrow-minded!

This issue has a small change you probably wouldn't notice: we lost our general editor. Thomas Schirrmacher stepped down as World Evangelical Alliance secretary general at the end of March, for health reasons. It has been an honour to learn from his vast experience in theology, religious freedom advocacy, intrafaith and interfaith relations, and politics. His candid observations, dedication to the gospel message, and commitment to academic excellence have expanded my mind and many others. Thomas plans to continue his global leadership on the religious freedom front, and I hope we will have the opportunity to publish more of his superlative thinking.

Happy reading!

—Bruce Barron, Executive Editor
bruce.barron0@gmail.com

CBTE and Micro-Credentials: New Tools for Theological Education

Compiled by Bruce Barron

The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) held a bold, boundary-stretching consultation in Rome on 13–16 February. Eighty stakeholders in theological education, more than half of them from the Majority World, met to discuss two innovative delivery tools that are emerging in global higher education—competency-based theological education (CBTE) and micro-credentialing (MC)—and how they can be effectively applied to the enormous needs of global Christianity.

ICETE qualify assurance director Marvin Oxenham, who structured the consultation, said it had three aspirations: (1) to envision how CBTE and MC can strengthen and support the church, (2) to consider how they can advance quality and collaboration, and (3) to spark a global movement using these tools in collaboration to empower evangelical Christians' teaching and training across the globe.

Since its founding in 1980, ICETE has served primarily formal theological education—i.e. seminaries and Bible colleges. But the massive need for more trained pastors, the demand for shorter and more flexible training programs, and the various strains facing seminaries have led ICETE to expand its constituency. Now more non-formal programs (generally churches and nonprofit organizations) and informal mentoring programs are represented as ICETE seeks to enable theological education to serve the church and its mission.

'Collaboration has been the global buzzword in theological education for about the last eight years, and ICETE has thankfully been uniquely positioned to respond', said Michael Ortiz, ICETE's executive director. 'We have one common aim: to strengthen the church's mission. We must continue to move from talking to doing.'

These two tools both enhance the flexibility of educational delivery, but in different ways. 'Whereas CBTE is an educational philosophy, MC is an approach to certification', Oxenham said. CBTE shifts the emphasis in program structure from inputs (typically the courses that one must take to complete a degree) to the outcomes or competencies that a graduate should fulfil. Micro-credentials (MCs), on the other hand, revolutionize the standard vision of the BA-MA-doctoral degree structure by introducing formalized higher-education qualifications for short learning experiences.

As a creative illustration of how these tools function, ICETE constructed the consultation itself as if it were an MC on the topic of CBTE and MCs—in other words, participants learned how to create a CBTE-based micro-credential and demonstrated their proficiency by presenting their work to each other on the last day.

After introductions and an overview on the first evening, the consultation's second day was fully dedicated to CBTE, with expert presentations in the morning followed by focus group discussions and brainstorming in the afternoon. Participants learned how to do 'backward design'—a five-phase process that thinks backward from the desired results to the needed competencies, relevant proficiency indicators, how to assess those proficiency indicators, and then identifying learning activities that will enable students to achieve proficiency.

The third day was devoted to MCs, defined as short, focused learning experiences that can stand alone as formal higher education qualifications or may be 'stacked' into larger qualifications or full macro-credentials (i.e. degree programs). Oxenham described MC as 'challenging the vision that the traditional degree-based system of certification is the only legitimate way to obtain a qualification in higher education.' Participants discussed the various advantages of MCs and then engaged actively in practical MC design workshops.

On the last day of the consultation, participants presented the CBTE micro-credential they had designed for their context and assessed each other on several competencies, including one in character formation, linked to the virtue of collaboration.

Going forward

What happens from here? 'We will not come up with a grand one-size-fits-all plan', Oxenham stated. 'That is not ICETE's style.' Ortiz emphasized similarly that ICETE initiated this work in response to requests for global guidance and would not be imposing a plan on anyone, but will be available to serve as interests and needs develop.

Oxenham indicated that ICETE is committed to helping evangelical theological education providers maintain a high standard of quality. 'Just as it was easy to do online education badly during COVID-19, so it will be easy to do CBTE and MC badly', he said. 'We made a strong appeal that if we are going to do this as an evangelical movement and have global recognition of CBTE programs and micro-credentials in theology, we need to do it with integrity and a solid standard of quality. Otherwise, we will lose trust.'

Referring to quality, accessibility and cost as the 'iron triangle of education', Oxenham said that 'anything you do to one of them will affect the other two.' MCs, for example, improve access and reduce costs, but it is essential not to do this at the expense of quality. 'The urgency of mission and church planting calls us to be agile and make training as accessible as possible, and it is unfortunate that sometimes we compromise quality along the way', he noted.

Oxenham also stressed CBTE and MC as a response to contemporary preferences in educational style: 'The era known as modernity had a very structured approach to education. Today's generation wants something taught to them in the morning that they can apply in the afternoon.' He added that while some of us may feel such demands for immediacy cannot fully satisfy our educational mission, we would be foolish not to consider the legitimacy that these demands carry, especially when it comes to preparation for service.

Moving forward, CBTE and MC could drive major revisions in theological schools' financial models, but Oxenham hopes they will also expand the reach of theological education to many more Christians. 'Traditionally, seminaries have had

relatively few students and relatively high fees', he said. 'With micro-credentials, we will potentially have many more students at lower fees. Providers will need to change their marketing approaches and reach out to different audiences that include, at the very least, the lay leadership of the church. No longer are you just recruiting young people who want to prepare for full-time ministry. Instead, you are going to churches and saying that what you offer is important to every Christian. This fits well with our theological convictions around the priesthood of all believers. In this way, theological education can become more widely distributed among Christians and not rely exclusively on the mediated training of professional clergy.'

ICETE will be developing further, concrete strategic plans in 2024 to advance quality and collaboration in these new developments in theological education.

Reactions

The remainder of this article presents the reactions and perspectives of ten leaders from various stakeholder groups who attended the Rome consultation.

Graham Aylett, general secretary of Increase, a network of church-based training organizations across Asia, and an ICETE board member

When I was working with a theological education by extension (TEE) program in Mongolia, we sought accreditation from the Asia Theological Association (ATA). We discovered that the ATA accreditation manual wasn't really speaking our language. The language was very much about faculty, libraries, dormitories and the like, whereas a TEE program doesn't have those things. This discovery led to a very good process of discussion, after which I was invited to join the ATA's Commission on Accreditation and Educational Development. I have now been on the commission for more than ten years. I was formally appointed to represent the ATA in Rome for the September 2023 consultation on CBTE and MC quality assurance issues and for the February 2024 consultation.

In education generally, especially in Europe, there is a realization that to remain competitive in global markets, the entire workforce needs ongoing education or upskilling. With changing patterns of study among adults, shorter programs that are quality-assured can enable people to study when, what and how they want to. MCs offer the promise of being able to provide this kind of accessible, relevant training.

There is definitely excitement about what CBTE and MC can bring to theological education. CBTE's strong focus on outcomes implies a strong connection of theological education to the church and its mission, which has always been an emphasis for ICETE.

Existing ICETE and regional guidelines already place a strong emphasis on holistic education and outcome-based training, but discussing CBTE can help us ask ourselves to what extent our assessment frameworks really give us confidence that we are equipping people as we intend.

Another strength of CBTE is the value it places on the experience, knowledge and character that students bring with them. Programs can be more tailored to the particular needs of the individual student than traditional degree programs.

The process at Rome was very good. We were asked to reflect on the shortcomings of both formal and nonformal theological education. The shortcomings

mentioned at many tables included disconnection from the church context and the realities of ministry, as well as the inaccessibility and lack of cost-effectiveness of longer programs. It was generally recognized that the strengths of CBTE and MC could help to remedy these problems.

Nearly everyone was very positive about the consultation. Some people who had not attended the September meeting and were not closely connected with ICETE felt that a more complete orientation at the start would have helped them. We need to do a better job of welcoming, acknowledging and giving encouragement to people who haven't been part of the process until now. That will be especially important for the next major conference.

As Bible colleges and seminaries in Asia explore CBTE, the ATA needs to be ready with appropriate quality frameworks to serve them, and it looks forward to working with ICETE's recommended guidelines once they are formally approved.

ICETE's desire to foster greater mutuality and synergy between kinds and levels of theological education is greatly valued by Increase's membership. ICETE has intentionally opened the door to a much wider range of training and equipping endeavours, not just tertiary-level programs, in order to serve the church. I want to see theological education broadened to serve not only people in church ministry but anyone who wants to think biblically and theologically, have a worldview shaped by Scripture and the Spirit, and be able to function as a Christian in their workplace or communicate Christian truth effectively over coffee. Having different training programs working together can help us offer levels and methods of training that can reach any Christian.

Embracing CBTE fully will be quite a journey for our Increase member organizations. My goal is to help them place a sharper focus on outcomes. How clearly can you describe what a graduate of your program should be capable of? How do you arrive at the description—by sitting in your office and thinking, or by going out to talk with stakeholders? What are your assessment processes?—not just exams at the end, but processes of mentoring and coaching that give windows of insight into individual character strengths and weaknesses. A lot of work goes into answering these questions, and I want to encourage our member organizations to do that hard work in conjunction with the churches they serve.

Connie Duarte, co-general secretary, European Evangelical Alliance

I have two sons, age 17 and 19, who have not talked about going to seminary but are interested in theological topics. When I heard about MCs at the consultation, I thought, 'This is the way forward'—not just for my sons but for pastors who can't take a year off. Thirty years ago, this option of smaller, competency-based chunks would have excited me more than the seminary training I took.

In northern and western Europe, theological seminaries have existed for hundreds of years, but in eastern Europe they are newer and smaller. Before the Rome consultation, I was in Serbia for a meeting at an empty Bible college—they don't have any students this year. Right after Rome, I traveled to Albania for a regional meeting and sat beside a Croatian seminary leader who said their numbers were dwindling. I talked about Rome and said that perhaps MC would fill their places

again. In the Baltics, where money is tight, MCs would be very helpful for someone who has already been a pastor for 20 years but wants an affordable chunk of training.

I still sensed some snobbery in the formal sector towards nonformal and informal training. I suggested that all seminary professors should have at least a short-term involvement in a nonformal or informal situation, to see their effectiveness and realize that formal education is not the superior way. By the end of the conference, there was much better understanding. Seminaries understand that they need to do things differently or they will be out of business—and they are an important business for us to sustain. This was a good chance for people to realize that it's okay to rethink and redesign.

It's a mentality change for formal institutions, and I could tell from their questions that some of them were struggling to get there. I thought ICETE has taken an incredible step in arranging this dialogue. It could have blown up, with people staying in silos.

In my role with the EEA, I hope to encourage seminaries towards a new way of thinking about theological education that could be more attractive to a younger generation. What we learn in church is often good, but there is nothing like taking a book of Scripture, or a concept like apologetics or hermeneutics, and thinking deeply about it for a while and then applying it to your own life. Such work should not be left to the professional ministry people as we have so often done. I'll be starting with my sons and seeing if I can get them to take a course or two this summer!

David Tarus, executive director, Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA)

In the 1990s, there was an attempt to connect theological education by extension (TEE) with formal education. ACTEA developed standards for accreditation of nonformal education in 1997. But those standards were never implemented or even announced. However, ACTEA continued to support TEE, holding various consultations throughout the continent. This led to some publications that are currently available.

ACTEA worked with the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) to convene a consultation in 2019 on scaling up theological training. We found that the best approach is to have formal and nonformal institutions in partnership, not opposition. In 2023, ACTEA and AEA held a three-day consultation with 30 formal institutions and 50 providers of nonformal curricula. It was a very fruitful dialogue. A similar conversation took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 9–10 April 2024, focusing on the role of national evangelical alliances in scaling up pastoral training.

I realized that the theological curricula are often not relevant to the needs of the church. I learned this immediately after I graduated. Despite my four-year seminary education, which focused a lot on theology, Bible and biblical languages, I was not prepared for the complex realities of the field. I graduated at age 25. In my first year as a pastor, I was asked to conduct a funeral for a 12-year-old boy who had been killed in a family dispute. I was totally incompetent for this task. My relevant training consisted of a one-afternoon class on grief issues. I kept asking myself why I was not ready for such an assignment. In my role with ACTEA, as I ask school leaders to

clarify their mission and pose critical questions, I find that schools are still not effectively addressing the situations their students will deal with on a daily basis.

Theological education was brought to Africa largely by missionaries, who have since left and handed the curricula over to us. Some schools are still using 30-year-old curricula and have not thought about how to revise them to deal with modern realities. As a result, there is a broad recognition that our theological education is not producing competent ministers for the church. That is the key question for me.

I came to Rome because I want to influence the shape of theological curriculum towards being more competency-based. Governments are ahead of us in this regard. The government of Kenya has implemented a competency-based curriculum for primary education.

The conference was well organized, with a diverse audience. The people who needed to be in the room were there. I come from a systematic theology background, so I depend on others for help on education issues. Marvin Oxenham and the people from the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) explained these ideas in a way we could understand. The consultation enabled me to learn about C-BEN and about various nonformal theological education consortia I did not know about. This forum brought people to the table and facilitated building of partnerships.

The MC component was new to me. In Africa, many pastors want training that can be offered quickly, is customized to meet specific needs, and is student-driven. MCs can fill the gap for pastors who can't enroll full-time, and also for alumni whose education did not cover all the competencies required and who may want to come back for something short and accessible.

In Rome, I saw a spirit of institutional generosity. Different entities that have been doing competency-based education for a long time, such as Kairos, were open to us. That spirit will move us forward, because we can't do it alone. If the formal sector excludes the nonformal sector, we are not being generous or welcoming to a whole movement that God is already using.

One reason why seminaries need a nonformal track is sustainability. Having a nonformal track brings traffic to campus and becomes a way to recruit full-time students, without compromising the traditional educational approach that schools have been offering well.

Henry Tan, president of the International Leadership Consortium

Our consortium consists of 13 schools, including 8 in Africa, formed by Campus Crusade for Christ International. We began hearing from churches around the world that our graduates were great in some areas but were not field-ready. In considering how to remedy this problem, we came across Kairos University, which was ahead of us in thinking through these issues.

Partnering with Kairos led us into a journey of revamping our curriculum and shifting our focus from academia to students and from inputs to outputs. Inputs are important, but they are insufficient if head knowledge is not connected to the heart and hands. We now see students' lives being transformed in a way that we have not seen before with increased effectiveness in ministry.

After we talked with Michael Ortiz at the previous global ICETE conference, he placed me and my colleague Ron Watters on the ICETE steering committee for

CBTE and MC. The Rome consultation was intended to introduce CBTE and MC to people who desire increasing quality and quantity of graduates for the Great Commission. We saw high interest in these tools.

Further discussion is needed on how to incorporate these ideas. You can't change your whole school at once or you will face a rebellion. A pilot project is a good way to do a proof of concept at your own school.

Formal and nonformal theological education proponents are continuing their dialogue on how best to work together in developing pastoral and lay leaders. I suggested that maybe formal versus nonformal is not the critical question, but how students are equipped to become Great Commission leaders is.

For us, the change is still in process. We are working with pilot programs in Francophone Africa and Singapore. We invite students to join us on a journey of discipleship. We say that if you go through our process, you will come out loving God and people more, loving God's living Word more, more confident and competent in consulting the Word for guidance on issues of life and society, and knowing how to be disciple-makers. The students' holistic development includes working with a team of three mentors.

We are also looking at MCs as a way to train Christian laypeople for ministry. We minimize our schools' physical plant requirements and bring the training to students, making it portable and accessible. Our training is competency-based rather than course-based and is paid for by monthly subscriptions. Students can progress at their own pace, but they are placed in cohorts through which they learn from each other in a powerful way that we didn't envision. Our mentoring is directed towards acquiring the competencies needed for their context.

The need is urgent. The rate of evangelism is far outpacing the development of pastors. Every year, worldwide, seminaries graduate 50,000 people, whereas we need 2.5 to 3 million pastors. If our focus is on outcomes, then every seminary graduate is a potential faculty member. Dallas Seminary, for example, has 18,000 alumni. If we could mobilize 10 percent of them in this way, we could have a great impact. Many other schools have vast numbers of alumni. Mobilizing them to equip the world's underequipped pastoral leaders might be a strategy to consider.

Reuben van Rensburg, retired president of the South African Theological Seminary and currently project director for Re-Forma, which is implementing a global standard for nonformal theological education

For more than 40 years, ICETE focused on formal institutions. I attended ICETE's global conferences every three years and benefitted greatly from interacting with other institutions. But there was no focus on the nonformal sector. When this initiative to close the gap between formal and nonformal theological education began two years ago, it was very welcome. I believe that the gap has been reduced and that there has also been a lessening of the competitive spirit within each sector. Historically, some nonformal programs have taken a 'what's mine is mine' attitude towards their curriculum; now there is a network of nonformal providers that meet online for an hour once every two months and are much more open to collaboration.

I attended ICETE's September 2023 meeting in Rome. Of the 24 people present, I was one of very few representing the nonformal sector. Because of the predomi-

nance of formal institutions, I found myself constantly having to intervene with ‘but the nonformal sector ...’. When I apologized for doing so, others said that they appreciated my speaking up.

Nonformal providers are in favour of the concepts of CBTE, but they will proceed without accreditation. That is what Re-Forma has done by establishing our set of 37 required, competency-based outcomes for pastors, grounded in what pastors need to know, do and be. As one of the few nonformal providers whose program is based purely on achieving outcomes, CBTE is a dream for us and we will support it as much as we possibly can. In the nonformal theological world, others may try to follow our example.

Having been a seminary president, I do not want the sword of accreditation hanging over the heads of the nonformal sector. I define accreditation as solely applicable to tertiary institutions of learning. Re-Forma does not want to be the ICETE of the nonformal sector. Our role is not accreditation but validation—ensuring that pastors are competent, even if they don’t have a degree, by offering a global standard and training opportunities for them to demonstrate that they can meet the 37 outcomes. Most people pursuing the Re-Forma certificate can’t leave their congregations to go and study somewhere, and they can’t afford it. Nonformal training is a necessity for the 70 percent of pastors in Africa who are untrained or undertrained.

Robby Richard, ministry catalyst for RREACH (Ramesh Richard Evangelism and Church Health)

We have played a role in establishing several organizations and ministries focused on nonformal pastor training. The formation of pastors is advanced most rapidly by nonformal training, but it should be undergirded by the formal sector and supported by informal mentoring. Michael Ortiz and ICETE are trying to get the sectors to talk with each other, which is exciting for us.

I served at a large, multi-site church in South Carolina, USA. We often said we were not finding what we needed in seminary graduates and needed to raise up pastors from within the church. Seminary graduates might be good expositors of Scripture, but can they disciple? Can they develop leaders who can disciple others? Can they build effective home groups? So we had the church’s lead pastors, who had all been formally trained, delivering nonformal training to others.

The nonformal sector has often felt left out or not taken seriously. The formal sector sometimes doesn’t realize that.

MCs provide a bridge by which the formal sector can validate what we are doing, although there might be some pushback along the lines of why *we* need *them* to validate what we are doing. (And this can highlight the ‘we vs. them’ mentality that is unfortunately present.) This arrangement could be even more effective in the Majority World, if the seminaries could help to set up the methodology and courses for CBTE and MC.

The content of the consultation was great, and to see everyone collaborating and sharing was huge. We also completed workbooks on how to put together a CBTE course or construct an MC. When you get around other people who are passionate about something, the ideas start to flow.

My hope is that accrediting bodies will take into account the nonformal and informal trainers who are active all over the world. I'd like people pursuing training of pastors specifically to know they have options other than sending their students to seminary—that there are other ways to obtain training and that the formal institutions would support them in moving forward without being constrained by the standards of those institutions. Our end goal is to improve pastor training, not just give titles and degrees. But also, I think that if seminaries could look at the nonformal sector as a sort of feeder program, they could attract more students. The historical economic model seems to be suffering now.

Anthony Oliver, president, Caribbean Graduate School of Theology; president, Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association (CETA)

We had four CETA representatives, from Cuba, Trinidad and Jamaica, at the consultation. CBTE is important to us. Our schools have to look at ways to give greater credit for and affirm the skills that people entering our programs already have. They don't all have to go through an entire three-year program. We want to help people save time and money without compromising quality of training. This discussion has helped us develop a common mind on how to evaluate competency and make appropriate curriculum adjustments.

We have been talking about principles for lifelong learning over the last two decades. Lifelong learning does not necessarily involve long programs, but what one needs in order to be effective. MCs offer a flexible, targeted way to certify short-term learning experiences and develop personal and professional competencies. Anything related to the *missio Dei*, we can cover in bite-sized courses.

We are reaching out to help people address challenges they face in their communities. For several years now, some of our institutions have been offering short courses, and MCs can help us do even better. The head of our counseling psychology program will be offering a micro-course on bullying, for example. We have also had courses on trauma for emergency responders and on child protection policies.

ICETE and its partners have done strategic work to help us be on the cutting edge, understanding what is happening at the global level and then implementing some of these ideas to provide relevant education in our specific contexts. We want to encourage theological institutions in the Caribbean to be involved in providing accredited MCs to their constituents.

CBTE has helped us bring formal and nonformal theological education together. Sometimes the latter group has felt their contributions were minimized. CBTE can help us work better with our nonformal colleagues. For instance, nonformal courses can be stacked into an MC, and then people won't have to go back and repeat that coursework if we can evaluate what they have done.

The networking ICETE provides has also helped us. When we need help from people with CBTE experience, we now know whom we can contact. We can arrange partnerships to create win-win scenarios for all. We are grateful for the vision, leadership, and insight of the persons who have invested in this.

Stacy Rinehart, founder of MentorLink International, a leadership development organization

We are part of the informal (mentoring) sector of training. Previously, informal mentoring was just a subpoint in the nonformal category. But informal training has strategic importance for the resilience, preparation and multiplication of pastors.

Michael Ortiz and others urged me to come to Rome. When I arrived, I found four categories of participants: accreditors, seminary and Bible college representatives, some nonformal ministry people, and then me representing the whole camp of informal mentoring.

My most recent exposure to formal education (a doctor of ministry program) was in 1983. It didn't take me long to realize that formal education has changed. The former view was that leaders are developed by content transfer, which is a false assumption. The CBTE discussion gave me hope that educators will actually deal with people individually. You can't do CBTE unless you individualize and mentor, figuring out how a particular competency fits into each individual's position and abilities.

When a person enters a formal theological education program, assumptions are made about that person's spiritual life. In many cases, those assumptions are not valid. As a result, the credibility of the product (i.e. the result of training) is undermined. There's a simple fix—involving a spiritual mentor.

I was greatly encouraged by the progress I saw. Incorporating MCs into accreditation processes may be hard, but moving towards transportable credentials that can be applied individually or stacked is a good step.

As a result of the conference, I am now working with a university that has the Filipino diaspora as its target audience. When we discussed curriculum design, I said we should give an MC for a three-course series on spiritual mentoring. That is a direct output of what I learned in Rome.

It's okay to offer academic credentials, but if people don't have the heart credentials commensurate with what they know, they are susceptible to becoming hypocrites, which was one of Jesus' most serious accusations against the Pharisees. Emphasizing spiritual mentoring can address that shortfall. I don't want to diminish the value of Bible courses and hermeneutics, but without character, you can't use those courses effectively.

I initially got into this discussion kicking and screaming, but after I went to Rome and saw how these ideas could be applied, I was more excited. The old-time approach of 'sage on the stage' has been replaced by a guide on the side.

Samuel Chiang, deputy secretary general for ministries, World Evangelical Alliance

Having been involved in theological education since 1986, I knew that the lines between formal and nonformal approaches were becoming blurred. I also believe that artificial intelligence will massively change the industry. I wanted to see how the human element in all this is going to work and to get a sense of possible future trajectories.

It was a new and exciting exploration. People came with anticipation, some with tension. People heard and challenged each other, and they collaborated well. Theological educators tend to be highly creative. The chemistry was good.

People grappled with how MC will work in theological education. Will this increase my student count? Can I deliver this well? Who has done it? For formal institutions, student relations have traditionally been bound to three or four years, but now the time period might be a lot longer, requiring a different mindset. Now the student drives the program; the model of mass production is over. When you are dealing with competencies, professors become a team of cohorts, leading and walking with you over a longer period of time. In some countries, compliance with government requirements is an issue.

As ICETE moves toward its next international meeting in March 2025, there will be assignments to develop everyone's knowledge, so that when we arrive there, the general attitude will be not 'This is brand new to me' but 'I have someone who has been a guide to me, and we have had a participatory conversation; I may not be wholly ready yet but the background will help me.' ICETE has moved effectively from being a supporter of brick-and-mortar groups to supporting the church well.

Errol Joseph, accrediting coordinator, Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association

CBTE and MC are among the new developments on the educational landscape. We need to understand them and how they affect what we do as an accrediting service.

This option was new to me, but we need to train 2.5 million pastors and we have only 10,000 formal training institutions. Our institutions' reach is limited, and so is their market. As a result, most of our schools are struggling. CBTE and MC open up new opportunities to train more people and expand our reach. One such opportunity involves relatively short courses that could be stacked into a longer program.

I have also taken the ICETE Academy's course on these tools in order to understand them better. The consultation itself provided two significant benefits. The first was the opportunity to design a sample course ourselves, using an MC design template. This helped me grasp more fully the nature and essentials of MCs and begin to understand and develop the skills needed to design such courses.

Second, at the consultation we gained a better understanding of CBTE and MC, which are not yet popular in all parts of the world, from people who are actually doing this work. This was very helpful because now, if we are advising a school, we can point them to someone with experience who can help them implement these tools with quality. Tapping into their expertise enables us to embrace these methods and use them in our own setting without reinventing the wheel. This is the synergy that we gain from ICETE.

As ICETE develops quality standards for MC, we look forward to having a set of guidelines that we can agree on and that will facilitate articulation from one program to another, which is a critical issue. Implementing these standards will help to establish mutual understanding and trust between participating programs.

Transforming theological education was a focus at our regional meeting in March, during which we considered innovations that will aid in this process. I expect that our institutions will be especially interested in developing MCs that can attract a wider constituency and potentially establish stronger linkages with nonformal education. We should use creative means to reach the many people who are unable to access formal education due to time limitations and cost.

A Model of Competency-Based Theological Education for Intercultural Contexts

Mark Naylor, Ken Jolley
and Andrés Rincón

Northwest Baptist Seminary in Canada has been a pioneer in revamping theological education in a competency-based manner, applying the tools described in the preceding article on the ICETE February 2024 consultation in Rome. This article describes Northwest's rationale for developing an intercultural CBTE program and the effort's results, including student perspectives.

Why an *intercultural* CBTE program?

In the early 1980s, my wife, Karen, and I (Mark) explored the possibility of missions with the director of Fellowship International (FI), Paul Kerr. He advised me to get an MDiv degree and then apply. I earned an MDiv at Northwest Baptist Theological College and Seminary, which was designed to train pastors for churches in western Canada, and we were sent as missionaries to Pakistan. In 1999 we returned with a sense of disquiet, feeling we had not been as prepared for cross-cultural ministry as we could have been.

In 2002, I was invited to join Northwest's faculty as Coordinator of International Leadership Development (CILD) to explore how candidates for cross-cultural missions could best be trained and how such training could be extended to a variety of cultural contexts. The CILD position was in partnership with FI, focusing on the training and development of FI personnel.

During the early 2000s, it was clear that traditional seminary training for missions practitioners was declining in popularity.¹ Students were not investing in missions preparation as they had in earlier times, and rather than encouraging candidates towards seminary education, mission agencies were increasing their in-house

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¹ The 'missions or inter-cultural programs at Canadian Christian higher education institutions [are] being scaled back or discontinued altogether because of a lack of student interest.' 'Canadian Evangelicals and Mission Priorities', in Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, *Canadian Evangelical Missions Engagement Study Series, Part 3* (Toronto: Faith Today, 2017), 29.

training activities for applicants who did not have the qualifications needed for successful intercultural ministry. Several innovations were birthed during the 1990s and 2000 in both agencies and academies to deal with this need, while other organizations, such as Youth with a Mission, which already had a strong focus on entry-level training for missions, were able to attract young people who wanted to engage in missions without a prior academic requirement.

While many traditional models of theological education effectively develop the knowledge (head) and even, to a limited extent, the skills (hands) of individuals, character (heart) is something we have tended to leave to be worked out between God and the individual. However, when leaders fail, it is often because of a heart problem, not a failure in their knowledge and skills. A competency-based theological education (CBTE) seeks to address this issue. A focus on the competencies of a servant of the Lord opens the way to emphasize character development along with knowledge and skill development.

Decades ago, living in community was a common part of theological formation. Professors and their families lived in a communal atmosphere with students and ate together in the same dining hall. Staff and students worked and played together on the campus. Spiritual disciplines and discipleship were incorporated into daily living, and opportunities for ministry in the community were conducted together. This component of doing life and ministry as well as classroom work together built relationships that facilitated character development. For multiple reasons, this focus on character has been lost in many of our academic and institutional models of theological education today. CBTE is a way to restore it.

The competency- and context-based Intercultural Ministry Master of Arts in Biblical Leadership (IM MABL) from Northwest Baptist Seminary, which contains a mentoring component and is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, is one such innovation that seeks to merge theological and academic rigor with practical cross-cultural application. The goal is to integrate in-context intercultural ministry with theological and sociological reflection so that competencies for effective ministry are developed. The program is a part of Northwest's CBTE initiative.

Program overview

Ruth McGillivray² has described the genesis and development of CBTE at Northwest to address perceived weaknesses in the traditional model of pastoral training, resulting in the establishment of a CBTE MDiv program in 2013 called Immerse.³ McGillivray outlined key training emphases in CBTE that contrast with traditional models. These emphases underscore the holistic (i.e. head, hands and heart) nature of CBTE.

2 Ruth McGillivray, 'Competency-Based Theological Education: Origins of the Immerse MDiv at Northwest Baptist Seminary', Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research, 2022, <https://nimer.ca/competency-based-theological-education-origins-of-the-immense-mdiv-at-northwest-baptist-seminary/>.

3 Other competency-based training programs had been established earlier, such as the missions training program at Bethany Global University. That program was based on John G. Kayser, *Criteria and Predictors of Missionary Cross-Cultural Competence in Selected North American Evangelical Missions* (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1994). However, Northwest constructed the first CBTE MDiv program accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.

McGillivray stated, 'One of the strongest successes of the CBTE educational model has been its ability to extend and center learning in the [ministry] context of the learner, regardless of where that learner is located.'⁴

This CBTE initiative has had positive impact both quantitatively and qualitatively. 'In September 2009, Northwest had two students enrolled in its conventional MDiv program. Ten years later, in September 2019, it had 79 Immerse MDiv students, learning in-context throughout North America and beyond.'⁵ Furthermore, 'Northwest faculty, staff and leadership have unanimously expressed higher confidence in the preparedness of Immerse graduates for ministry, more so than if they had been trained in a traditional MDiv program.'⁶

The vision of CBTE intercultural training

The Intercultural Ministry MABL for training cross-cultural disciple makers

Being part of the Northwest faculty during the development of the CBTE program allowed me (Mark), in my role as CILD, to take advantage of Northwest CBTE resources in developing an intercultural ministry training program for FI personnel. Initially, an intercultural MDiv program called 'Contextualized Ministry Leadership Training' was designed using the framework and outcomes of the established Immerse MDiv described above, but with competencies and assignments adjusted to fit the requirements of a cross-cultural ministry worker. The first MDiv student, Andrés Rincón, one of the authors of this paper, graduated from the program in 2017.

While the program was considered a successful application of the CBTE philosophy and incorporated all the paradigm shifts described above, two major changes in the program were needed.

First, a graduated or 'laddered' approach was adopted so that a student could move from a certificate of four outcomes to an MABL of 12 outcomes and, if desired, on to an MDiv of 27 outcomes. This provided structure and direction for the students, ensuring an orderly completion of assignments with a clear sense of progress.

Second, FI's mission focus of sending intercultural *disciple makers* required the MABL to be created from the ground up. FI's leaders described the ideal disciple-making practitioner as competent in head (vision and knowledge), heart (character and commitment) and hands (skills and methodology), and therefore capable of effective ministry in a cross-cultural setting. A series of 12 outcomes was created with four to six competencies for each outcome.⁷ The 12 outcomes are divided into four themes, described in the table on the next page.

4 McGillivray, 'Competency-Based Theological Education', section 5, para. 1.

5 McGillivray, 'Competency-Based Theological Education', section 4, para. 1.

6 McGillivray, 'Competency-Based Theological Education', section 4, para. 2.

7 The competencies can be found on page 6 of Northwest's internal standards document for the IM MABL program, which is available on request.

Themes	Outcomes
Strategy and Implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prayer, vision, planning, and evaluation 2. Engaging a community 3. Empowering, multiplication and reproduction
Bible and Theology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Ministry praxis⁸
Cross-Cultural Change Agent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Cross-cultural sensitivity 6. Communication and language 7. Contextualization
Lifestyle and Ministry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Faith and spirituality 9. Lifestyle and ministry balance 10. Resilient character 11. Team and partnership 12. Relational skills

The IM MABL, equivalent to 12 courses or 36 credit hours, is designed to be completed in three years, or four outcomes per year. The assumption is that the student is in part- or full-time ministry, and the assignments are integrated with their ministry responsibilities. This would be equivalent to a part-time student taking four courses a year. The first theme, Strategy and Implementation, provides practical guidance in disciple making, with one outcome each year. Three outcomes from the other themes are assigned to each year as well.

The focus on competence rather than information is crucial for people working interculturally. Writing acceptable papers and passing exams is of limited value and often does not translate into relational, fruitful and reproducible ministry skills. Effective disciple making requires insightful contextualization and simple, reproducible methodologies that resonate with the audience and provide the desired transformation to which Jesus calls us in kingdom living. This is best acquired through ministry engagement that is overseen by mentors who both correct and encourage the student.

In particular, the IM MABL moves the student from becoming a disciple to becoming a disciple maker. Rather than *teaching* theology they have learned, students learn to *generate* theology by guiding people to engage Scripture as revelation—discovering God’s character, God’s will and God’s mission—and then working out appropriate life expressions of that understanding within their context. This dialogical approach of both engaging and generating theology requires grounding in biblical studies, theology and contextualization skills to treat the biblical text with integrity and the ministry context with sensitivity. Each assignment is fulfilled with direct application to the student’s ministry, thus integrating head, heart and hands.

Spanish CBTE MDiv program

The dream of a CBTE program in Spanish, primarily for Latin Americans, began in the minds of former Northwest president Kent Anderson and Diego Cardona (an FI Missionary and former Northwest student) shortly after the 2014 initiation of the

8 Because theological themes are integrated into other assignments, Bible and Theology has only one specific outcome.

CBTE program in Canada. In 2017, after I (Andrés) completed my studies in the contextualized CBTE MDiv program, I returned to Colombia and joined the team, led by Rob Brynjolfson, to translate and contextualize the Canadian-based CBTE MDiv outcomes and assignments for the Latin American context.

In 2018, the Spanish CBTE MDiv for church leadership officially began with a group of ten students: eight from Colombia, one from Peru and one from Guatemala. Because of the pandemic, we did not open additional new places for students until 2022. We currently have 14 students in the program and, in addition to the MDiv, offer a Master of Arts in Biblical Leadership (MABL). We are currently designing a one-year diploma program in Christian leadership. These programs 'ladder' towards the MDiv.

The need for CBTE intercultural training

We believe that CBTE ought to be the preferred way of training people for intercultural ministry, for reasons not limited to the following.

Agency/church partnership with the academy

In traditional educational models, seminary-based programs were established with limited input from mission agencies or churches. As a result, there were often gaps in areas such as language and culture learning, partner raising and interpersonal skills. Candidates encountered steep learning curves when they completed their degree and became immersed in their ministry context. CBTE addresses that gap by including the agency or church as a *partner* in the program, in the following ways:

1. **Student selection.** In the CBTE program, the investment by the agency or church, through mentoring the students and shaping the program and assignments, gives it an important voice in who is chosen for training. Rather than assessing candidates according to their previous training and experience, the agency or church can focus on candidates it is already committed to by having them engage in training within the parameters of its own activities.
2. **Mentoring.** The agency or church has at least one mentor representing its concerns and ensuring that the student is being evaluated according to character, values, skills and practices considered essential for impact and perseverance in ministry.
3. **Shaping assignments to fit agency/church priorities.** Within CBTE programs such as the IM MABL and the Spanish CBTE MDiv, the outcomes and competencies are pre-determined. However, there is significant flexibility in the assignments and ministry contexts, which are determined by the agency or church and the mentors.

Flexibility of assignments

The CBTE programs evaluated in this paper as case studies illustrate the many assignment options open to the agency or congregation in training their personnel.

1. **Cohort options.** FI has a professional development program called 'Competent as Intercultural Change Agents' (CICA) in which FI personnel interact together as they engage in a key ministry topic. Each member of FI is required to take

one module a year. For the IM MABL program, FI students are required to complete four CICA modules a year, providing interaction with other missionaries located in a variety of ministry contexts. CICA modules in Spanish are being designed for the Colombian cohorts.

2. **Input options.** To take advantage of the variety of opportunities available to learners today, mentors and students can substitute lectures, seminars and workshops that would enhance the student's development.
3. **Output options.** There is flexibility in how students describe their development and demonstrate their competence, potentially including videos, blogs, audio recordings or papers in addition to direct observation of students in their ministry setting.

Our case study research question

CBTE claims to be an effective way to train people for intercultural ministry, so that leaders are equipped according to the needs of the agency or church.⁹ Is there evidence from both students and mentors that this claim is valid? Does CBTE provide accredited degrees in an accessible and effective manner for those serving in ministry?

To investigate these questions, we interviewed mentors and students, asking them to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses and effectiveness of the following aspects of the CBTE approach that represent major paradigm shifts from traditional seminary education models:

1. *Competence versus course-based assessments.* In CBTE, students 'demonstrate whether they have mastered the stated competencies',¹⁰ rather than relying on the quality of papers submitted and personal exam results.
2. *Holistic application of knowledge, skills and character in the ministry setting.* In CBTE, the focus is on competence in ministry activity, more than merely on the ability to communicate the theory that guides the activity (although such communication is considered part of the competency).
3. *Practices and habits conducive to longevity and effectiveness in ministry.* In CBTE, character competencies such as conflict management and overcoming failure in a ministry setting are tested and assessed, as opposed to mere theoretical comprehension of such issues.
4. *Collaborative partnership between agency, church and academy.* In CBTE, the high level of investment per student requires a partnership to address all areas required for success in ministry. In traditional education, the bulk of responsibility lies with the academy.
5. *Value of team-based mentoring.* In CBTE, 'Students are assisted, rather than taught, by coaches and mentors, who may also be responsible for curating content that the students may need to help master a given competency',¹¹ as opposed to prioritizing instruction via lectures.

9 McGillivray, 'Competency-Based Theological Education'.

10 K. Ford, 'Technical Report: Competency-Based Education: History, Opportunity, and Challenges', UMUC Center for Innovation in Learning and Student Success (2014), 4, <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4679.0885>.

11 Ford, 'Technical Report', 4.

6. *Direct relevance of assignments with flexibility based on developmental needs.* In CBTE, the concern for competence coupled with integration between inputs and ministry practice means that enhanced learning opportunities outside of assigned tasks are considered. Traditional education requires strict adherence to the requirements outlined in a syllabus.
7. *Priority on context-based learning as opposed to classroom experience.* In CBTE, students are required to reflect on their ministry experience in light of the insights gained through their reading or other inputs. In traditional education, often the ability to explain the insights discussed in the classroom is sufficient.
8. *Flexibility in content, scheduling and methodology.* In CBTE, the focus is on developing the student to an appropriate level of competence, which depends on each person. "Time is variable rather than fixed for each student."¹² In traditional education, papers are marked in a way that reveals which students have demonstrated greater understanding within a particular time frame.

Research process and interview questions

For each of the eight CBTE aspects listed above, we asked the following questions:

- From your perspective, what is the difference between the [CBTE aspect] and traditional education?
- From your perspective, what is the strength of this unique aspect?
- From your perspective, what is the weakness of this unique aspect?
- How would you rate the effectiveness of [the CBTE aspect] in terms of preparing people for ministry?

We then asked interviewees what recommendations they would make to improve the CBTE experience.

Results

Two of us (Jolley and Rincón) interviewed five students each who were involved in the Spanish CBTE MDiv program located in Colombia and Peru. Naylor interviewed five mentors and four students involved in either the Contextualized Ministry Leadership Training MDiv or the IM MABL.

In the interest of brevity and to avoid redundancy with the discussion above, the interviewees' perceived differences between traditional education and CBTE are not presented here. Following is a summary of comments made in the interviews along with recommendations for improvement.

1. Competence versus course-based assessments

Strengths:

- CBTE emphasizes the competent and practical application of theological knowledge, which develops critical thought.
- CBTE promotes reflection with application and is therefore a more robust way to ensure that students understand the concepts and can continue to develop their skills long-term.

12 Ford, 'Technical Report', 4.

- Immersion in the context means that the student is not just dealing with abstract ideas; the experience is more like a residency or co-op program.
- The CBTE process reveals if a person is a good candidate for ministry rather than if the person can rightly answer the questions. It reveals students' real needs within their context of ministry.
- The focus on the student's particular ministry context allows for a variety of expressions and emphases. There is freedom for the student to experiment, try new things and even get things wrong without losing the benefit of the learning experience, because the mentor is there to engage and evaluate the student.

Weaknesses:

- The metrics used in CBTE to evaluate students are different from those in traditional education programs. Evaluating competencies can take longer than marking papers and exams, and milestones showing progress are not as obvious.
- Because CBTE is a paradigm shift, it takes students and mentors a while to adjust and can be frustrating, confusing or overwhelming at first.
- Transferring from CBTE to traditional programs can be difficult. It is not easy to measure and transfer credits when competencies rather than grades are the ultimate criteria.
- CBTE requires a lot of resources—mentors, instructors and coaches focused on one student—in contrast to the possibility of large classes in traditional education.
- Since there is only one academic mentor, sometimes that one person can't address everything the student experiences in the ministry context. In traditional education focused on classroom teaching, the professor is the expert and there are multiple professors, each with their distinct expertise.
- CBTE requires a very highly motivated and disciplined person to complete the program, and even those students may take longer to finish than in a traditional program.

Effectiveness:

All responses were positive, stating that 'it is the best way', 'excellent', and 'very effective'. One interviewee said, 'CBTE is definitely more effective than course-based, if field readiness is the goal, because the student is already doing ministry and this process maximizes the effectiveness of training.' CBTE fits both those who have experience and those who do not, because it looks at competence. The student uses and builds on their experience during the program. The student is dealing with relationships (with their mentors as well as through ministry activities) and so develops character and ministry skills. The study program itself feels like ministry and is an integrated process of inputs, ministry and reflection that has been observed by the mentors.

2. *Holistic application of knowledge, skills and character in the ministry setting*

Strengths:

- Because knowledge is immediately applied in real-life situations, it is more memorable, and even more knowledge is gained from those real-life experiences.
- Students experience constant feedback and are confronted by areas in which they need to be transformed: piety, devotion, values, character and motivations, which go beyond mere knowledge.
- Students address issues like relationships, vulnerability and family beyond a particular topic of study so that they experience the educational process from a holistic point of view.
- One student emphasized that ‘we go deep. I have a good relationship with my mentors and coach.’

Weaknesses:

- Students need to be engaged in an appropriate ministry context.
- There is significantly more complexity in CBTE than just head knowledge and it can be hard to integrate all the dimensions.
- CBTE requires more work from the student for the same academic degree and can take longer to finish than traditional methods of study.
- CBTE depends significantly on the quality of the mentors, who must understand and be committed to the holistic development of the students.
- Pressure to have students fulfil the requirements within a limited time frame could possibly lead to program completion without adequate competency development.

Effectiveness:

- CBTE does not isolate students from their ministry context, but rather develops them within it.
- Skills and character are developed in conjunction with knowledge acquisition, rather than waiting until after their education.
- The strengths of CBTE are more important than the weaknesses for establishing the habits and focus of successful ministry.
- Experience is a key part of the CBTE model and the relevance of learning in context is evident.

3. *Practices and habits conducive to longevity and effectiveness in ministry*

Strengths:

- CBTE facilitates the identification of passions and character weaknesses.
- Good practices and habits are encouraged through real-life situations, including how to make contextualized ministry plans and fulfil them.
- Immediate applications help to develop disciplines for effectiveness and fruit.
- The students implement resources related to self-awareness and ministry awareness. These practices encourage longevity in terms of protecting the practitioner from burnout.

- There is a high correlation between those who thrive under the pressures of the program and those who have the discipline needed for successful ministry.

Weaknesses:

- Students could conceivably avoid areas that are difficult for them and thus not develop a competency.
- The effectiveness can be hampered by character flaws that take years to deal with if they are not identified and dealt with properly.
- The program does not evaluate long-term ability to deal with the pressures of ministry, because it extends for only two to four years.

Effectiveness:

- The program develops good habits and skills that promote lifelong learning, particularly because the student is serving while studying.
- A feedback loop to correct and guide produces evidence of the student's development, in both learning and habits.
- Tools are not just learned cognitively but are put into practice so that they become useful skills.

4. Collaborative partnership between agency, church and academy

Strengths:

- There are huge advantages with mentors from each partner who are involved throughout the program: Students' progress can be tracked with their end goal and their relationship with the partners in mind. Students' learning outcomes and skill building are observed so that they feel supported, cared for and encouraged. Students recognize that they are invested in and not isolated since they are being trained according to the partners' purposes.
- Students develop a greater sense of being part of a team.

Weaknesses:

- The model requires good communication between the institutions and mentors. Different eyes may not be evaluating the same things or even have the same metrics. Unfulfilled expectations between the partners could lead to a clash and confusion.

Effectiveness:

- Being pushed and assisted in the same direction by all three partners provides strong affirmation. Having the collaboration and broader interaction of the institutions as an integral part of the program is very effective and great for field readiness.

5. Value of team-based mentoring

Strengths:

- CBTE is a relational model that promotes the value of the team.
- Mentors focus on character and worldview, not only knowledge. By speaking deeply into the student's life, they provide the metamessage that the student is important, valued and has potential. Mentors teach the student to accept rebuke

and correction. They affirm what is good; 'they cheer you on.' They are familiar with the life situation and field experience of the student and can offer real-time critique.

- The mentoring relationship can continue beyond the program.
- The mentoring model becomes a model for discipleship ministry, with a pastoral focus on personal issues, a ministry focus on skills, and an academic focus on the Bible.
- Mentors evaluate with one voice, but from different perspectives.

Weaknesses:

- The quality of the program depends upon the quality and character of the mentors as well as their understanding of and commitment to both the student and the program.
- There must be a good relationship between the student and mentors.
- The mentor must be readily available and must provide useful feedback.
- Mentors must be willing to face conflict over practices and habits. Students must accept conflict and criticism.
- If the mentors are not in agreement, problems could arise.
- It can be difficult for students to challenge mentors. There is a power dynamic at play. Students will sometimes feel that they are being judged by too many people, so the team of mentors needs to be disciplined and speak with one voice.

Effectiveness:

- Highly effective, but low in efficiency. There are far fewer students, but they become more fully developed and feel supported and encouraged along the way.
- A mentoring team is one of the best things about the program. Personal character growth has occurred, beyond just education. The student is observed from different perspectives, ensuring a more holistic development.

6. Direct relevance of assignments with flexibility based on developmental needs

Strengths:

- This is a big strength of the program. Each competency is fixed, but the outworking is adjusted to the student's specific personal and ministry development. Students can develop a competency through a wide variety of possible activities, incorporating any training that helps them reach the objective.

Weaknesses:

- Requires self-discipline to manage, and too much flexibility can be overwhelming.
- Assignments can take longer if the student struggles to apply the assignment to the context. If the mentors are not satisfied with the student's work, the student may have to redo the work or demonstrate competency in another way.
- Students can potentially manipulate the flexibility based on their fears or weaknesses. It is important for mentors to be able to perceive if this is happening.

Effectiveness:

- Students address concepts and skills in real-life contexts.

- A mentor can more accurately gauge the student's ability for ministry and provide early correction when the student gets off course.
- Having flexibility is comparable to ministry realities, which helps to develop field readiness. As one student expressed it, 'I am learning to replicate this aspect of flexibility within my ministry as I get used to adaptive space and experimentation. If my education had been more structured, I would be less adaptive.'

7. *Priority on context-based learning as opposed to classroom experience*

Strengths:

- Learning is applied immediately and the students can see the benefits. This helps retention as well as motivating and encouraging students, since they are always considering how an assignment relates to their ministry context, theology, service or constituency.
- Students become polished in ministry as they adapt the teaching to their reality, resulting in growth and improvement as well as clearly demonstrating their level of competence.
- Students learn to develop relationships in ministry, not just with classmates.

Weaknesses:

- The path of study is individualistic. This is both a strength and weakness, developing self-motivation but lacking a strong cohort experience.
- Studying in CBTE can be a lonely path and thereby a challenge for some, especially if one is overwhelmed by the accumulation of work.
- There is not a clear-cut standard of grading as in the classroom setting.

Effectiveness:

- Very effective for the student's development and ministry preparation, mainly because of a greater focus on experiencing ministry context.
- Because assignments are applied and the student gets direct feedback, CBTE puts the student in the right world.

8. *Flexibility in content, scheduling, and methodology*

Strengths:

- CBTE provides a structure and paradigm for study to develop skills in ministry without having to take a formal course. The program runs according to students' needs and schedule; students have control in setting goals depending on what they want to do in the long term. This is helpful for some who prefer to process the readings and assignments at a slower pace; avoiding harsher and quicker deadlines allows students to integrate the material into their ministry.
- Because the mentors know the students well, they can sensitively push students to complete assignments, guide them around barriers, and understand why a flexible deadline may be required.
- The online platform provides orientation to the program plus the ability to interact with mentors and assignments. There is an opportunity for students to pursue further training and learning in a particular area if deemed appropriate.

Alternately, if a competency is evident, students can quickly move on to other assignments and avoid redundancy.

- Developing a posture of flexibility helps when dealing with people in ministry.

Weaknesses:

- In a traditional model, structure is provided through class schedules and due dates. In CBTE, students need discipline, dedication and individual initiative. For people who prefer more direction and deadlines, this can be a great difficulty since, unlike traditional programs, students must find their own rhythm and progress. Some become overwhelmed by decision fatigue or underperform.
- Because the focus is competency and not just information intake, it takes longer. It can be hard to manage the tension between the social demands of ministry and studies.
- Some students were not able to combine the demands of the program with full-time employment and reduced their studies to eight to ten hours per week.
- Too much flexibility can make the structure seem weak.
- Standardization and evaluation of progress are harder.

Effectiveness:

- CBTE facilitates field readiness, and even more so for people who are already in ministry, resulting in faster fruit in the ministry.
- Effectiveness comes from the flexibility as students learn to build their own schedule.
- Both the methodology and the input from the mentors allow for development of competencies, not just completion of assignments.
- CBTE is a relationship model that maintains academic rigor.

Recommendations for improvement

Mentoring:

- Improve and maintain the functioning of the mentoring team. The preparation and training of mentors, specifically the role of the academic mentor, is key to the student's success. From the beginning, it is important that the mentors understand and commit to an investment of time and energy in the student.
- Mentors should be familiar with the program and know how much is expected of them, especially with respect to the portfolio.
- For missions, it is important to have a mentor from the sending church.
- Personal contact of mentors with students beyond online interaction would improve relationships.
- Students should have a feedback form to evaluate their mentors.

Cohort interaction:

- It takes a disciplined person to complete the program. Support is important.
- Provide opportunities for community and collaboration among students. Joint research projects, cooperation in support networks and discussions with other students would be encouraging and motivating for students.

Basic training:

- Training in study techniques, self-management and time management would help the student balance work with life.
- The freedom and flexibility in the learning path can be overwhelming. It would be helpful to provide recommended paths of study.
- Provide a chart that outlines the books to read for each ministry outcome, all on one page.

Program structure:

- Maximum ministry workload should be 50% for students to succeed, allowing them to complete the program in time without stress.
- Social skills need more emphasis with better and long-term metrics for heart (character).
- The competencies as described in the program do not sufficiently take into account a person's character because a four-year program is too short a time to change a person's character sufficiently. It would be helpful to create a set of recommendations for further character development at the end of the program.

Conclusions and opportunities

These interviews gave us the opportunity to evaluate and corroborate many of our premises. We are encouraged that the programs are edifying the church with competent and confident leaders.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for traditional theological education has been to avoid reducing students to mere learners and teachers to information givers. CBTE seeks to break that mold and address students as holistic human beings trained *for* ministry as they serve *in* ministry. There is integration of faith and action, resulting in a life of integrity. Traditional training has generated many leaders and pastors with great abilities in both academic and ministerial fields, but it has also had significant shortcomings. CBTE is not the only way forward to a new reality, or even necessarily the best, but it is a promising path towards forming leaders and pastors who will have a holistic and integrated ministry, lived out with integrity.

The interview responses confirm the significance of CBTE for missions training. We have high expectations that CBTE will result in effective collaboration between many mission agencies and the academy for the training and development of cross-cultural disciple makers. Although agencies or churches must make a significant investment in the partnership by providing mentors, the fruit of the investment is tremendous, including the development of competencies and the experience of mentorship that will continue to have impact and be reproduced for years to come.

‘Sin and Grace’ or ‘Grace and Sin’? Implications for Christian Spirituality

Simon Chan

Evangelical Christians typically think of grace as God’s response to our sin, but that’s not the whole story. In this article, a distinguished theologian known for drawing fruitfully on both Pentecostal and Orthodox streams of spirituality challenges us to think about grace in a more expansive way.

Some years ago, I attended a theological conference with the theme of ‘Sin and Grace’. Within Protestantism, this is what one would expect when these two terms are juxtaposed. I would like to suggest, however, that a better way of exploring the sin-grace relationship is to reverse the order to ‘Grace and Sin’. This reversal implies that the doctrine of grace can be understood other than in response to sin. The life God has given us is from the beginning a graced life, with or without reference to sin.¹ I would even go so far as to suggest that grace apart from sin provides a broader framework for understanding the relationship between sin and grace. This paper seeks to make a case for such an understanding and then to draw out some ramifications for Christian spirituality.

The grace of God comes to us in the form of a story: the story of the triune God giving himself, moving outward (*ekstasis*) to create, and then redeeming fallen creation and consummating creation in the new heavens and the new earth. This moving outward reflects the very nature of the inner life of the triune God who is eternally self-giving to each other. Traditional theology speaks of creation as a free act of God, not a necessary one; and if it is a free act, then it is an act of sheer grace. Grace, therefore, must be understood not only in relation to sin but also prior to and apart from sin.

To appreciate this difference, I will introduce two scholastic phrases: created grace and uncreated grace. *Created grace* refers to any gratuitous gift of God but is distinct from God himself. The Catholic tradition emphasizes grace as a transforming power which comes to humans in different ways for the sanctification of the soul. Thus, Catholics tend to speak of ‘graces’ (in the plural). Protestants, in contrast, rarely speak of ‘graces’ but mostly of ‘grace’. This is because in the Protestant

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1 Here I am not thinking of the graced life in the Rahnerian sense. Rahner is basically a Tillichian who places much confidence in human culture through his doctrine of intrinsic grace. For a critique of Rahner’s view, see R. R. Reno, ‘Rahner the Restorationist’, *First Things* (May 2013), 45–51.

tradition, grace tends to be seen in relational terms: it is God's favourable disposition towards undeserving human beings. Both the ontological and the relational aspects of grace are necessary and complementary, but they are insufficient to comprehend the full extent of God's grace.

Uncreated grace is God himself in his loving self-communication which draws humans into communion or partaking the divine nature. This is traditionally the emphasis of the Eastern church, which understands spiritual progress in terms of participation in the life of the triune God, leading to deification.²

These different conceptions of grace—as created and uncreated—have far-reaching consequences for understanding the nature of the Christian life. Western theology tends to focus on spiritual growth in terms of sanctification (i.e. purification from sin and formation of virtues) whereas the East, without minimizing the need for sanctification, sees the goal of the Christian life as deification. The difference is more than a matter of preferred terminology but reflects different ways of conceptualizing the nature of the Christian life. For the Orthodox, the graced life begins even before the Fall, whereas for Protestants, the Christian life presupposes the Fall. I will explore the doctrine of grace from these two perspectives and then draw out their implications for Christian spirituality.

Sin and grace

Much of Western theology, especially its Protestant version, has been shaped by a doctrine of grace against the backdrop of sin.³ For example, Gerald L. Bray, in his article on grace in a widely used theological dictionary,⁴ understands grace almost exclusively in soteriological terms and mostly from the Latin (Western) perspective, with a short paragraph at the end of the article on the Eastern Orthodox view. Similarly, Thomas Oden defines grace as 'the favor shown by God to *sinners*' (emphasis added).⁵

As already noted, Western theology has been shaped largely by the order of 'sin and grace'. Within this order, sin and grace can be understood in two ways: relational and ontological, or viewing either grace as re-establishing a relationship between God and humanity or graces that effect changes in the person.

2 Georges I. Mantzarides, *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory and the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir Seminary Press, 1984). Thomas Oden acknowledges uncreated grace in the triune relationship, in *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 36. Deification is a distinctive Orthodox understanding of spiritual progress. It refers to the communication of God's uncreated 'energies' so that the believer shares in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). It goes beyond the formation of virtues.

3 This order is further reinforced in older Reformed theology, which affirms an Edenic covenant of works that was subsequently replaced by a covenant of grace. See Oliver J. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 1:309–12. In support, Buswell cites the Westminster Confession, VII.2 and 3, which reads, 'The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace.'

4 Gerald L. Bray, 'Grace', in Martin Davie et al., *New Dictionary of Theology, Historical and Systematic*, 2nd ed. (London: IVP, 2016).

5 Oden, *Transforming Power of Grace*, 33.

In traditional Catholicism, progress in the Christian life is realized through objective means of grace. Grace comes as transforming power that results in the formation of quantifiable virtues, such as the three theological and the four cardinal virtues. Specific virtues need to be cultivated to overcome specific sins (plural), which over time have been schematized as the seven deadly sins.

The graces are understood as working in different ways. Preventive grace is that which 'prepares one to will the good'; cooperating or concomitant grace enables one 'to do the good'; persevering grace 'preserves the will in doing good.'⁶ In Catholicism, these graces are largely mediated through the sacraments. Thus, the spiritual life is closely linked to the sacramental system.

Protestants, on the other hand, while recognizing to a limited extent grace(s) as a power, more often tend to speak of 'grace' in the singular. Grace is a relational concept: God's favourable disposition towards undeserving sinners. This grace is experienced first as justification—again a relational concept where the sinner, despite his sin, is declared righteous before a just God by virtue of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Meanwhile, sanctification is accomplished through the 'secret workings of the Spirit' (a phrase used frequently by Calvin), the actualization of which remains largely unspecified. Traditionally, Protestants are reticent to speak of 'graces' for fear of reintroducing a sacramental system with all its attendant abuses. Protestants who rejected the sacramental system and the objectification of grace see salvation in terms of a relationship with God established on forensic grounds. This leads sometimes to 'legal fiction'⁷ and antinomianism, but overall to a weak doctrine of sanctification. Protestantism has always struggled with this problem: just how does a right relationship with God bring about the actual transformation of the soul?

In more recent times, Protestants have become more open to the idea of grace as transforming power. Thomas Oden is one example. Oden argues that grace is at the very centre of a distinctively Christian spirituality. Without a theology and practice of grace, spirituality becomes self-help and self-improvement.⁸ Concurrently, one must beware of reducing the power of grace to a kind of brute force as seen among some charismatics today. In fact, when grace is properly understood both relationally and ontologically, it avoids being reduced to either legal fiction or brute force. A relationship with God through both grace *and* graces effects spiritual transformation.

The difference in emphasis between Catholicism and Protestantism results in different ways of cultivating the Christian life. Spiritual theology as a distinct theological discipline developed quite early in Catholicism. From the Protestant perspective, this is often regarded as salvation by works, but before long, Protestants too began to realize the need for something like a spiritual theology. The transition from 'grace' to 'graces' arises from an instinctive need to find a practical and methodical way to cultivate the spiritual life. Thus, by the early 17th century, Protestants started to produce bowdlerized versions of popular Catholic devotional manuals. One of the

6 Oden, *Transforming Power of Grace*, 54.

7 'Legal fiction' is a phrase used by critics of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith. The critics object to the idea that sinners are justified strictly on forensic grounds without any change of state in the sinner so as to constitute an objective basis for declaring the sinner righteous.

8 Oden, *Transforming Power of Grace*, 15–20 *passim*.

better-known ones is the Puritan Edmund Bunny's *Resolutions*,⁹ which was instrumental in the conversion of John Bunyan.

One reason for this development in Protestantism is that all Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, have to deal with specific sins in their lives: anger, envy, lust, sloth. Having had one's relationship with God set right through justification by grace through faith, one is still left with the recurring problem of actual sins. How is one to deal with them? Without spiritual resources to deal with these practical problems, early Protestants resorted to bowdlerizing Catholic spiritual manuals. Later, they produced their own spiritual directories every bit as sophisticated as Jesuit casuistries, such as Richard Baxter's *Spiritual Directory* (1674), a massive work of more than a thousand folio pages.

Closely related to graces is the concept of 'gifts of the Spirit'. Here again, we see different emphases between Catholics and Protestants. When Catholicism refers to the gifts of the Spirit, they usually have in mind the sevenfold gifts of Isaiah 11 given to the Messiah.¹⁰ But for Pentecostals and charismatics, the gifts of the Spirit are traditionally identified with those listed in 1 Corinthians 12. The Catholic understanding sees Christ as the object of the gifts, whereas in the Pentecostal-charismatic understanding, the Spirit is the subject of the gifts. Thus, a new conception of 'graces' is reintroduced through the charismatic movement as the power for life and service. Formally, the charismata are very similar to the 'graces' in Catholicism: they are analyzed and quantified (the nine gifts of the Spirit), and in place of a sacramental system, these gifts are often manipulated by spiritual gurus. A kind of spiritual technology emerges in how the gifts are applied—e.g. in identifying 'territorial spirits', dealing with 'generational curses', and honing techniques for exorcism and 'deliverance ministry'. Thus, in certain charismatic circles today, we encounter a system of manipulating the gifts of the Spirit which may be far worse than the abuse of the sacramental system in the late medieval church.

In summary, when the Christian life, whether viewed relationally or ontologically, is shaped by the order of sin and grace, it tends to be expressed largely in terms of justification and sanctification. The practical exigencies of Christian living have led some Protestants to accept a conception similar to the Catholic idea of 'graces', more popularly understood as spiritual gifts.

Grace and sin

In reversing the order, we not only acknowledge the priority of grace, but we also recognize that grace can be seen apart from sin when viewed from a trinitarian perspective. Grace is the overflow of the fulness of the life of the Trinity. All life is graced in the sense that the whole universe is the result of God's free act, his self-giving love. Grace is God's gift of himself, involving a free decision to create a world apart from himself. As the Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart puts it:

God's gracious action in creation belongs from the first to that delight, pleasure, and regard that the Trinity enjoys from eternity, as an outward and *unnecessary*

9 The long title is *A booke of Christian exercises, appertaining to resolutions ...* by R. P. [Robert Parsons] perused, and accompanied now with a treatise tending to pacification (London, 1584).

10 See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), section 1831.

expression of that love; and thus creation must be received before all else as gift and as beauty.¹¹

Similarly, according to von Balthasar, within the trinitarian life of love there is an overflow, an *excessus* or ecstasy. 'Ecstasy' in popular parlance is often used pejoratively, but in the trinitarian life, ecstasy is the proper work of the Spirit.¹² If God were binitarian and not trinitarian, there would be no ecstasy, no movement outside of the divine life; the I-Thou relationship would become a self-enclosed fellowship. It is the third Person who creates what Lossky calls 'an open-ended infinity'.¹³

If mission refers to the continual flowing out of the Spirit of love between the Father and the Son, then we can speak of mission as eternally present in God. Von Balthasar uses the analogy of a child to bring out the distinctive identity of the Spirit as the third Person in the Trinity and the ecstatic life of God. The relationship of the Spirit to the Father and Son is analogous to the child who is the fruit of the union (the oneness as 'we') between a man and a woman. The Spirit is therefore referred to in Scripture as the Spirit of truth, because he is 'the disclosure (*alētheia*) of the eternal life of the divine love (just as the child discloses the sexual act of the parents; the work, the cooperation of the friends), which permits us to look into God and to see him as he is'.¹⁴

Despite the similarity between Catholicism and Orthodoxy on the nature of grace apart from sin, there are subtle differences. Unlike the West, Orthodoxy is not as obsessed over the problem of sin. Indeed, this obsession with sin has led to the question that has plagued Western theology since the time of Augustine: the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. Since sin has resulted in the bondage of the will, the question is to what extent and in what way human freedom is affected. Western theology has been preoccupied with trying to unravel that relationship. It has tended to see the relationship of divine sovereignty and human freedom as a zero-sum game: less of one means more of the other. In Western theology, the Augustinian-Pelagian and later the Calvinist-Arminian controversies continue to this day.

Orthodoxy avoids these controversies, first, by focusing on the presence of the Holy Spirit both working *in* us and coming *upon* us to draw individuals and the church into an increasingly deepening relationship with God until they arrive at union with God. Grace is essentially uncreated; it is the very presence of God himself through the Holy Spirit, not something external to God. Christian life is participation in the uncreated energies of God but not his essence.¹⁵ For the Orthodox, the

11 David Bentley Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 249, emphasis added.

12 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3: *Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 151.

13 Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Ian and Ighita Kesarcodi-Watson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1989), 45.

14 Von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 127.

15 Gregory Palamas's (1296–1359) distinction between divine energies and essence has been influential in shaping subsequent Orthodox thinking. For an introduction to Palamite theology, see George C. Papademetriou, *Introduction to St. Gregory Palamas* (Brooklyn, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004).

sacraments are important too, but they are created means that transmit uncreated grace rather than mediating created grace.¹⁶

Second, Orthodoxy refuses to analyze the relationship between God's sovereign power and the gift of human freedom. Divine sovereignty and human freedom are equally real, and they work mysteriously and simultaneously. This is what Orthodoxy means by synergy. Within the Western frame of reference, synergy is often misunderstood as semi-Pelagianism. But the concern of synergy is not to reconcile divine sovereignty and human freedom. Rather, its primary concern lies somewhere else—in the mysterious working together of human and divine wills, leading human beings eventually to what the Orthodox call deification.¹⁷

As one Orthodox theologian puts it, deification 'is that which *from the beginning* has constituted the innermost longing of man's existence'.¹⁸ Deification precedes any consideration of the Fall. But since the Fall has become a reality, deification cannot bypass human fallenness. Still, deification was God's original goal for human beings even if they had not sinned. If Adam had not sinned, he would have been led towards deification. Adam and Eve, according to Irenaeus, were children in the Garden who needed to grow into full adulthood.¹⁹ As Irenaeus wrote:

For in Paradise they were both naked, and were not ashamed ... inasmuch as they, having been created a short time previously, had no understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they should first come to adult age, and then multiply from that time onward.²⁰

This means that even if Adam and Eve had not sinned, it would still have been necessary for Christ to come in the flesh. To cite Irenaeus again, he compares the Christian's growth to the growth of Adam when he was first created. It is, therefore, necessary for Christ to come first in the flesh before he comes in glory:

He, who was the perfect bread of the Father, offered Himself to us as milk, [because we were] as infants. He did this when he appeared as a man, that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of his flesh, and having, by such a course of milk nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father.²¹

Irenaeus further clarifies:

God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it. It was for this reason that the Son of God, although He was perfect, passed

16 Mantzarides, *The Deification of Man*, 41.

17 Synergy is not exclusively the preserve of the Orthodox; it is recognized in von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 3:114.

18 Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 12 (emphasis mine).

19 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (hereafter *AH*) 4.38.1–2. For an exposition of the childhood of Adam and Eve, see Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 141–45.

20 *AH* 3.22.4.

21 *AH* 4.38.1.

through the state of infancy in common with the rest of mankind, partaking of it thus not for His own benefit, but for that of the infantile stage of man's existence, in order that man might be able to receive him.²²

For Irenaeus, the incarnation of the Word shows what Adam as an *embodied* being made in God's image was meant to become had he reached full adulthood.²³ Growth to full adulthood is growth into full conformity to the likeness of Christ.²⁴ This is the *theological* distinction between 'image' and 'likeness' which is characteristic of Orthodoxy. Image is 'the common property of all' whereas 'likeness' is the *goal* of human existence, which humans failed to attain due to sin and which the coming of Christ seeks to restore.²⁵

The eucharistic ethos

If created life is understood in terms of the priority of grace, a distinctive ethos pervades all of life. We may call this the eucharistic ethos.

Every created thing is sacramental—a reminder of the God who made it. But the most fundamental expression of the sacramentality of life is in the act of eating. Man was given every tree in the Garden as food. In eating, man is made most acutely aware of life itself as a gift from God, for it is in eating that he continues to live and grow. Every act of eating is cause for man to return thanks to God. Thus the eucharistic ethos pervades all of life, including non-human creatures, in the Garden before the Fall.

As Alexander Schmemmann puts it:

In the Bible the food that man eats, the world of which he must partake in order to live, is given to him by God, and it is given as *communion with God*. The world as man's food is not something 'material' and limited to material functions, thus being different from, and opposed to, the specifically 'spiritual' function by which man is related to God. All that exists is God's gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God. . . . God blesses everything he creates, and, in biblical language, this means that he makes all creation the sign and means of his presence and wisdom, love and revelation.²⁶

The Eucharist after the Fall looks back to what life was like before the Fall, remembers what Christ did to reverse the Fall, and anticipates the future when we will sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb. Thus, the Eucharist defines life—past, present and future—as what God has always intended it to be: communion with God.

Schmemmann further notes that the story of the Fall also centres on food: the eating of food that is explicitly forbidden by God. It represents an eating that is not communion with God but, on the contrary, the rejection of God, a disfellowship

22 AH 4.38.2

23 AH 5.16.2.

24 Cf. Denis Minns, *Irenaeus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 60, 61.

25 Mantzarides, *The Deification of Man*, 22.

26 Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1973), 14.

with God.²⁷ Instead of being thankful, man turns inward away from God into himself. Sin is, as Luther reminds us, *incurvatus in se* (turned in on itself). Its modern equivalent is consumerism.

The means of bringing alienated humanity back to God is through the Word and sacrament. The proclamation of the good news of salvation in Christ is the means by which humans receive the good news that they can return to God's eternal purpose: communion with God, anticipated and foretasted in the Eucharist. But in the new creation, there will no longer be proclamation of the Word to call humanity back to God; rather, it will be proclaiming the 'praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pet 2:9). The Song of Moses and of the Lamb will still be sung as a remembrance of God's great deliverance. But eating will continue as the actualization of face-to-face communion with God.

To repeat, understanding grace apart from sin creates a eucharistic ethos, in which Christian life is marked essentially by gratitude—gratefulness to God not just because we are saved from sin, but gratefulness for life itself as a free gift.

Imagine a world of sinless free agents (such as the angelic world). Such agents will still be praising God for a different reason: that they exist by the grace of God. They would not be singing God's 'mighty acts' of redemption but their very existence by grace. We have an inkling of this in Revelation 4. First, the praise expressed by the four living creatures (angelic beings?) focuses on God's holiness and who he is: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come' (v. 8). Then these four living creatures join the chorus of the 24 elders (representing OT and NT saints) to sing God's praise for the existence of creation: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being' (v. 11).

Praise, for such agents, will be marked chiefly by gratitude or *eucharistia*. This eucharistic ethos is reflected in the Preface of Eucharistic Prayer IV in the Roman missal:²⁸

It is truly right to give you thanks, truly just to give you glory, Father, most holy, for you are the one God living and true, existing before all ages and abiding for all eternity, dwelling in unapproachable light; yet you, who alone are good, the source of life, have made all that is, so that you might fill your creatures with blessings and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light. And so, in your presence are countless hosts of Angels, who serve you day and night and, gazing upon the glory of your face, glorify you without ceasing. With them we, too, confess your name in exultation, giving voice to every creature under heaven as we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.

Here, humans and angels join together to sing the praises of God not with respect to redemption but out of sheer gratitude for their very existence. In the eucharistic prayers of both Catholic and Protestant churches, the soteriological dimension of

27 Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 16–18.

28 Eucharistic Prayer IV can be found at <https://liturgyoffice.org.uk/Missal/Text/EP4-A4.pdf>. Unlike the other three eucharistic prayers, which change according to the season of the liturgical calendar Eucharistic Prayer IV is fixed.

grace comes only after the Sanctus, where the creation of man and the disobedience that follows are brought into focus:

We give you praise, Father most holy, for you are great, and you have fashioned all your works in wisdom and in love. You formed man in your own image and entrusted the whole world to his care, so that in serving you alone, the Creator, he might have dominion over all creatures.

And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the domain of death. For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you. Time and again you offered them covenants and through the prophets taught them to look forward to salvation.²⁹

The eucharistic ethos that marks the Christian life continues into eternity. Saints in heaven will be continually praising God and enjoying his presence. Thus, the final vision of the new creation is pictured as nuptial union and feasting.

Grace, sin and spirituality

The two basic ways in which sin and grace are related have important implications for Christian spirituality.

When we place sin before grace, our doctrine can tend towards a doleful spirituality, or 'penitential piety'.³⁰ Historically, we can see Puritans struggling over their assurance of salvation by looking inward for signs of grace. They developed a whole genre of spiritual works to help the soul 'prepare' for salvation. Popular Catholic devotion fared no better; consider its *via dolorosa* spirituality or its meditations on the wounds of Christ. Or it could manifest itself in an exaggerated concept of grace, exemplified in antinomianism or 'hyper-grace'. In contrast, Orthodox spirituality, with its robust pneumatology, sees the Christian life as characteristically beautiful and joyful without minimizing the need for constant penitence, as seen in its liturgy and in the Jesus Prayer ('Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner').³¹

Another feature of the sin-grace order of spirituality is its tendency towards activism, whether evangelical or liberal. The evangelical movement expends much of its energy in mission and evangelism. Even the more recent development of 'missional ecclesiology' among some evangelical scholars reflects basically the same concern, except that mission is now more deeply grounded in the trinitarian life. The spirituality of 'progressives' is no less activist, except that its concerns are focused mostly on the socio-political sphere.³²

A different spirituality ensues if we begin with the order of grace and sin. Here, I can only briefly delineate some of its characteristics.

29 Eucharistic Prayer IV.

30 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality and Sacramental Community* (London: DLT, 1983), 13–30.

31 Boris Bobrinskoy, 'The Church and the Holy Spirit in 20th Century Russia', *Ecumenical Review* 52, no. 3 (July 2000): 326–42. Cf. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*.

32 E.g. Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Virginia Fabella et al., *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992).

Trinitarian communion spirituality

In relation to the Trinity, the model undergirding the Christian life is not only the sending model but the return model.³³ The Trinitarian movement, *ad intra*, is not just a moving out but also a moving in to each other in perichoresis. (That is, the persons of the Trinity move out of themselves to each other so that they interpenetrate each other.) Edith Humphrey has aptly described these dual movements as ecstasy and intimacy.³⁴ The Christian life, too, is marked by ecstasy and intimacy. This is the essence of communion: the intimacy of union entails a going out (ecstasy) to the 'other'. But in the economy of salvation, the going out is complemented by the return. The ultimate goal of mission, then, is not about saving souls per se but about leading them back into communion with the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever';³⁵ that is to say, worship and communion constitute the eternal occupation of saints.

Evangelicals who are always itching to 'do something' may find 'enjoying God forever' in heaven a little difficult to handle. But there is another aspect of life in eternity which might appeal to them more: according to Thomas Aquinas, spiritual knowledge ('counsel') continues to grow even in heaven.³⁶ Whether this growth will go on infinitely or end in what Paul Griffiths calls 'repetitive stasis' is a moot point.³⁷ But I'm more inclined to agree with C. S. Lewis that if God is not likely to grant our request for an 'encore', there is probably no repeat performance in heaven.³⁸

If worship and communion are what saints will be doing forever and ever, it follows that communion spirituality should be the definitive form of spirituality in this life as well. It has two characteristics. First, communion spirituality is inconceivable without *personal* knowledge—knowledge of the person in all his or her particularity. Grace is personal, whether considered in relation to sin or apart from sin. The fullness of grace is revealed in the incarnation of the Son, which is the revelation of the fullness of grace (Jn 1:14). Theologically, grace is 'appropriated' to the Son in the Pauline benediction (2 Cor 13:14). Second, communion spirituality can be nothing less than *embodied* communion. Insofar as God chooses to create humans as embodied beings, the incarnation of the Son is necessary; otherwise, humans as embodied beings would not know fully what it means to be 'sons in the Son' (*fili in filio*). Had humans not sinned, the Son would not have come into the world as Saviour. His proper name would not be Jesus Christ but something else, perhaps the Elder Brother. The end would still be the same: deification and partaking of the divine nature, that is, the uncreated energies of God.

33 David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

34 Edith M. Humphrey, *Ecstasy and Intimacy: When the Holy Spirit Meets the Human Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 3–4.

35 Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1.

36 *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 52, a. 3.

37 Paul Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 21–23.

38 C. S. Lewis, *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm* (Glasgow: Fount Paperback, 1974), 29. Growth in the knowledge of God (not purely cognitive) could be infinitely developing, since the God to whom we are united through uncreated grace will never be fully known in his essence. See Mantzarides, *The Deification of Man*, 124–25.

Communion in the Spirit

If the grace of the Son, from his incarnation to his ascension, is to reveal the ‘shape’ of the ultimate end of humanity—namely, as sons in the Son—then the grace of the Holy Spirit who is *in* us and coming *upon* us is intended to enable us to appropriate such a life through synergy. His being in us gives us the freedom to say a true ‘yes’ to the Father. Our ‘yes’ is not merely an echo of God’s ‘yes’ but a real ‘yes’ from us.³⁹ His coming *upon* us from beyond history pushes us forward towards the goal for which we were created: to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The Spirit is the enabling power of us *becoming* sons. If humans had not sinned, the Holy Spirit’s indwelling would not be for the purpose of sanctification, but it would still serve as the bond of love, bonding us in communion with the Father and the Son. And just as the Holy Spirit is the ecstasy of the Father and the Son in eternity and in creation, the Spirit’s indwelling draws humans *out of themselves* to the Father and the Son and to one another at the consummation.

Eucharistic-liturgical purpose

If communion is God’s ultimate intention from eternity apart from sin, then it is best reflected in the liturgy that culminates in the Eucharist. Christian spirituality is essentially and teleologically eucharistic, not evangelistic. This is why, in the liturgy, preaching is not the climax of worship but leads to the Eucharist as its culmination. Preaching is consummated in the Eucharist. Here again, we see a distinction between Protestant and Catholic-Orthodox spirituality. Despite the former’s definition of the church as constituted by word and sacrament, Protestantism has never really taken the Eucharist seriously in practice, as seen in the fact that most Protestant churches have weekly preaching but not weekly Eucharistic celebration.

The spiritual life, however, is primarily expressed in and shaped by the eucharistic liturgy. In the Eucharist, the whole body of Christ as well as each person individually communes with Christ and all his heavenly hosts, including angels, saints, apostles and martyrs.

Enjoyment

If the going forth (mission/ecstasy) of the Trinity is consummated in the return in the divine economy, activism is only a prelude to rest. As in the story of creation, the six-day work week is followed by the Sabbath rest. Missionary activity is not the ultimate end of the Christian life, but hesychasm (seeking and finding God through rest, silence and quiet) is. In this life, however, we do not stop with rest. Life consists of the cycle of work and rest. Out of silence and solitude, the Christian goes forth to bear witness to the truth of the gospel. The church is *in via* (still on the path); the liturgical journey of gathering and scattering continues until the final eschaton. But the cycle does not go on forever. The *telos* or ultimate goal is rest: enjoying God forever.

If the final reality is eternal communion, all our earthly activism must be viewed *sub specie aeternitatis* (from the perspective of eternity). Evangelism, social justice

39 Tom Smal, *The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 110. Smal repudiates the Reformed view that the human response is only an ‘echo’ of God’s voice.

and all our other earthly works are not the *raison d'être* of the church, but they will find their proper place in relation to the church's ultimate end: rest, communion and feasting. We work so that we may rest; we fast so that we may feast.

A communion of interpreters

If the church is the communion of saints, this should have implications for hermeneutics. The Bible belongs to the church, the one communion of saints whose sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) over the centuries has resulted in what we have today: the canonical Scripture. Biblical interpretation, therefore, cannot be just the work of a few experts trained in scientific exegesis. The church in communion with God 'knows' God and is constituted as a community of interpreters. Of course, this does not make the work of scholars redundant. But scholars cannot ignore the church's *sensus fidei* if they are to be true to their calling as church theologians. If we take seriously the *sensus fidei* among the faithful as it exists through space and time (*sensus fidelium*), then there must be a place for spiritual exegesis or figural interpretation which transcends space and time.⁴⁰ If the saints of old knew God deeply, perhaps far better than we do, how dare we think that our modern, scientific study of the Bible is superior to theirs?

Conclusion

I am not suggesting that we should stop thinking of grace in relation to sin; rather, I am encouraging us to move beyond a doctrine of grace that is exclusively tied to sin and begin to envision divine grace as prior to and apart from sin.

This reversal of the order, placing grace before sin, does not mitigate the seriousness of sin in any way. But it does give us a broader vision of God's grace and affects how we understand Christian spirituality in terms of 'man's chief end'. Reversing the order can make a significant difference in how we understand and live out the Christian life and in how we worship. I believe that the Orthodox Church basically got it right when it perceived the Eucharist as defining life in the Trinity, with joy and beauty as its defining characteristics, and that we evangelical Protestants should dare to embrace this awe-inspiring truth as well.

Epilogue: A parable

Two persons stand outside the Pearly Gate, a burly Orthodox soldier and an evangelical preacher. St. Peter first ushers in the soldier. There to welcome him are Jesus and St. Demetrios. 'Thank you, thank you', the soldier keeps repeating with tears streaming down his face, 'It's so good to be home. And thank you, St. Demetrios', this time turning to his patron saint. 'You gave me the courage to fight well and die well.' You can see from his bouncy strides as St. Demetrios leads him 'further up and further in'⁴¹ that he is really happy and feeling much at home.

40 On figural interpretation, see Ephraim Radner, *Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

41 The phrase is from C. S. Lewis's *The Last Battle* and is used as the title of Edith Humphrey's book on Lewis, *Further Up and Further In: Orthodox Conversations with C. S. Lewis on Scripture and Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017).

Next, the evangelical preacher is ushered in. ‘Thank you, Jesus, am I glad to see you! But where are all the great preachers: Charles Spurgeon and George Whitefield and ...’

Jesus stops him short. ‘They are somewhere yonder. You’ll get to see them, but I’m afraid it may take you a while before you can recognize them.’

‘I don’t understand’, says the preacher, sounding a little agitated. ‘What about that soldier? You even had St. Demetrios come here to welcome him.’

‘The difference’, says Jesus, ‘is that you are only a *fan* of Charles and George, whereas Demetrios and his namesake have been *friends* for 38 years from the day Dimitry was christened.’

Biblical Influence in the Public Square: An Alternative to Christian Nationalism and Holy Withdrawal

Thomas K. Johnson

As many Christians even in the West become increasingly strident in describing threats to Christianity, fostering a reasoned, principled approach to public engagement is crucial. Here, the WEA's top theological advisor articulates the main principles he believes should guide Christian public involvement.

During my years as a professor and ethicist in Europe, I had the privilege of speaking at a Czech government conference on family policy. In my message, I argued that certain foundational values are so important that they should shape the actions of government, schools, family and business in relation to children. I said responsible people make value decisions which lead to certain actions, feelings, and reactions in personal relationships and in the public realm. These value decisions include seeing children as gifts, not as problems; decisions on whether to remain loyal to or abandon one's children or spouse; and consciously practising a combination of unconditional love and structured ethical guidance.

I believe that this combination of love and ethics is a human reflection of the complementarity of God's grace and God's law. However, I did not say that in my lecture. I self-consciously did not emphasize my identity as a Christian pastor, but I was not being a coward about my beliefs. (In many other public and interfaith settings, I have been introduced as a representative of Christian organizations.) On this occasion, I was present as a philosopher with a contribution regarding family values, which I consider applicable to all people regardless of their religious beliefs. But my presentation was consciously shaped by theological convictions that can inform other believers' participation in discussions of public ethics.

My philosophy, including my philosophy of family values, is a result of my theology. This is not because I am a religious fanatic; it is a normal but often unrecognized part of being human. Our ultimate beliefs (for example, about the source of the universe) influence our secondary convictions in many realms. Probably some people at the conference could discern my faith commitment, though others did not. I did not emphasize my faith, but I did not leave my faith at home; I was practising an indirect apologetic for Christianity.

The principles behind this lecture on family values merit clarification for our broader faith-based engagement with public values. Join me in the theological research laboratory as we do so.

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Jesus wants us to be ‘in the world’ but not ‘of the world’ (John 17). Jesus did not tell us to withdraw from the world into a holy community. That is impossible, because the unbelief, pride and ingratitude which make ‘the world’ hostile to God reside within us too. Jesus also did not tell us to dominate or conquer the world, using a particular version of the faith to form a national identity, as has been repeatedly attempted. We are to make disciples of all nations, but a theocracy, in which representatives of one religion dominate a country, was practised only for a limited time by one people group in the Old Testament. If we want an Old Testament precedent for how we should relate to the world, we can look to how the people of Israel were instructed after their exile to Babylon. Through Jeremiah, the Lord told them, ‘Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper’ (Jer 29:7).

If we are sent by God into the world but not told to dominate the world, there should always be a multi-faceted interaction between the Word of God and the cultures into which we are sent. Four facets of that interaction are critique, correlation, construction and contribution (i.e. biblical faith contributing ethical values and principles into our various cultures).

Many good characteristics of cultures around the world are the result of two thousand years of history during which biblical values and principles have been proclaimed to those cultures. Christians have not only cared for the helpless, freed the slaves and fed the poor; they have also articulated their reasons for doing these things. These moral reasons often become a gift from the body of Christ to the rest of the culture, making decisive contributions to the world’s moral reasoning and practice. John R. W. Stott writes:

We should neither try to impose Christian standards by force on an unwilling public, nor remain silent and inactive before the contemporary landslide, nor rely exclusively on the dogmatic assertion of biblical values, but reason with people about the benefits of Christian morality, commending God’s law to them by rational arguments. We believe that God’s laws are both good in themselves and universal in their application because, far from being arbitrary, they fit the human beings whom God has made.¹

Stott describes this effort as an ‘ethical apologetic’.

We can learn to articulate our moral beliefs more effectively within the public square so that we can consciously contribute to public policies and attitudes. In addition to influencing our cultures, this type of effort should also make our biblical convictions more plausible to our non-believing neighbours, reducing their resistance to the Word of God. For the glory of God and for the good of our communities, I will propose here a series of theological and ethical theses.

1. People often know more about right and wrong than they acknowledge.

In Romans 1:32, Paul made an astonishing claim about moral knowledge. After listing several inappropriate behaviours, such as envy, murder, slander, deceit and

1 John R. W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 61.

gossip, he said, 'Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them.' Paul claimed that people generally know significant truths about right and wrong, and that this knowledge is true knowledge that comes from God; at the same time, in self-contradiction, people approve the actions they know to be wrong. They may talk as if they do not know that these actions are wrong. This is a self-deceiving self-contradiction. On one hand, one cannot carry on everyday life without knowing a certain amount about right and wrong; every day we all know we should not murder, lie or steal. This knowledge comes through God's general revelation. On the other hand, such moral knowledge is bothersome. It is not simply moral information about how to treat other people; it is knowledge of our common failure to do what we know we should.

This situation puts spiritual stress on a person and frequently leads to various self-deceiving intellectual moves, unless the person is willing to cry out, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' By calling these moves 'intellectual' I am not implying that only scholars do this kind of thing; taxi drivers and factory workers probably think the same way as professors, though they use a different vocabulary. I call them 'intellectual moves' because they are ways of thinking.

One common intellectual move is moral relativism, which simply denies that there is a real moral law or any objective right and wrong. Any feelings about right and wrong, it is said, are relative to a particular person or culture and not based on any universal standard. In response, I claim that our theories may be relativistic, but life is not relativistic. There are moral norms which we encounter every day in every relationship. Even the man with a strongly relativistic philosophy may not talk like a relativist if you steal his car or sleep with his girlfriend. Without actually stealing his car, there are things one can do to help people break out of moral relativism. The main point here is that moral relativism is a common intellectual move in reaction to the stress of knowing (but not wanting to know) that breaking God's law deserves God's wrath.

A second common intellectual move to avoid such stress is secularizing ethics. Since the Enlightenment (starting around 1650), it has been common to describe ethics as having nothing to do with God. Some theories say ethics is simply a matter of our rational duty; others call it a matter of the social contract, the agreements which hold society together; many say ethics concerns what actions or policies lead to good results; and today it is popular to say ethics is about reaching human potential. There is a profound bit of truth in each of these theories, but each one forgets the relation between moral demands and God. Each of these theories lets people talk about right and wrong while pretending they are not accountable to God. Such moral theories help people to be good neighbours, practising civil righteousness; at the same time, they reduce spiritual stress, saying people know less about right and wrong than they do. The command of God, however, is deeper.

A third intellectual move to reduce spiritual stress is to reduce our recognition of moral obligations to something we can do. The maxim 'If I should, then I can' reflects a mind that does not recognize the depths of God's demand. If people deceive themselves into thinking they can follow whatever moral demands exist, they also may convince themselves they do not deserve death, if God holds us account-

able. This attempt to minimize the moral demand we face seeks to reduce spiritual stress without God's forgiveness.

In discussing fundamental principles, one should remember the conflicted nature of moral knowledge. The problem is not entirely a lack of moral information. The problem is spiritual stress based on knowing more about God's demand than some want to know; such stress leads to various intellectual tricks to reduce spiritual stress. This makes the discussion complicated.

2. There is harmony between God's two revelations.

We call the Bible God's special revelation, meaning those truths and promises God gave in various ways from Adam and Eve through the New Testament apostles, now preserved in Scripture. God's general revelation is his voice echoing through the universe. There are significant differences between the two revelations. God's special revelation does not teach much about plant genetics or the various planets; for that, we rely on general revelation through creation, perceived and organized as natural science. General revelation in creation does not describe forgiveness in Christ; for that, we need God's special revelation through the Bible. We make mistakes in understanding both general revelation and special revelation, but if we understand both correctly, they will agree. Both convey truth from God; all truth originates in God. There is no ultimate conflict between general and special revelation when they are properly understood, but there may be intermediate conflicts between our understandings of God's two revelations, since people make mistakes.

Moral demands are distinctive among types of knowledge because they are prominent in both revelations. When I read the Bible, I encounter God's commands. When I listen to human experience and relationships, I am confronted by moral demands which I believe are God's demands via his general revelation. Many areas of learning deal either mostly with general revelation or mostly with special revelation. A study of ethics should engage knowledge we receive via both general and special revelation, because God's moral law is proclaimed in both. Therefore, scholars studying Christian ethics are often philosophers or sociologists as well as students of the Bible. They cannot stop considering the interconnections between faith and different types of learning.

In our time, we should give renewed attention to God's law as it comes to us through general revelation, since most of our neighbours have little contact with the biblical revelation. Even people who claim to be Christians often have little effective contact with the Bible. This should inform how we talk about God's law within our secular or multi-religious societies. We should regularly mention the multi-faceted character of our moral knowledge. For example, I know that my wife and children need real loyalty from me, and this knowledge comes from my interpersonal relationships as well as from the Bible. I know that my colleagues need real honesty from me, and this moral demand comes from those relationships as well as from the Bible. I know that my neighbours should expect justice from me, and this knowledge comes from civic relationships as well as from the Bible. As a believer, my moral knowledge is always a unity of what I have learned through both general and special revelation. My non-Christian neighbours have some of the same knowledge, which

they have received via God's general revelation, but that knowledge is not completed, confirmed and reformulated by means of God's special revelation.

When non-Christians read God's moral commands in the Bible, such as the commands not to steal, murder or commit adultery, they do not exactly receive new information. They hear in explicit written form what they already knew, though their previous knowledge may have been less fully clarified and perhaps partly rejected. For many believers, this harmony of the two ways of encountering the moral law is so deep and uniform that they rarely observe that we encounter God's moral demands in two ways.

This harmony does not in any way make the special revelation of God's law less important. As mentioned, there is extreme value in having his law written on stone in a public manner. And the special revelation of God's law always sets his law in close proximity with the promises of God, especially the gospel of grace in Christ; this situation changes our relationship to the moral law. In the most profound way possible, the special revelation of God's law (with the revelation of his grace in Christ) renews our previous knowledge of his law which came via general revelation. In the terms used by older theology, grace restores nature; in my terminology, the special revelation of God's moral law restores our broken understanding of the moral law which we previously received via his general revelation. But this does not eliminate the importance of understanding the way in which God is still revealing his moral law through creation to all people.

This harmony between the two forms of revelation of God's law is crucial background for public discussions of moral principles. Our neighbours who are not Christians may not know the Bible or Christian doctrine, but at some deep level, they are normally aware of a moral demand, and they will probably know some of the content of this demand. Like it or not, they may be bothered by sensing that these demands come from God. In a post-Christian culture, our neighbours may have conflicted feelings about the entire Christian tradition, and these feelings may be conflated with their troubled relationship with the general revelation of God's moral law.

3. We should distinguish the different uses of God's moral law.

Historically, Protestants have distinguished three different uses or functions of God's moral law. Both the general revelation of God's law and the special revelation of God's moral law have these three uses: (1) the theological, convicting use of God's law; (2) the civil or political use of God's moral law; and (3) God's moral law as a guide for the Christian life of gratitude, which we can call the 'doxological use', because it restores all of life into worship to God.

The theological, condemning use of God's law provokes our awareness of sin and guilt before God. 'Through the law we become conscious of sin' (Rom 3:20). We see that we are sinners before a holy God; in this sense, the moral law teaches us to know ourselves. The law says, 'You shall not covet', and yet we constantly covet. The law says, 'You shall not steal', and we recognize ourselves as thieves. Perhaps the entire law prompts a reaction in us, so that we recognize that we want to do things simply because they are wrong. The law pushes us to see our need for the gospel, to cry out for mercy. This occurs not only at the beginning of faith, when we first

believe, but throughout our lifetimes, causing us to repeatedly renew our trust in the gospel. Some churches make this process of recognizing our sin and rehearing the gospel a component of weekly worship. So long as we have sinful tendencies, we need God's moral law to convict us, to drive us again to the message of forgiveness. In this sense, the law always condemns.

The second use of the moral law is sometimes forgotten among evangelicals. The moral law can restrain sin to the point of making a humane life in society possible. This is called the civil, political or civilizing function of God's moral law. Why do people not always follow their worst instincts? Why does much of the world enjoy the benefit of civilized life, even though our sinful nature easily leads to the war of all against all? People do not usually become their worst because of moral restraint. This moral restraint is complex in its function: it is partly cultural expectations and government laws; partly good habits learned at home, school or work; partly moral principles, rules and values. God's law is built into creation as the fabric of the creation order, even if people do not like it, claim not to know that a moral law exists, or claim to be atheists. Even if people reduce the demands of God's law so that it is easy to follow, this reduced moral perception has a civilizing effect.

Believers should be grateful that God's law civilizes us; we also recognize that the body of Christ is one of God's means of making his law effective. We can be proud that Christians have contributed a wide range of biblically informed moral values, principles, examples and theories to many different cultures, exerting a profound effect on what people regard as civilized behaviour. Something similar happened through God's Jewish people in the time before the birth of the Christian church. This history should inform our understanding of the calling of the body of Christ today.

The third use of the moral law is the doxological use of inspiring a life of gratitude to God for his gifts of creation and salvation. A doxology is a song of praise to God; God's Word can change our life into a hymn of praise! The person who is at peace with God by faith, receiving forgiveness and a new status as an adopted child of God, faces the important question, 'How do I properly show my gratitude to God?' The answer: follow God's commands as we receive them in the Bible and in creation! Instead of desiring to kill, steal, lie or commit adultery, I should really want to protect life, property, truth and marriage, and then turn these renewed desires into a life of gratitude to God. In this way, the law of God plays an important role in the authentic life of faith; the moral law of God is the blueprint for life as worship.

The same moral law of God, encountered in both general and special revelation, is present in all three uses. This means there is a similarity between actions resulting from the civilizing use of the law and using God's law to turn life into worship. An atheist or agnostic may be very careful to tell the truth, and the explanation of that action may be that 'If I do not tell the truth, no one will trust me.' Such a partial but good explanation of why truth-telling is important arises from how God's moral law is built into human relationships. In this way, the general revelation of God's law enables a civilized way of life. A believer should be even more serious about truth-telling because our explanation of that action is that 'truth-telling glorifies God because God is Truth.' For this person, the special revelation of God's law guides the life of gratitude, or the third use of God's law. In terms of outward appearance, the

actions of the two people are similar, but there is a large difference regarding purpose and motivation. The atheist is trying to be a good neighbour and citizen, whereas the believer is trying to glorify God, which includes being a good neighbour.

4. There is similarity and difference among the types of righteousness.

Since Luther, Protestants have distinguished types of righteousness in a way that echoes earlier Christian discussions of the types of virtue. I propose talking about three types of righteousness.

First, civil righteousness characterizes people who try to be good neighbours and good citizens who want to protect truth, property, life and family for everyone in society, while helping people in need. Such people may not, in their own minds, connect civil righteousness to God or faith, but they may have a good description of the ethical life they seek to live. I see in such people a serious response to God's general revelation.

Second, spiritual righteousness describes people who are at peace with God by faith and who rest in God's great mercy and grace. This righteousness can be described as passive, since nothing remains to be done to be at peace with God.

Third, spiritual civil righteousness characterizes those who are passively fully at peace with God and actively longing to worship God with their entire lives. They practise civil righteousness for the glory of God.

Civil righteousness and spiritual civil righteousness produce similar actions, as described above regarding truth-telling. Both types of active, civic-minded righteousness include honesty, loyalty, mercy and a deep concern for fairness or justice. Both types of righteousness should include a real concern for the common good, including economic, political, medical, environmental and educational concerns. Both types of active righteousness should include real concern for many family values, including love for children and loyalty to one's spouse. Both types of righteousness are radically different from a life of crime, negligence, irresponsibility, laziness, cruelty, dishonesty, corruption and general delinquency. Both types of active righteousness lead to real improvements in the everyday world and contribute to justice, peace and mercy.

But we must not minimize the radical differences between these two types of civil righteousness. Augustine described the virtues of the pagans as glorious vices. By this he probably meant that the virtues of the pagans, which I have called civil righteousness, are ultimately motivated by love of self, not love of God. An intelligent person knows that a life of crime and obvious vice is not the best way to love oneself; a really smart person may love himself and give full expression to his arrogant pride by a life of seemingly humble public service for the common good. This is truly a glorious vice.

Luther observed that there is deep in the human heart a desire to justify ourselves before God, in effect telling God that the gospel of forgiveness is not needed, since we can justify or cleanse ourselves. Luther thought that this desire is mixed into all our normal, 'rational' considerations of the moral demands built into creation. Of course, he thought, it is much better for our life in society to be governed by the rational consideration of good laws and principles than by irrational passions like

revenge, prejudice or greed. And this is possible, Luther thought, because God has built his moral law into creation and into human reason. But this type of active righteousness, which I have called civil righteousness, may promote the most fundamental of all theological mistakes, that of thinking we can earn our salvation before God.

In our time, we can observe another deep weakness in most common varieties of civil righteousness without spiritual roots. Our world is filled with a whirlwind of competing ideologies and worldviews, many of which contain ideas which substantially reduce or twist the perception of the moral law which God built into creation and reason. Through ideologies that say the unborn or the disabled are not human, say marriage is not important, or give a strange religious justification for murder or lying, people's minds are filled with ideas and beliefs that make it more difficult for them to respond positively to the general revelation of God's moral law. This leads to religious or philosophical attempts to justify actions that are repugnant before God: abortion, easy divorce, cohabitation, temporary marriages, violent jihad, genocide, deception. Biblical revelation should play an important role in our moral thinking to help us avoid the various types of religious and philosophical deception that so easily cloud moral thinking. Without the influence of special revelation, civil righteousness can very easily go astray.

5. Both common grace and special grace are truly grace.

Since the Reformation, evangelical Christians have distinguished between two types of grace from God: common grace and special grace. Special grace has to do with salvation, eternal life and the forgiveness of sins; common grace has to do with everything that makes life in this world possible. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of our Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous' (Mt 5:44–45). Our love for our enemies should reflect our Father's love for his enemies, whose daily needs he meets graciously through common grace.

Common grace is a call to repentance and faith. In Lystra, Paul preached that God 'has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy' (Acts 14:17). In Romans 2:4, Paul completed the thought: 'Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?'

We can contrast God's common grace with his common wrath (which is different from particular acts of wrath, as well as different from God's eschatological wrath). In Romans 1:18, Paul writes that 'the wrath of God is being revealed.' His language points to a current work of God's wrath. At three points in the following paragraphs, he describes this wrath further. In verse 24 he says, 'God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts'; in verse 26, 'God gave them over to shameful lusts'; and in verse 28, 'He gave them over to a depraved mind.' In each statement, God in his wrath lets people become more sinful. It is an act of God's wrath when he lets people follow the sinful desires within them, so that sin is self-punishing.

Though not explicitly stated, it follows that a work of God's common grace, in contrast to his common wrath, is to restrain sin. When sinful tendencies are

restrained, we should thank God, remembering that this restraint of sin is a work of God's common grace, regardless of what secondary means God uses for such restraint. To repeat, the common grace of God should lead people to repentance and faith. Without the restraint of human evil, society can degenerate into the war of all against all and thereby self-destruct. The restraint of human self-destruction is as much a work of God's common grace as are the rain and sun.

Such restraint of sin leads to civil righteousness. The person who benefits from such sin-restraining common grace might still profess ideas that dishonour God and be motivated by desires that are not God-honouring. But whatever cultural, religious, personal, political or economic motives are involved, it is by God's common grace that people practise any type of righteousness. Paul assumed the presence of this grace when he wrote in Romans 13 that all people should submit to the governing authorities. By preventing some destructive sins, civil authorities are a means of God's common grace. We should show our thanks to God and to them by practising our civic duties and paying our taxes. Good civil government is an important means of God's common grace. To make this truth vivid in our minds, we need only to contrast pictures of genocide or urban warfare with pictures of well-functioning schools and businesses.

By using the word 'grace' to describe the gifts of God such as rain, sun and peaceful life in society, Christians have recognized that these are undeserved gifts of God, just as much as the special graces of salvation in Christ, forgiveness of sins, and justification before God by faith.

6. Believers are called to be servants of both special grace and common grace.

Jesus said, 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (Mt 28:19). This Great Commission, grounded in Jesus' claim of authority over all peoples and cultures, has empowered believers with the conviction of the universal importance and relevance of the biblical message. It is a call for believers to become servants of God's special grace.

But we have a parallel call to be servants of common grace. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus taught that whatever we do for 'the least of these', we are doing for him (Mt 25:34–40). I know some interpreters claim this passage influences only our relationship with other believers in need, and that they should not guide our actions with people who are not Christians. However, this interpretation ignores how the four gospels repeatedly portray people who are either being attracted to Jesus or repelled from Jesus. Many New Testament characters are in the process of either coming to or walking away from real faith. And most groups of people in terrible need today are in a similar situation. Many are reassessing everything they believe and value and may not know whether they regard themselves as our fellow believers.

If this is true, can there be a more pointed call than this passage to become participants in God's common grace? Jesus evaluates our claim to be his followers by asking if our actions are similar to his Father's common grace. The Father loves his enemies by giving them rain, sun and the things needed for life in this world. Jesus calls us to imitate his Father. Can there be a more powerful motivation to become the giving hands of God in relation to a world filled with suffering?

There does not seem to be a sharp line between God's common grace that sends rain and sun and God's common grace that restrains sin. Both are works of God that make life possible but do not immediately lead to salvation or forgiveness of sins. In much of the world today, the need for humanitarian aid arises when the sinful drives within the human heart have not been restrained. Too many humanitarian crises are the result of war, violence, economic collapse caused by corruption, or illness caused partly by irresponsible behaviour (such as drug abuse). These humanitarian disasters, which properly move the hearts and hands of believers to action, have arisen partly because there was no effective restraint of sin. How much more compassionate it would be to prevent such humanitarian disasters by being servants of God's common grace at that earlier time! Or think of the many problems of children, addressed by countless educators, that have arisen because they were abandoned, abused or neglected by one or both parents. Teachers continually see children with medical, neurological, psychological or learning problems related to the sins of the parents: alcoholism, drug abuse, abandonment, physical abuse. Teachers become social workers to help these children. How much better it would be if the body of Christ had effectively served God's common grace at an earlier time, preventing such human-caused disasters!! If we claim to have received God's special grace, we must become imitators of his common grace as well as proclaimers of his special grace.

7. Articulating humane moral principles in the public square is a means of God's common grace.

We must never forget that God's common, civilizing grace is closely connected with the moral law, whereas his special grace is closely associated with the gospel. The restraint of sin is never complete, and this partial restraint of sin can occur when a person or a culture accepts even some parts of God's moral law. However, the restraint of sin, leading to civil righteousness, will be more effective if a person's or a culture's reception of the moral law is strengthened. The human perception of the moral law coming through creation is influenced by a wide variety of personal and historical factors. The public witness of the body of Christ is one of the most important historical and personal factors that influence general perceptions of the moral law.

Both common grace and special grace are mediated by means of words. Protestants normally say that God's special grace is mediated to us by 'the means of grace', which is how we refer to the combination of God's Word (including preaching and teaching in churches, schools and families) and the sacraments (baptism and the Holy Supper). The sacraments are sometimes further described as 'visible words'. In this way, we emphasize the connection of special grace to words, ultimately the word of the gospel, without minimizing the way in which God's special grace is also mediated by means of actions. (Obviously, the gospel is a report about God's actions in the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, a fact which also illustrates the connectedness between words and acts in the realm of God's special grace.)

In God's common grace, there is a different relationship between words and actions. People benefit from the sun and the rain, regardless of the words they use to describe them. But there are important ways in which God's common grace is also mediated by words.

Man does not live by bread alone. We live from our hearts and minds—which means from words, words by which we express ideas, beliefs, values, feelings, attitudes, relationships and more. From the words in our minds and hearts arise very different ways of life for individuals and nations. The difference between Adolf Hitler and Mother Teresa rests largely on what words filled their hearts and minds. One set of words led to National Socialism and the Holocaust; another set of words and ideas led to self-giving care for the needy. One set of words can lead to destructive totalitarianism; another set of words can lead to a humane democracy. Ideas have consequences; words create or destroy. And the set of words shaping the life of a person or a society is never fixed and unchanging. There is always change regarding what messages are communicated.

Even if people do not believe the gospel of Christ, there is real benefit for individuals and societies if some partial dimensions of the total biblical message are accepted. Words, slogans, sayings, mottos, theories, proverbs and stories can all be means of God's common grace, ways in which the Creator works in our societies to restrain our sin and sustain life. Words become the material of a humane culture, from which then arise our feelings, our actions and even our public policies. People who believe the gospel of Christ and love their neighbours should inspire our various cultures to give a voice to messages that arise from and support the biblical message. In this way, we can contribute to the cognitive, symbolic and emotional contents of our cultures in a way that mediates God's common grace. Believers can contribute to the total direction of our cultures so that more people are inspired to imitate Mother Teresa and fewer people imitate cruel despots. Societies can be encouraged to practise higher levels of justice, honesty, loyalty and mercy.

8. The rich complexity in God's revelation of the moral law enables a wide range of methods of presenting the moral law in society.

Within the Bible, we see a rich complexity and complementarity in the communication of God's moral will. We find commands like 'You shall not steal.' We see stories or parables, such as that of the Good Samaritan. We read histories, such as the punishment of Israel for their sins. We also find a colourful supply of proverbs which instruct us in reflective moral wisdom. This rich pattern of communication may reach its high point in the New Testament instruction to put on the character of Christ as those who have died and risen with him.

Within this complexity, there is also a deep harmony, so that there is real unity in the total presentation of God's moral will. It is the self-consistent communication of a self-consistent God; therefore, the way of life contained in God's explicit commands fits with the way of life taught in the parables, stories or proverbs. A biblically informed virtue ethic grounded in the book of Proverbs will align with one based on God's direct commands. This is because of the complementary character of God's special revelation.

There is the same unity within complexity in the general revelation of God's law in creation; the different dimensions of the general, creational revelation of God's law are complementary. Whether they know the Bible well or not, all people

encounter a God-given moral demand in a wide variety of ways. We often have a direct, intuitive sense of what is required of us; for example, a father may perceive that his wife and children need unconditional love and complete loyalty from him, or our encounter with people experiencing pain and suffering may give us a direct moral intuition that we should practise mercy. This direct, intuitive awareness of a moral duty probably arises from our direct awareness of God and his moral attributes given in general revelation, which demands that we imitate God's moral attributes because we are made in his image.

Another way in which we become aware of a God-given moral demand (though perhaps without a strong awareness that the demand comes from God) is by means of thinking about predictable consequences; we might ask ourselves, 'What would happen to society if everyone lies or steals?' or 'What would happen to my relationships with others if I were to lie or steal?' This type of awareness of God's moral law arises from the way in which God has created us as relationship-oriented, while God has also built his moral law into the structure of human connectedness. Yet another way in which we become aware of a God-given moral demand is by asking what kind of person we are making ourselves if we take a particular action. Maybe I am aware that a single impatient act or word is one step towards becoming a grumpy, irritable person, which I do not want to be. Another action or word will tend to make me into a fair and kind person, worthy of real respect. This type of awareness of a moral demand is also God-given, probably arising from our God-given drive to reach our created potential.

Unbelieving moral philosophies generally isolate and absolutize one of the different ways of encountering the God-given moral law. This tendency to absolutize one dimension of our encounter with the moral law gives rise to competing moral philosophies, many of which seek to explain all our moral experience in light of one dimension of moral experience. Most secular moral philosophies are reductionistic in the sense of reducing our perception of moral experience and moral obligation, because each moral philosophy absolutizes one part of moral experience. If we really believe that we live in God's created world through which he is continually speaking his moral law, we can begin to see a deep unity and complementarity within the different ways of encountering his law in creation. Many believers do this without a second thought.

When we attempt to bring biblically informed moral principles into the public square in secular societies, we have the freedom to select which dimension of the general revelation of God's moral law to emphasize on that occasion. On some occasions, when speaking for an audience composed predominantly of people who are not yet Christians, I have emphasized our direct intuitive awareness of certain moral duties like mercy, faithfulness or honesty. In these situations, I may have sounded like a follower of intuitional deontological ethical theory, which absolutizes that way of encountering the moral law of God given in creation. On other occasions, I have chosen to emphasize what kind of person we become as a result of particular actions. In those settings, I would have resembled a virtue theorist or a follower of Aristotle, whose ethical theory absolutized the way a series of actions turns us into a certain type of person. On still other occasions, I have highlighted the predictable negative or positive results, sometimes demonstrated by studies in the social sciences, that

follow from certain practices; for example, I have talked about the significant negative consequences for human well-being that usually flow from divorce and cohabitation. In that situation, one might think I was an advocate of utilitarian moral theory. As a Christian, I have the freedom to use all these approaches to invite people to think about the different dimensions of God's general revelation of his moral law. But my goal was to bring my hearers into significant contact with one of the many complementary ways in which we encounter God's moral law revealed through creation. My purpose has been to embody God's common grace while also making God's special revelation and special grace more plausible for a particular audience.

9. The same moral law which restrains sin shows our need for forgiveness.

I have argued that believers should be servants of God's common grace by means of promoting humane moral standards in the public square, moral standards which arise from the general revelation of God's law and are informed by the special revelation of God's law. This process has been occurring for centuries, and believers should adopt the promotion of civil righteousness as part of our contribution to our various cultures. We should look for suitable opportunities to help our neighbours see that some things, such as telling the truth, protecting human rights and being loyal to one's spouse and family, are truly right and proper and contribute to human well-being. As servants of God's common grace, we should attempt to promote the civil use of the law and encourage adherence to God's law in its civil use.

As we accept this part of the calling God has given us, we should never forget that God's law always retains all three of its uses. It always shows us our sin and need for salvation in Christ, restrains our sin to enable civic righteousness, and guides us towards gratitude and praise to God. Perhaps, in a particular situation, one of the uses of God's law is more prominent, but God's law is always engaging people in these three ways. Our discussion of ethics in the public square mostly addresses civic righteousness and the restraint of sin, the second use of God's moral law. But God's law is frequently used by God's Spirit to also accomplish the other purposes. And one of these functions is showing people their sinfulness and need for forgiveness.

Some examples may help. In public university lectures, I have argued that governments should not legalize active euthanasia, because we can observe a repeated tendency in human history for people to kill other people while deceiving themselves into thinking they are doing a good thing. Can we have any certainty that active euthanasia is not a repetition of this old problem? I would call this a utilitarian type of moral reasoning. An astute listener would notice that my lecture was intended to promote civic righteousness, but that it simultaneously illustrated human sinfulness: we are the sort of people who can easily kill others and deceive ourselves about our murderous potential. This lecture would both promote a humane society and show our need for forgiveness from God.

When teaching university ethics classes, I sometimes gave a lecture based on social-science research showing that cohabitation and divorce generally lead to negative consequences for the people involved, including the children of the couple. My mode of reasoning has been consciously rule-utilitarian, asking what rule, if widely observed, would predictably lead to better consequences for the people most directly

influenced by that rule. I have suggested that even an intelligent atheist who is honestly concerned about human well-being will follow the traditional Christian teachings on marital faithfulness and on keeping sexuality within marriage. An astute observer of such lectures would notice that I was promoting civic responsibility, in a crucial area of ethical consideration, by using a method of moral reasoning employed by some of the most highly regarded secular moral philosophers; but this lecture was also an apology for the Christian faith. It promoted civil righteousness, regardless of the faith of the hearers, but it also exposed an area of guilt and the need for forgiveness, making the biblical message more plausible. The moral law restrains sin as a means of common grace while also showing our sin and our need for God's forgiveness.

In the speech I cited at the beginning of this essay, I chose to use the language and terminology of a direct, intuitive awareness of moral duties. I decided to use this method of reasoning and presentation because I considered it suitable for the situation. My intent was to strengthen the awareness of certain parts of God's moral law in a manner that could be used by God's common grace to restrain sin and promote healthy family life; but I remained very conscious that God's law always carries out three parallel functions, including guiding believers towards gratitude and showing people their sin. Probably some of my hearers had a history of disloyalty to a spouse and children, leading to an awareness of guilt as they listened to me—a step towards seeing their need for forgiveness. In that way, a public lecture with no explicit spiritual content can lead people towards reconciliation with God and people. God's law, even when presented in a partial manner, retains its power to fulfil all three of its important functions. Therefore, bringing biblical principles into the public square is a key part of the overall mission of the body of Christ.

Islam as a Theological Mosaic

Gene Daniels

The Qur'an's idiosyncratic appropriation of Christian Scripture has led to controversy as to how Christians should engage in outreach to Muslims, so as to build on legitimate commonalities while still presenting the gospel with integrity. This article works in an inductive manner from an analysis of historical and textual facts to a suggested approach.

When my family and I lived in post-Soviet Central Asia, one of the more interesting art forms we encountered was mosaics made from broken dishware. This was evidently a Soviet state–encouraged repurposing of bits and pieces of everyday life, since these mosaics were common in public spaces such as bus stops and park signs. Although I personally do not care much for the aesthetics of Soviet art, I had to admire the creativity and resourcefulness required to produce these mosaics.

But teacups, plates and other bits of pottery are not the only things that can be repurposed into a mosaic. I believe Islam itself can be understood as a mosaic made from bits and pieces of the religious world from which it emerged.

One of the problems we face as we seek to engage the Muslim world with the gospel is that even after one accounts for the differences between the different schools of Islamic theology, there is nothing like a ‘unified field theory’ of Islam. That is, there is no satisfactory, overarching explanation of Islam that both summarizes what it is theologically and promotes fruitful gospel engagement with Muslims. The models out there tend to do one or the other, not both. For example, one common theological model held by many evangelicals posits Islam as simply a false religion started by a false prophet. While there is some truth to this view, it is so offensive and polemical that it has borne little fruit in the several hundred years Christians have used it to attack the core beliefs of Islam.

On the other extreme, there is a modern trend of explaining Islam exclusively in terms of anthropology. This approach has introduced cultural relativity into the mix with its universalist overtones and can lead evangelicals to ignore some of the more disturbing parts of Muhammad’s religion.

These models and others like them fail at the fundamental missiological task. Field workers need a simple yet accurate way to understand Islam that gives us a framework through which to fruitfully engage Muslims with the gospel.

Enter metaphorical reasoning

The more abstract things are, the more people struggle to apply them in the concrete world around them. Take for example the diversity of Islamic theology. Not only do

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missionaries face the well-known Sunni-Shia schism, but there are Salafists and Sufis, traditionalists and Tawhidists, as well as countless contemporary expressions of Islam now promoted on YouTube. Not all Islamic ideologies impact every mission context; nevertheless, few missionaries have either the capacity or the desire to master the versions of Islam that do affect their ministry. This is exactly the kind of intellectual setting in which metaphorical reasoning can be of great help.

Metaphorical reasoning is a mental process that seeks understanding through an analogy between two objects or ideas that are similar in some way or another. It uses these similarities as thought bridges between something that is concrete, or already understood, and something that is unknown, abstract or esoteric. Just think of Jesus saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like ...’ and you get the concept.

Down through history, metaphorical reasoning has played an important, if sometimes mysterious, role in philosophical, legal and even scientific problem-solving.¹ One reason is that metaphors function as decentering devices. They help us step back from direct observations to ask important questions like ‘What is really going on here?’ and ‘What is this telling me about the big picture?’ Consequently, reasoning through metaphor allows us to go beyond simple descriptions and move up to a more inferential level of thinking, because metaphors are a half-step between the actual phenomena and its significance.²

Thinking in terms of metaphors is particularly helpful when we are trying to understand something that cannot be directly observed, such as theology. Without some way to organize our thoughts, all but a few specialists will tend towards unhelpful oversimplification. This is where metaphors can be a particularly powerful intellectual device. At the same time, any metaphor can be stretched too far. They are almost always focused on a single perspective of a phenomenon; by nature, they are never comprehensive representations of reality.

Keeping this limitation in mind, in this article I will build a case for using the metaphor of a mosaic as a missiological lens through which to view Islam, as a collection of theological bits and pieces. This model not only attempts to deal honestly with the historical data but also offers important missiological insights that help us engage Muslims with the gospel.

The origins of Muhammad’s mosaic

The Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century was a fascinating place. It was politically and culturally constrained on land borders by two great powers: to the north and northwest by the Christian Byzantine empire, and to the east and northeast by the Persians. These aging empires were constantly hemorrhaging religious and political dissidents through their borders. Their ideas fed into an already complex religious situation among the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula itself.

1 Paul Barta, ‘Analogy and Analogical Reasoning’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasoning-analogy>.

2 Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (New York: Sage, 1994).

Thus, Muhammad³ lived in an eclectic religious world which included many streams of theology. The backbone of his nascent religion was likely indigenous Arab religious expression, both polytheistic in nature and a lesser-known emerging Arab monotheism.⁴ We also know about his interaction with Christians of the Syriac church, as well as his contentious relationship with Jews, which we now know ranged from traditional to semi-Christian Jewish groups such as the Ebionites.⁵

Therefore, it is not a novel idea that Muhammad drew from a rich palette of religious, social and political thought. Even some missiologists who object to using the Qur'an in Christian witness agree with the concept of Muhammad repurposing other material. For example, although he takes a very different evangelistic approach from the one suggested in this article, Mark Durie still uses a strikingly similar metaphor to describe the relationship between Islam and Christianity. He writes that it's like 'a church which has been demolished, and its materials have been repurposed for the construction of a mosque'.⁶ Interestingly, Durie also acknowledges that this particular metaphor was repurposed from Dudley Woodberry,⁷ and that he uses it in such a way as to make a very different point from Woodberry's original one. Whereas Woodberry saw this process as akin to refurbishing and reusing, Durie uses the imagery of destruction and demolition. Thus, people can have stark differences as to Muhammad's repurposing of material actually means for gospel witness. This is a place where metaphorical reasoning can prove quite helpful.

Going back to the Central Asian art described earlier, when an artist repurposes pieces of broken ceramic into a new mosaic, it is partially an acknowledgement of the original design, and also the artist's reworking of the pieces for his or her own vision. Since the application of this illustration to Muhammad's work is slightly abstract, we should turn to some concrete examples to support this assertion.

Qur'anic use of biblical material

When reading the Qur'an, we can readily perceive that Muhammad believed there were previous, inspired Scriptures with which he wanted to associate himself and his theology. Two good examples of this are as follows:

3 Some scholars argue that Muhammad either was not a real historical figure or produced only a small portion of the material in the Qur'an, the rest being the product of the Uthman caliphate in order to clarify the distinction between Islam and Christianity. For example, see Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 1987). However, since this is a minority view and very unlikely to prove fruitful in gospel engagement, we will assume Muhammadian authorship throughout.

4 This view is held by an increasing number of scholars. For example, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023).

5 T. Chekovikj and E. T. Chekovikj, 'Jesus and Monotheism, the Similarity and Relations Between Early Judeo-Christian Credence and Islam', *Journal of Modern Islamic Studies* 2 (2020): 45–53.

6 Mark Durie, 'What Is Islam's Relationship to Christianity? Theological Analysis of the Bible and the Quran', Lausanne Global Analysis, 2021, <https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2021-11/what-is-islams-relationship-to-christianity>.

7 Dudley Woodberry, 'Contextualization among Muslims Reusing Common Pillars', *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 4 (1996): 171–86.

Surah 3:3:8: ‘He hath revealed unto thee [Muhammad] the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel.’

Surah 42:13: ‘He hath ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We inspire in thee [Muhammad], and that which We commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion, and be not divided therein.’

He goes so far as to claim that Allah even directed him to consult these previous Scriptures:

Surah 10:94: ‘And if thou [Muhammad] art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee. Verily the Truth from thy Lord hath come unto thee. So be not thou of the waverers.’

We should also note that while most of the biblical bits and pieces in the Qur’an are short, even just allusions, it does contain a few fairly accurate versions of biblical events. Interestingly enough, two are rather long birth accounts—those of John the Baptist (Qur’an 3:37–41) and Jesus (Qur’an 19:16–21). Nevertheless, despite an appearance of respect for Scripture, Muhammad’s overall purpose was clearly to re-purpose biblical characters and material to create his own new theological picture, rather than in any sense to communicate the existing message of Scripture.

One strategy in building his new mosaic was to connect with the previous inspired Word by using well-known biblical names, but specifically as a means to establish *himself* as part of the prophetic tradition of the Jews and Christians:

Surah 4:163: ‘Lo! We inspire thee as We inspired Noah and he prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms.’

Creating the appearance of a direct connection to biblical prophets would have been important to Muhammad because his own claim to prophethood was challenged from the very beginning.⁹ Thus, connecting himself to a well-established prophetic lineage would have been greatly to Muhammad’s advantage both religiously and politically.¹⁰ In his book *The Muslim Jesus*, Tarif Khalidi points out:

The stories of the various prophets are not found together but are scattered throughout the Qur’anic text. ... Thus we may speak of a typology of Qur’anic prophets, a model of prophecy recognizable ... which proclaims that no distinction is, or should be, made among prophets and that true belief must include belief in all prophets (Qur’an 4:150).¹¹

8 All Qur’anic references are from *The Glorious Qur’an: Bi-lingual Edition* with English translation by Marmaduke Pickthall (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1996).

9 Montgomery W. Watt and Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur’an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

10 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010).

11 Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Saying and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

As Muhammad picked and chose the pieces for his mosaic, he placed them in such a way as to give him honorific association, in an attempt to obligate all good Jews and Christians to follow him as well.

Another attempt to transform biblical material was by invoking important personages while reshaping them in ways that support his emerging religion:

Surah 3:66: ‘Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet was he a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to Allah), and he was not of the idolaters.’

Here the man the Jews called their father (Jn 8:39), and whose fatherhood Paul extended to encompass all who have true faith (Rom 4:16), is cleaved away from both Jews and Christians and attached to Muhammad. This repurposing was an attempt to make Abraham ‘the prototype for all Muslims who follow because he lived his life in complete submission to God’s will’.¹²

Muhammad’s habit of revising biblical characters is most disturbing when done to the person of our Lord. Jesus is often mentioned in the Qur’an,¹³ but as with other material, Muhammad usually refashions him to fit his new theology. This begins subtly in the annunciation narrative:

Surah 3:45: ‘(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, [‘Isa] Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah).’

Here Muhammad makes a connection to the annunciation narrative, even calling Jesus the Messiah. However, as in many other cases, he is reworking the biblical material into something distinctly Qur’anic by reshaping Jesus into primarily being known as the ‘son of Mary’. He does this not only to connect himself to Christ as a fellow messenger, but perhaps more importantly to begin a process of undermining the doctrine of the Trinity. In another passage, Muhammad goes so far as to place an anti-trinitarian diatribe in the mouth of Jesus:

Surah 5:116: ‘And when Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Dost thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? He saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right.’

In other instances, Muhammad reworked Jesus’ own words to affirm his role as Allah’s messenger. Consider this biblical passage:

And he said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’ (Mk 4:26-29)¹⁴

In the Qur’anic version of this same thought, Muhammad (and his followers) replace Jesus as the one bringing the kingdom of God:

12 John Kaltner and Younus Y. Mizra, *The Bible and the Qur’an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

13 Arabic *‘Isa*, although some Christians object to identifying the Qur’anic *‘Isa* with the biblical Jesus.

14 All biblical citations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Surah 48:29: ‘Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves. . . . The mark of them is on their foreheads from the traces of their prostration. Such is their likeness in the Torah and their likeness in the Gospel—like as sown corn that sendeth forth its shoot and strengtheneth it and riseth firm upon its stalk, delighting the sowers.’

These and many other Qur’anic passages show a clear pattern of literary appropriation of biblical materials for Muhammad’s own purposes.¹⁵ Martin Accad puts it this way:

I believe that in its primary purpose, the Jesus metanarrative in the Qur’an was in fact designed as proof of Muḥammad’s prophethood, and only incidentally became a counter-narrative, not to the Gospels themselves, but to the Christians’ interpretation of their texts.¹⁶

However, Accad also contends that despite Muhammad’s counter-narrative, we should still use whatever parts of the Bible are embedded in the Qur’an as part of a respectful proclamation of the gospel:

The practice of the kerygmatic [proclamational] approach to Christian-Muslim interaction knows few boundaries. Every occasion is suitable to bear witness respectfully to Christ’s good news. A Christ follower using this approach will happily make use of the Qur’an and other elements of the Islamic tradition as a bridge to do so.¹⁷

Consistent with Accad, I would suggest that even though we reject Muhammad’s end product—that is, his theological revision of biblical material—we should still acknowledge the place from which he snatched these bits and pieces, because doing so may establish important connections with Muslims, the nature of which I will explore below.

It may help to recognize that Muhammad’s intentions were probably not exclusively religious, maybe not even primarily so. Many scholars think Muhammad’s purpose may have had as much to do with uniting the fractured Arab tribes into a powerful military force as with starting a new monotheistic religious movement. Some have written that in the light of historical context, the teaching of the Qur’an sounds a lot like a program aimed at uniting the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula with the goal of supplanting the political orders of the Byzantines and Persians.¹⁸ Not only does this perspective help us understand why Muhammad may have wanted to gather broken pieces, but it could possibly minimize the religious meaning of the pieces in his new assemblage.

15 Muhammad also drew from many other sources in his religious context, such as Zoroastrian thought. However, that is not particularly germane to the topic of this article.

16 Martin Accad, ‘Jesus, Muslims and the Qur’an: In Search for Kerygmatic Peacebuilding’, blog of Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019, <https://abtslebanon.org/2019/08/29/jesus-muslims-and-the-quran-in-search-for-kerygmatic-peacebuilding-2/>.

17 Martin Accad, *Sacred Misinterpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

18 Donner, Muhammad and the Believers.

This perspective sets the mosaic metaphor apart from the view that all religions have a primordial commonality due to man's search for God, an idea usually associated with J. H. Bavinck and more recently advocated by Daniel Strange, who writes:

Non-Christian religions are sovereignly directed, variegated and dynamic, collective human idolatrous responses to divine revelation behind which stand deceiving demonic forces. Being antithetically against yet parasitically dependent upon the truth of the Christian worldview, non-Christian religions are 'subversively fulfilled' in the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

Conceptualizing the Qur'an at least partly as a mosaic filled with pieces repurposed for political ends is a very different perspective from Strange's argument for a universal, 'subversively fulfilled' religious impetus. From this perspective, the Qur'an looks less like the words of a false religious prophet and more like those of a very religious, would-be military conqueror navigating a complex socio-religious environment. Yet we are still left with an important question: What did Muhammad use to fill in the gaps?

No matter how one understands Muhammad's goal for repurposing biblical material, it is obvious that those pieces do not fit together neatly. Determining the exact nature of this unique material is where we run into controversial and explosive territory.

What should we make of Muhammad personally?

Since at least medieval times, many Christians have imagined Muhammad in a manner similar to the demon-possessed false prophet portrayed in Dante's *Inferno*. One of the more recent, and very unfortunate, revivals of this image is found in *The Secrets of the Koran*,²⁰ by the otherwise fine missionary author Don Richardson. Islam as absolute evil, and Muhammad as the incarnation of that evil, often seem to linger at the edges of Christian thought.

While I cannot agree with this caricature of the Qur'an, it does beg a serious question. Was Jibril, that bright spirit who supposedly brought revelations to Muhammad, the same kind of angelic being as Paul wrote about?

And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. (1 Cor 2:14–15)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an *angel from heaven* should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (Col 1:6–8, emphasis added)

Muhammad's supposed revelations certainly distort his 'gospel' so that it is contrary to the one Paul preached. But how should this impact our view of the Qur'an, particularly if we recognize broken pieces of truth scattered through it? Even if we take

19 Daniel Strange, *Their Rock Is Not Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 42.

20 Don Richardson, *The Secrets of the Koran* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2008).

the view that Muhammad's ideas were seeds sown from the demonic realm (Mt 13:24–30), this demonic deception merely affirms his fallen humanity, since that seems to be part and parcel of man's broken condition (2 Cor 4:4; Rev 12:9a).

Here again, the mosaic metaphor helps us keep perspective. Even if it is truly demonic deception that fills in many of the blanks between truthful pieces of the mosaic, this does not change the fact that some of the surrounding material is authentically biblical. Or we might say that Muhammad took pieces from many sources, mixed them with his own ideas (perhaps even demonic ones), and created a new theology.

A careful reading of the Qur'an points to many broken biblical 'tiles' alongside the assortment of other pieces. Thus, Muhammad neither faithfully reproduced the original nor made his own completely unique piece; the resulting theology is truly a composite.

This reminds me of something that happened many years ago when I was teaching academic writing at a university in the Muslim world. A student who had come to Christ was being pressured by his uncle and financial benefactor to read the Qur'an. He asked me what I thought he should do, and I told him he had liberty to read it if that would ease the tension with his family. Another missionary who was also involved with his life was quite against this, but I assured him that everything would be fine, just wait and see. A few weeks later the student came up to both of us and said, 'Well, I read the Qur'an. All of it.' So I asked him: what did he think? His reply was insightful and proved that he had been paying attention in my writing classes: 'Muhammad was a plagiarizer, and a bad one at that. He took a lot of stuff from the Bible, but then he got most of it wrong.'

I imagine that some readers resonate with this basic idea while still pondering a couple of important questions:

- Is there enough residual truth from the Bible in Muhammad's mosaic to constitute an authentic connection to the original?
- And if there is, how might we go about using those bits and pieces of the truth?

A very contested space

The idea that Muhammad's religion can in any way prepare the way for the gospel touches on a sharp fault line in the evangelical world. Over 40 years ago, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization formally wrestled with this question. It identified five different attitudes held by Christians about the Qur'an, which can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The Qur'an should *never be used* in discussions with a Muslim, because using it implies that we accept it as inspired and are putting it on the same level as the Bible.
2. The Qur'an should be studied, but only to help us to *know and appreciate what Muslims believe*, and to enable us to learn Muslim terminology.
3. The Qur'an should be *used against itself*, to demonstrate that it is self-contradictory. Such a polemical use of the Qur'an will show its weakness and create a hunger for something better.

4. The Qur'an should be *used as a starting point*; e.g. the many verses that speak about Jesus and other biblical characters can be used to point to the biblical version of these same stories.
5. The Qur'an can be *used as a source of truth*. Our recognition of the truths which the Qur'an does contain makes the Muslim much less defensive and more open to reading the New Testament.²¹

While this list is a bit of a simplification of more nuanced positions, it does give us a good view of the range of evangelical views of the Qur'an. As such, it provides a context in which to discuss some of the missiological postures that disagree with the basic premise of the mosaic metaphor—namely, that the Qur'an can play a constructive role in our evangelistic approach to Muslims.

A number of fine missiologists argue that Islam and Christianity are so fundamentally different, at the theological and worldview level, that it would be wrong to use the Qur'an, in any positive light, as a part of our witness. The literature on this topic is quite extensive; therefore, I will attempt only to identify and briefly address the deeper issues that undergird certain views.

John Span is a missionary veteran and well-known critic of Muslim-idiom translations (MITs) of the Bible.²² In his study of John Calvin's views with regard to finding truth in other religions, he explored a number of more contextualized approaches to the Qur'an. In this category, he includes the works of Kenneth Cragg, Fouad Accad and Phil Parshall, as well as the findings of the Lausanne committees of 1980 and 1995. His summary explains why he considers these flawed approaches: 'I would suggest that all these programs have failed to adequately wrestle with the entire worldview in which a sacred text like the Qur'an finds itself.'²³

Here Span touches on a common concern expressed by opponents of contextualized approaches: that they do not adequately take into account the differences in worldview. Other examples of this position include Adam Simnowitz²⁴ as well as Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham.²⁵ They argue that the worldview of the Qur'an and that of the Bible are too far apart for the former to be used in communication about the latter. While I agree that the Qur'an and Bible present different worldviews,²⁶ the mosaic metaphor does not lead to the same conclusion because it

21 Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 'Christian Witness among Muslims', Lausanne Occasional Paper 13, Report of the Consultation on World Evangelization, Mini-Consultation on Reaching Muslims, held in Pattaya, Thailand on 16–27 June 2018.

22 MITs are a kind of dynamic-equivalence Bible translation that uses expressions associated with Islam, rather than with Christianity, in an attempt to more accurately translate biblical meanings for Muslim audiences.

23 John Span, 'John Calvin's Views of "the Turks" and of Finding Truth in Non-Biblical Sacred Texts', unpublished thesis, https://academia.edu/70572512/John_Calvin_s_views_of_the_Turks_and_of_Finding_Truth_in_Non_Biblical_Sacred_Texts.

24 Adam Simnowitz (ed.), *Muslim Idiom Translation: Assessing So-called Scripture Translation for Muslim Audiences with a Look into Its Origins in Eugene A. Nida's Theories of Dynamic Equivalence and Cultural Anthropology* (Columbia, SC: Columbia International University Press, 2015).

25 Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (eds.), *Islam and the Bible: Questioning Muslim Idiom Translations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2023).

26 The idea of the Qur'an as bits and pieces drawn from many origins perhaps argues against the possibility that it can present a single unified worldview, but that issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

is rooted in the view that as living, breathing human beings, individual Muslims cannot possibly be synonymous with a religious abstraction such as Islam. Furthermore, to believe that all Muslims share the same worldview would be akin to believing the same thing about all who claim to be Christians. But that claim would imply that differences in language or culture, sectarian divides, and gaps between devout and nominal levels of commitment do not have a meaningful impact on a person's worldview.

I could argue that this position is self-evidently wrong, but I do not need to do so, because the fact that all Muslims do not share a common worldview is supported by empirical research. In 2012, the Pew Forum conducted a survey of 38,000 Muslims in 39 countries²⁷ concerning their beliefs and practices. The study did indeed find some key issues on which the vast majority of Muslims agree,²⁸ but there were also significant differences concerning many beliefs and practices. Examples include the belief in angels,²⁹ the legitimacy of visiting shrines,³⁰ and belief in the imminent return of Isa (Jesus).³¹ Furthermore, the wide diversity of thought uncovered by this study encompassed a question that is particularly relevant to the present topic: how Muslims understand the Qur'an itself. Survey responses affirming the Qur'an as literal truth varied across countries, from a low of 50 percent to a high of 90 percent.

These findings hardly paint a picture of a shared theological worldview.³² Therefore, it is highly problematic to use concerns about a 'Qur'anic worldview' supposedly shared by all Muslims as an objection to using the Qur'an in Christian witness.

Another major criticism of using contextualized approaches, such as those encouraged by the mosaic metaphor, concerns the difference between the theology of the Bible and that of the Qur'an. Several scholars have adopted this position, including Sam Scorloff,³³ Georges Housney,³⁴ and Mark Durie. One extensively researched example is Durie's recent book, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes: Investigations into the Genesis of a Religion*.³⁵ Durie summarized his position in a Lausanne occasional paper:

In my book, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes*, I explored an alternative thesis, that there is a deep theological disconnect between the Bible and the Qur'an, too deep to sustain the view that Islam arose out of Christianity or Judaism in any meaningful sense. Yes, the Qur'an incorporates biblical (and extra-biblical)

27 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity* (2012), <https://pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/08/the-worlds-muslims-full-report.pdf>.

28 The belief in Allah and Muhammad as his messenger was almost universal, with regional averages ranging from 85 to 100 percent.

29 Country averages ranged from 42 to 99 percent who confessed belief in angels.

30 Country averages ranged from 4 to 99 percent who responded positively regarding this practice.

31 Country averages ranged from 3 to 67 percent who confessed this belief.

32 For examples of a case-study approach to this diversity, see Gene Daniels and Warrick Farah, eds., *Margins of Islam* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2018).

33 Sam Scorloff, *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims* (Upper Darby, PA: Middle East Resources, 2006).

34 Georges Housney, *Engaging Islam* (Denver, CO: Treeline Publishers, 2010).

35 Mark Durie, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes: Investigations into the Genesis of a Religion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

Christian and Jewish materials, but it repurposes them to serve a radically different theological agenda: the Qur'an marches to the beat of its own theological drum.³⁶

I do not disagree that Islam 'marches to the beat of its own theological drum'; however, I do dispute the conclusion that this fact renders the text unusable for Christian witness. The reason is simple: it is not the religion of Islam that we seek to engage with the gospel, but the people who identify with it to one degree or another. As for the question of to what degree Muslims identify with the doctrines of their religion, a Muslim friend and Islamic scholar once explained it in this way: 'Anyone born of a Muslim parent is a Muslim. But a person is Islamic when the Qur'an is a *sunnah*, a path of life.'

How many Muslims are truly Islamic in this sense, or to what degree they are, is far beyond the scope of this article. However, this discussion does point to a real risk. If we adopt a missiological approach that emphasizes opposition to Qur'anic theology, we may miss important ways to connect with the many Muslims who are not actually Islamic in the sense just described.

The mosaic metaphor helps us shift our focus away from the sharp lines of theological differences, because metaphors are by nature imprecise—and that is a good thing. Although it may seem counterintuitive, research in cognitive psychology has found that precise language is not always the best way to communicate well. Studies of how people actually talk reveal an abundance of what we might call 'imprecision' in the form of metaphors, and they suggest that this very imprecision helps people understand new ideas,³⁷ the mechanisms of which I will explore shortly.

Threading a very narrow needle

This leaves us with a tricky passage to navigate with Muslim friends. Christians often worry that if they affirm anything found in the Qur'an, they will seem to be affirming Muhammad's prophetic mission. But many years ago, Lebanese pastor Fouad Accad offered another way, via his own metaphor in the book *Building Bridges*. He invited us to find points of connection with Muslims by recognizing the places where the Qur'an and the Bible share common material. This allows a space to connect with them without recognizing Muhammad's own words as a source of truth.

Again, the mosaic metaphor is helpful here for clarification. A person can point out the designs present on specific pieces of broken pottery without commenting on the larger overall pattern of the mosaic. They are simply acknowledged as recognizable pieces that have been broken away from something else. In the case we are considering, those pieces have their own meaning as isolated units, not just as part of the theology represented by the Qur'an as a whole.

David Greenlee points in this direction when he uses the term 'congruence' to refer to the same basic idea as Fouad Accad's 'bridges'. He says that people from non-Christian cultures need a connection 'between the old and the new, between the

36 Durie, 'What Is Islam's Relationship to Christianity?'

37 Paul H. Thibodeau, Rose K. Hendricks and Lera Boroditsky, 'How Linguistic Metaphor Scaffolds Reasoning', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 21, no. 11 (2017): 852–63.

former faith and the set of values in Christianity'.³⁸ The pieces of biblical truth arranged in Muhammad's mosaic can serve as this connection, specifically as emotional touchstones to make the gospel feel less alien to Muslims. The point is not so much to convey propositional truths as to create an emotional passageway for them to move across as the Holy Spirit draws them to Christ.

I believe this is the kind of 'bridge building' envisioned by Fouad Accad. It is not the work of a structural engineer drawing blueprints or welding parts together, but the building of emotional bridges that draw Muslim hearts, rather than arguing with their heads. Unfortunately, his fine work seems lost to many because of the pain of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as the bitterness of ideological debates in the mission community.

Perhaps Timothy Tennent was thinking along the same line when he wrote that the emergence of Muhammad's religion represented 'a potential *preparatio evangelica*, which may yet serve as a bridge for Islamic peoples to cross over and receive the Christian gospel'.³⁹ Here Tennent is clearly talking about the emotional side of man, because he defines *preparatio evangelica* as 'God's work in the pre-Christian *heart* that prepares a person to receive and respond to the gospel message' (emphasis added).⁴⁰

The bits and pieces of truth scattered through Muhammad's mosaic don't have enough substance, even collectively, to convey the gospel. But they can soften a Muslim's emotional soil so that he or she may more readily receive the Word of God. This is really no different from God using tragedy or other of life's circumstances as a means to prepare the human heart. This view of emotion's role in decision making is also supported by recent insights from the field of psychology.

Emotional reasoning

Perhaps due to overly emotional forms of evangelism that have been common in the past, many evangelicals today seem to emphasize rationality and the role of propositional truth in communicating the gospel. While this may be in some ways a helpful corrective, we must not lose sight of the role the emotion plays in human thinking. New advances in neuroscience, based on research using brain scans, shows that we do not make decisions solely with the logical rational side of our minds, but that our emotions are a constant, integral part of the decision-making process. Theoretical physicist Leonard Mlodinow writes:

While rational thought allows us to draw logical conclusions based on our goals and relevant data, emotion operates at a more abstract level—it affects the importance we assign to the goals and the weight we give to the data. It forms a framework for our assessments that is not only constructive but necessary. Simply put, emotion helps us judge and place value on the facts.⁴¹

38 David Greenlee, *One Cross, One Way, Many Journeys: Thinking Again about Conversion* (Atlanta: Authentic Press, 2006).

39 Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 44.

40 Tennent, *Theology in the Context*, 282.

41 Leonard Mlodinow, *Emotional: How Feelings Shape Our Thinking* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2022), xi.

When people are making a decision, they do more than drawing their conclusions based on rational, intellectual deductions; they also use emotional reasoning. This part of the mental process helps them decide how much weight to place on the various facts with which they are wrestling. Thus, when Muslims hear familiar words or phrases from the Qur'an associated with a gospel presentation, they often intuitively give greater weight to that message. Of course, this is not always the case. Some Muslims may have a negative emotional association with the Qur'an; for instance, if they have been religiously abused or live in austere fundamentalist contexts, connecting emotionally to the Qur'an may be counterproductive to gospel witness. But for many Muslims, perhaps the majority, the words of the Qur'an are simply part of the fabric of their lives and thus carry a reassuring familiarity.

For some evangelicals the idea of connecting to the fabric of a Muslim's prior cultural experience will raise the red flag of syncretism, but I would argue that it is more productive to frame this approach as a matter of normal discipleship. All converts, from whatever background, bring existing knowledge into their new faith in Christ, and often a significant amount of that background information is inconsistent with Scripture. Rather than rejecting everything they already know, the antidote to syncretism is to help them renew their minds by the washing of the water of the Word of God (Eph 5:26). This is not to dismiss the possibility of syncretism, which is very real, but to place it in a more helpful and biblical context.

Furthermore, reflecting on Mlodinow's assertion that emotion is an integral part of decision making may cast additional light on why many evangelicals object to connecting the Qur'an to gospel witness. Our love of Christ is rightly offended when Muhammad usurps the place of our Lord Jesus in Qur'anic theology. Therefore, could it be that *our* emotions are playing a negative role in our decision that there is no redemptive value in the words of the Qur'an?

When we present the gospel to Muslims through connecting with the bits and pieces of the Bible that are embedded in the Qur'an, the door is open for their minds to be renewed with accurate biblical meanings. Otherwise, we are left with presenting the gospel as part of a completely alien worldview, which raises the emotional stakes for any Muslim who is considering the gospel. The history of mission shows us that some Muslims have been able to jump over such a very high bar, but is it really necessary to make embracing Christ so hard? This question leads to a theological reason for recognizing the authentic biblical pieces in Muhammad's mosaic.

As the early church wrestled with the practical details of a similar enormous gospel leap—from being a Jewish movement to welcoming gentiles—James made this profound observation: 'It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God' (Acts 15:19 NIV). No one believes that James was calling for the early church to make a doctrinal compromise. James was advocating for the church to intentionally seek legitimate ways to minimize the barriers that could keep the 'religious other'⁴² from receiving the gospel. Of course, there may be contention about what is a legitimate approach, but surely his words

42 For an excellent treatment of this topic, see Martin Accad and Jonathan Andrews (eds.), *The Religious Other: A Biblical Understanding of Islam, the Qur'an and Muhammad* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2020).

should give us pause before we adamantly reject the possibility of building bridges between the Qur'an and the Bible.

Furthermore, Paul seems to have taken James' words very much to heart. Even when dealing with the evil of idolatry in Athens, he still chose an irenic approach that connected his message to Greek religious literature (Acts 17). Considering the harshness of Old Testament rhetoric against idolatry, it is somewhat astonishing that a Pharisee like Paul could make any positive association at all! He certainly was not connecting the two theologically. Isn't it possible that he was simply trying to establish some emotional connection with his listeners' affection for their ancient Greek poets?

If we think only in terms of propositional truth via intellectual reasoning, we will focus on theological issues like the repeated inaccuracies of Muhammad's repurposed biblical stories or his distorted theological worldview. But this hinders us from seeing these bits and pieces as what they can be—points of emotional contact for the Muslim heart. These scattered portions of Muhammad's mosaic can serve to lessen the Bible's foreignness and help Muslims give greater weight to the gospel as they wrestle with its implications for their own lives.

Conclusion

Using metaphors to understand spiritual realities is as old as God telling Abraham that he would give him descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky or the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:17). Thus, using a metaphor to shape how we think about Islam is quite solid ground. I realize that the mosaic metaphor would not be acceptable to our Muslim friends as a description of the Qur'an, yet it still holds great promise for us as messengers of the gospel.

Thinking of Islam as a mosaic made from pieces of other religious ideas frees us to recognize whatever bits of truth Muhammad repurposed from the Bible, without agreeing that he personally received any divine revelation, and while still rejecting the worldview of the Qur'an. Perhaps most importantly, instead of arguing about these biblical fragments and allusions as if they are propositional truths for us to use in appealing to the rational intellect, the mosaic metaphor presents them as emotional touchstones that can open Muslim hearts to the gospel.

Opening the Scrolls: Understanding the ‘Cries’ of Federico G. Villanueva

Francis Jr. S. Samdao

The frequent propensity for a triumphalistic attitude towards spirituality often obscures the function of lament as a necessary, biblical response to life’s struggles. This article summarizes the extensive contributions on the topic of lament by Federico Villanueva, a prominent Filipino scholar who has become unusually transparent about both his personal and church experiences.

Theologian Stephen Pardue, who teaches in Asia, has noted the abundance of insightful literature produced by scholars from the Majority World. Evangelicals should celebrate, he says, because theologians from the Global South are bringing fresh perspectives concerning Scripture and cultural realities. However, their works are not always widely accessible, especially because they are often written in local languages and published in regional spheres. Moreover, even though some publishers (notably Langham) value and promote such resources, readers uninitiated into the existential issues underlying these works can struggle to interpret them due to their lack of necessary contextual understanding.¹

I cannot solve those problems singlehandedly, but I do hope to play a small role in bringing the insights of Majority World Christian thinkers, especially my compatriots from the Philippines, to a broader audience. In this paper, I highlight a gifted Filipino scholar, Federico G. Villanueva, and his observations on important aspects of being human. Villanueva offers particularly significant contributions regarding the transforming influence of lamentation. He combines superb Old Testament scholarship with Philippine realities to discuss the importance of emotions, processing our feelings, embracing our situatedness and appreciating our limitations. I hope that readers from various backgrounds and cultures will benefit from Villanueva’s reflections on the power and implications of lamentation.

The ‘lament guy’ in Philippine evangelicalism

Villanueva has served as co-director of biblical studies at the Alliance Graduate School.² He is currently a regional commissioning editor at Langham Publishing and

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1 Stephen T. Pardue, *Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 3.

2 Federico G. Villanueva, ‘Reading the Psalms with Asian Resources’, *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 17, no. 1 (March 2003): 35; personal conversation, 6 December 2023.

coordinates ‘scholar care’ for Langham-funded scholars in Asia. He is also a part-time professor at the Loyola School of Theology and Asia Graduate School of Theology in Manila.³ He was a contributing author and general editor for the Asia Bible Commentary series.⁴

Villanueva has a diverse background and rich experience in writing, education, leadership and pastoral work. Before going to the United Kingdom for his PhD, he pastored a church in Manila. In his pastoral ministry, he dealt with people’s real-life problems such as sickness, flooding and the most common issue raised at prayer meetings—financial struggles. In this ministerial setting, Villanueva felt led to study lamentations in the book of Psalms.⁵

After finishing his PhD in Old Testament studies at Trinity College, University of Bristol, he returned to the Philippines to become a seminary professor, but he did not stop doing direct ministry. Every Tuesday, he ministered to government employees at the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, leading a Bible study during their lunch break. To support his family, he also preached in various churches, sometimes delivering sermons four times on a single Sunday. Moreover, Villanueva applied his scholarship by teaching discipleship classes on Sunday afternoons.⁶

Mental struggle and the need for lament

At any time, an estimated 3.3 percent of the Philippine population struggles with depressive symptoms. A staggering 30 percent of Filipino youth exhibited such symptoms in 2008, and the total number of Filipinos grappling with depression has increased recently.⁷ As a result, suicide has become a significant public health issue, now ranking as the fourth most common primary cause of death for individuals age 15 to 29 and third among teenage girls. In 2020, the Philippine Statistical Authority (PSA) documented 3,529 instances of intentional self-harm resulting in death.⁸

Lamentation plays a crucial role in the Old Testament Psalms. It reflects the psalmists’ bravery and boldness in communicating their plight and their urgent requests to God.⁹ Villanueva was drawn to the Psalms partly by his own experience of depression: ‘Ironically, my dark night came in my time of success. I had finished my PhD, and my dissertation was accepted for publication. But there I was,

3 Langham Publishing, ‘Federico G. Villanueva’, https://bit.ly/author_7508.

4 Federico G. Villanueva, ‘The Calling of Asian Christian Scholars: A Biblical Scholar’s Perspective’, *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 22, nos. 1–2 (March–September 2018): 7.

5 Federico G. Villanueva, ‘The Transforming Power of Lament: Reading the Psalms from a Filipino Context’, in *The Gospel in Culture: Contextualization Issues through Asian Eyes*, ed. Melba Padilla Maggay (Manila: OMF Literature, 2013), 229.

6 Villanueva, ‘The Calling of Asian Christian Scholars’, 12–13.

7 Von B. Guintu and Theresa M. Chua, ‘Major Depressive Disorder’, in *Beyond DSM: Casebook in Abnormal Psychology and Mental Health*, ed. Maria Isabel Melgar, Cherie Ann Lo, Marika Melgar and Anne Marie Topacio (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2018), 26.

8 Sherna G. Bangalan, Marie Eugenie M. Otones and Arsenio M. Escalona, ‘Risk and Protective Factors of Suicidal Behavior among College Students in Pampanga, Philippines’, *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry* 24, no. 4 (10 April 2023); 1, <https://aseanjournalofpsychiatry.org/articles/protective-and-risk-factors-of-suicidal-behavior-among-college-students-in-pampanga-philippines.pdf>.

9 Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), xv.

depressed. I myself could not understand why I felt so alone and afraid.¹⁰ Rarely is a scholar (especially a Filipino)¹¹ so willing to put this experience in writing for public consumption. Villanueva says that at times, particularly around the Christmas season, he wished he could not exist. He reports suffering from extended periods of melancholic mood.¹²

Aside from his personal experiences, Villanueva notes the lack of lamentation in many evangelical churches in the Philippines. He says, 'When I was pastoring a church in Manila, we would gather in church Sunday after Sunday and sing songs to the Lord—mostly praise songs. From time to time, some terrible difficulty would strike our members—sickness, some serious problem, some form of suffering—and yet our songs remained the same.'¹³ On one occasion, during the week before Villanueva was to serve as guest preacher, a Chinese vessel hit a boat of 22 Filipino fishermen, which left them adrift at sea. Villanueva hoped that the church's liturgy would mention or indirectly reference this event, but to his disappointment the church service included no mention of the victims.¹⁴

In a 2021 article in this journal, Walter Riggans has similarly observed the inadequate appreciation of lament in worship service. For him, 'Much of our hymnody today, especially what we commonly call "Christian songs", is at risk of losing a highly significant aspect of our fulness in worship—namely, our ability to deal with those times when life is terribly hard and faith is a genuine struggle. Are these not also times when worship is appropriate? Should we not be able to embrace one another in the solidarity of sadness and loss as well as in times of joy and spontaneity?'¹⁵

On 26 September 2009, Typhoon Ondoy (international name Ketsana) wreaked havoc on the Philippine island of Luzon, destroying houses and villages. It claimed hundreds of lives while submerging many parts of Metro Manila.¹⁶ Villanueva's brother Jojo, with his wife and two young daughters, was trapped in their home as the floodwaters entered. Jojo was desperately calling for help. The family hastily

10 Federico G. Villanueva, 'The "Dark Night of the Soul", the Lament Psalms, and Juan De La Cruz', in *Walking with God: Christian Spirituality in the Asian Context*, ed. Charles R. Ringma and Karen Hollenbeck-Wuest (Manila: OMF Literature, 2014), 134–35.

11 Embedded in Filipino cultures, particularly in the lowland Philippines, is the concept of *hiya*, translated in English as shame. Filipino psychologist Virgilio G. Enriquez argues that the proper translation is propriety because *hiya* is connected with *dangal* (dignity). There are two components of *hiya*: external and internal. Virgilio G. Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience* (Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press, 2016), 57, 82. In the case of Villanueva, he is opening himself (his being—the internal dimension) to the public (social) dimension of *hiya*.

12 Federico Villanueva, 'Can the Bible Teach Us Anything about Depression?' Unbelievable Faith Explored, 17 November 2023, <https://bit.ly/can-the-bible-teach-us-anything-about-depression>.

13 Federico G. Villanueva, *It's OK to Be Not OK: Preaching the Lament Psalms* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Preaching Resources, 2017), 2.

14 Federico G. Villanueva, 'Worship and Justice', in *Faith and Bayan: Evangelical Christian Engagement in the Philippine Context*, ed. Lorenzo C. Bautista, Aldrin M. Peñamora, and Federico G. Villanueva (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022), 13.

15 Walter Riggans, 'Can We Not Mourn with Those Who Mourn?' *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, no. 2 (May 2021): 141, <https://bit.ly/ERT-45-2>.

16 Sarah Jayne Olan, 'Looking Back: The Records of Ondoy', *Rappler*, 26 September 2014, <https://rappler.com/environment/disasters/70240-ondoy-records/>.

relocated most of their possessions to the second floor, hoping to keep what they could. Eventually, Jojo broke a window, tied a rope around their grille and that of a neighbouring house, and carried an infant and a seven-year-old across the rope at great risk. That harrowing event affected Federico Villanueva deeply. During heavy rainstorms, he has experienced panic attacks. A week after the typhoon, he preached in a small church. He was saddened that the worship leader proceeded as if nothing had happened. Villanueva thought there should be a place in the liturgy where those in attendance could reflect on their recent experiences and process their feelings, but there was none.¹⁷

Because of the absence of lament in the worship services of many Filipino evangelical churches, we encounter a predicament. Although our experiences and emotions may drive us to lament, our truncated understanding of spirituality and theology discourages us from approaching God with our toughest question: ‘God, why?’¹⁸

‘Lament is an identifiable genre that, at its core, is prayer—a distraught prayer to God for him to change something that the praying person experiences as distressing, saddening, or oppressive.’¹⁹ As Villanueva has pointed out, this kind of prayer is lacking in many evangelical worship services. Emotions such as loneliness, fear, despair, complaint and anger, especially if aimed at God, are not accepted as part of living the Christian life faithfully.²⁰ Why might this be? Perhaps our focus on the spiritual leads us to overlook our emotional and mental struggles. Or perhaps we do not think it is acceptable to bring our negative emotions to God.²¹ Additionally, we often seem unable to integrate our daily challenges with our Sunday spirituality. That is a big problem in the Philippines, which is regularly threatened by earthquakes, typhoons and volcanoes as well as by personal struggles with health and finances.

In such a context, turning to the book of Psalms should be helpful because it contains similar expressions of anger, frustration and confusion.²² Moreover, we would do well to learn from the psalmists that feeling low does not always indicate a

17 Villanueva, *It’s OK to Be Not OK*, 1–2. According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), at least 20 typhoons pass through the country yearly. Government of the Philippines, ‘Tropical Cyclone Information’, <https://www.pagasa.dost.gov.ph/climate/tropical-cyclone-information>.

18 See Federico G. Villanueva, ‘My God, Why? Natural Disasters and Lament in the Philippine Context’, in *Why, O God? Disaster, Resiliency, and the People of God*, ed. Athena E. Gorospe, Charles Ringma and Karen Hollenbeck-Wuest (Manila: OMF Literature, 2017), 88, 90–91.

19 D. Keith Campbell, ‘Lament in James and Its Significance for the Church’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 1 (2017): 125, https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/60/60-1/JETS_60-1_125-138_Campbell.pdf.

20 For example, Villanueva admits, ‘I remember the night after Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines, I felt the words of Jesus in my heart, and so I posted them on Facebook in Tagalog: ‘*Diyos ko, Diyos ko, bakit mo kami pinabayaan?*’ (‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken us?’). But after posting that, I felt uncomfortable, and I wanted to remove it. Why are we not comfortable asking, “God, why?”’ Villanueva, ‘My God, Why?’ 88.

21 See Federico G. Villanueva, ‘Why the Church Needs to Learn How to Complain and Not Just “Trust and Obey”’, in *Faith and Bayan: Evangelical Christian Engagement in the Philippine Context*, ed. Lorenzo C. Bautista, Aldrin M. Peñamora, and Federico G. Villanueva (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022).

22 Riggans, ‘Can We Not Mourn with Those Who Mourn?’ 146.

lack of faith or distance from God. Rather, it may be the opposite; lamentation can signify a growing connection with God. Walter Brueggemann claims that lament is essential for the people of God who willingly embrace their needs and vulnerabilities in the presence of their loving Creator.²³

The power of lament: accepting pain and raising questions

Villanueva is aware of the contemporary discussion of the shift in the laments in the book of Psalms. The usual trajectory is from lament to praise, which tells us that the former will *surely* change to the latter (a happy ending). Villanueva challenges the traditional view of the trajectory of lament, which is called 'certainty of a hearing'. That technical concept is rooted in the assumption that lamentation will always evolve into praise. Scholars are puzzled by the sudden change in mood, prompting them to search for an explanation. The common belief suggests that the possibility of change in mood lies in the existence of a prophet who stands and delivers a divine revelation to a lamenter. The person receiving the message is uplifted, encouraged and empowered, causing that individual to shift from sorrow to praise.

Villanueva argues that something is missing in that theory. The problem lies in the assumption that all laments inevitably progress into praise, neglecting the possibility that after experiencing the state of praise, one may shift back into lamentation.²⁴ In his dissertation, he argues for the possibility of a movement from lament to praise and then a reversal to lament again.²⁵ He also observes that Psalm 88 starts with lament, continues in lament and culminates in lament.²⁶ He notices that there are more psalms dedicated to lamentation than to praise. In fact, lament stands out as the most prevalent type of psalm.²⁷ Thus, we must explore ways to integrate lamentation into our lived experiences and cultural situatedness.²⁸

The act of lamentation served as a distinctive method by which Israel vocalized their existential issues in life. The book of Psalms is tangible evidence of this reality. It shows the courage of the Israelites in communicating their faith and openly acknowledging their struggles and problems. Their prayers demanded an answer from God, recognizing him as the only one who could solve their problems.²⁹ But such is not the case only for Israelites, because we are also called to be courageous in communicating our struggles before God.

Near the end of his dissertation, Villanueva explains, 'It is remarkable that Lamentations 3—a poem that is not aimed primarily for encouragement—becomes in the end a source of encouragement through its expressions of pain, agony and suffering engraved in its very words and overall structure. It brings encouragement

23 Walter Brueggemann, 'Necessary Conditions of a Good Loud Lament', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25 (2003): 27.

24 Villanueva, 'The Transforming Power of Lament', 230–31.

25 Federico G. Villanueva, 'The "Uncertainty of a Hearing": A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1–2, 243.

26 Villanueva, 'The "Dark Night of the Soul"', 133.

27 Federico G. Villanueva, *Psalms 1–72: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2016), 2.

28 Villanueva, 'My God, Why?' 94.

29 Logan C. Jones, 'The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow', *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 61, nos. 1–2 (2007): 49.

by embracing the very darkness and struggle which we ourselves have sometimes wished were not there.³⁰ Villanueva sees lament as an important aspect of life and a necessary factor in Christian growth. For him, lament can serve as ‘a means of grace’ when one is struggling.³¹ He realizes that lament can serve as a hope: ‘For centuries, great thinkers, theologians, and philosophers have tried to resolve the question of suffering. I think one answer to suffering is lament. The lamenting is in itself a sign of hope. We may never find a solution to our individual suffering or to the suffering of this world. But God has provided us, in the lament, a way of coping with our sufferings.’³² Aside from healing, lamenting before God helps us grow.

Villanueva’s passion for reminding Christians of the reality and power of lament comes from his pastoral ministry and personal experiences concerning depression. He reflects, ‘I look at myself and wonder at how I have managed all these years to continue. I have survived challenges in my ministry, in my studies, and in my marriage. I haven’t emerged unscathed. While amidst these challenges, I felt, at times, as if I had been asked to run or walk without feet, to carry a load with my back broken, and to hold a heavy burden with feeble hands.’³³ Lamentation may embolden us to face our finitude and current struggles. By acknowledging it, we may realize that we are welcome to present these sufferings to God so we can gain strength, courage and grace to embark on the essential journey toward resolution. This is not to romanticize lament but to recognize it as a starting point and a necessary factor in the healing process.³⁴ For Villanueva, an essential factor in grasping the Psalms lies in connecting with the emotions expressed by the psalmists—whether happiness, joy, sadness, fear, frustration or grief. Indeed, some psalms can be understood deeply when readers are also in tears.³⁵ Lamenting affirms an essential part of our creaturehood.

A sensitive pastoral theology for those who suffer encourages them to mourn, to also praise God, but then to lament again if necessary.³⁶ When we are struggling, depressed and disheartened, it is alright to explore this ‘dark night’ rather than making a futile effort to suppress it. Villanueva encourages us to reflect on Psalm 88 for this reason. When we go through painful struggles, we ought not to deny the pain. It is better to acknowledge our confusion. It is appropriate to aim questions at God, and it is essential to resist the urge to make things appear better than they are.³⁷ Lament rebukes our tendency to provide a quick answer to our sufferings and struggles in life.³⁸ As such, in contrast to ignoring our struggles and always offering rational answers, lamentation (as in Psalm 120) can serve as a moving and potent prayer expressed to God amid tough circumstances.³⁹ Some reasons for calamities

30 Villanueva, *Uncertainty of a Hearing*, 246.

31 Villanueva, ‘The “Dark Night of the Soul”’, 134.

32 Villanueva, *It’s OK to Be Not OK*, 123.

33 Villanueva, *It’s OK to Be Not OK*, 19.

34 Villanueva, ‘The Transforming Power of Lament’, 242–43.

35 Villanueva, ‘The Transforming Power of Lament’, 234.

36 Villanueva, ‘The Transforming Power of Lament’, 230–31.

37 Villanueva, ‘The “Dark Night of the Soul”’, 134.

38 Villanueva, ‘The “Dark Night of the Soul”’, 134.

39 Federico G. Villanueva, ‘From Thanksgiving to Lament: The Shape of Psalm 120’, *Vetus Testamentum* 70 (2020): 495.

are beyond our complete understanding. Therefore, in times of crises or calamities, it is crucial to restrain oneself from offering logical explanations like those of Job's three friends. Such restraint is beneficial because it implies sensitivity towards the hurting.

Our best model is Jesus Christ because he is 'the embodiment of the lamenter'.⁴⁰ For example, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus 'fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father", he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me"' (Mk 14:35–36b). During his crucifixion, Mark tells us, 'At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. On the cross, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"' (Mk 15:33–34). As Keith Campbell writes, 'When the psalmist prays, "O God, why have you rejected us forever?" he is lamenting (Ps 74:1); when Jesus, quoting Psalm 22:1, asks his heavenly Father, "Why have you forsaken me?" he is lamenting (Mark 15:34)'.⁴¹

Villanueva does not negate the importance of joy, gratitude and celebration as responses to God. However, many Filipino evangelicals view these as default reactions and do not consider lamentation as a possible reaction that could also honour God.⁴² He explains: 'It is not wrong for the church to be a place of celebration. There are many reasons why the church should celebrate. It is when the church is being celebrative all the time, day in and day out, that it becomes a problem. For when the church does not learn how to live with "sadness, brokenness, and questioning," it will not learn how to respond when tragic events occur'.⁴³

Villanueva finds it unfortunate that Filipino evangelicals have often suppressed what most perceive as negative emotions, and that there is little space for crying, mourning, weeping or even complaining in worship services.⁴⁴ Perhaps it is hard to envision a Sunday worship that incorporates complaining, but it is possible. The pastor may address this concept during a sermon, explaining that such an attitude is not entirely wrong. The minister could include a dedicated time for lamenting during pastoral prayer (some churches call it 'the church at prayer'). Additionally, members can share their frustrations and questions about a crisis with their pastor before the official start of the worship service. As Villanueva explains, 'I have been attending church worship for almost five decades now, but I have not heard a single sermon on the importance of complaining. If there is anything on complaining, the emphasis is on its prohibition'.⁴⁵

40 D. Keith Campbell, *Of Heroes and Villains: The Influence of the Psalmic Lament on Synoptic Characterization* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 14. See also Federico G. Villanueva, 'What Is the Father Like "in Heaven"? The Lord's Prayer and Psalm 82', in *Ama Namin: The Lord's Prayer in Philippine Life and Spirituality*, ed. Timoteo D. Gener and Jason Richard Tan (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2023), 50; Villanueva, 'Worship and Justice', 22.

41 Campbell, 'Lament in James and Its Significance', 126. Note that God himself is an emotional being: 'In Psalm 82, God is not only angry; he is lamenting. ... God is angry when the rich who are wicked are shown partiality (v. 2) while the poor and vulnerable are oppressed and denied their privileges.' Villanueva, 'What Is the Father Like', 43, 44.

42 Villanueva, *It's OK to Be Not OK*, 26.

43 Villanueva, *It's OK to Be Not OK*, 26.

44 Villanueva, *It's OK to Be Not OK*, 5.

45 Villanueva, 'Why the Church Needs to Learn', 77.

It is essential to have ‘room for our “NOT OK” experiences in the presence of God. Reading the book of Psalms pastorally allows us to hear the cries of David and the Israelites and to see in their laments something of our own sufferings.’⁴⁶ This might be a challenge for Filipinos (and others), according to Villanueva. He asserts that Filipinos in general do not question or complain about the authority granted to the elderly; as a result, questioning or complaining to God seems even more inappropriate.⁴⁷ Furthermore, our culture often encourages us to suppress our feelings. For example, we often hear that men should not cry. Even when a loved one dies, the patriarch or the eldest man in the family, unwilling to exhibit vulnerability, will suppress his feelings to show that he is strong. For Villanueva, this is perhaps one reason why men have a higher mortality rate from heart attacks than women.⁴⁸ Add to this the Filipino perspective that tends to romanticize resiliency. We ought to remember, says Filipino scholar Melba Maggay, that even if we have been ‘extraordinarily resilient in the face of calamities, ... there is a limit to our carrying capacity for suffering.’⁴⁹ It is healthy to learn from the context of the Old Testament, where lamenters bring to God a question, a distressed complaint, and a prayer for change in a real perceived crisis.⁵⁰

The reason why we can and should utter complaints before God is that we have developed a deep relationship with him. Filipinos speak of *tampo* or *pagtatampo* (an indirect expression for hurting a person close to you), which has no one-word equivalent in English.⁵¹ Maggay explains that *tampo* is an emotion experienced when someone close to you fails to meet your expectations. It is a form of indirect communication showing that the person has hurt you.⁵² Thus, it is alright for a

46 Villanueva, ‘Reading the Psalms with Asian Resources’, 49.

47 Villanueva, ‘My God, Why?’ 91.

48 Villanueva, *It’s OK to Be Not OK*, 44. A study concerning suppressing anger and its effect on cardiovascular maladies reported that ‘cardiovascular responses to suppression may not be uniquely linked to anger suppression, but might extend to the suppression of negative emotion more generally. Moreover, there may be somewhat distinct patterns of initial and subsequent cardiovascular effects tied to efforts to suppress experiential versus expressive components of a negative emotional response.’ Philip J. Quartana and John W. Burns, ‘Emotion Suppression Affects Cardiovascular Responses to Initial and Subsequent Laboratory Stressors’, *British Journal of Health Psychology* 15 (2010): 524, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19840496/>. Another study of older male health professionals found that expressing anger at a moderate level was helpful because it can protect against nonfatal myocardial infarction and stroke. Patricia Mona Eng et al., ‘Anger Expression and Risk of Stroke and Coronary Heart Disease Among Male Health Professionals’, *Psychosomatic Medicine* 65 (2003): 108.

49 Melba Maggay, ‘Trauma Care for Disaster Survivors in Tacloban: Spiritual, Psychological and Cultural Dimension’, in *Tackling Trauma: Global, Biblical, and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. Paul A. Barker (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2019), 186.

50 D. Keith Campbell, ‘NT Scholars’ Use of OT Lament Terminology and Its Theological and Interdisciplinary Implications’, *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21, no. 2 (2011): 217.

51 Federico Villanueva, ‘“My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”: Christology amid Disasters’, in *Christologies, Cultures, and Religions: Portraits of Christ in the Philippines*, ed. Pascal D. Bazzell and Aldrin Peñamora (Manila: OMF Literature, 2016), 83.

52 Melba Padilla Maggay, *Pahiwatig: Kagawiang Pangkomunikasyon ng Filipino* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002), 138. The title can be translated as *Hinting: A Common Indirect Filipino Communication*.

Christian to *magtampo* (sulk)⁵³ to God. The Bible presents faithful people of God who cried, mourned and wept because of suffering. The psalmists lament due to personal struggles from emotional distress and physical illness.⁵⁴

On 7-8 November 2013, Yolanda (known as Haiyan internationally), one of the strongest typhoons in Philippine history, hit the central Visayas region especially hard, resulting in the death of thousands of people. A week later, I joined a Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary team that delivered relief goods. Two or three weeks later, we returned to bring aid given by various donors. It was heartbreaking that some Christians prioritized sharing the gospel when people's most immediate needs were for tangible relief and trauma counseling, while others claimed that the disaster was a judgement against idolaters. Maggay shared similar observations: 'One survivor spoke of her resentment at those who thoughtlessly threw Bible verses at her: "They said, 'God has a purpose for it.' *'Mabuti pa sila'*, she said, *'alam nila ang purpose; bakit ako hindi?'*" ['Good for them, they know his purpose; how come I don't know it?'].⁵⁵ In times of disaster, spiritual and emotional problems inevitably arise. When honest expressions of emotions such as anger, grief and anxiety are met with judgement and condemnation from the community, the survivors' deepest issues remain unaddressed. Therefore, ministers should not suppress these emotions but, rather, should show adequate attention.⁵⁶

In short, lament teaches ministers to be sensitive to the feelings of those who are grieving. We allow them to bring their complaints to God. The Bible contains many constructive complaints, as seen in Psalms 6, 13, and 22 among others.

Our emotional limitations also remind us that we need each other in this journey. For Villanueva, that is one resource for coping with suffering—we suffer and lament together.⁵⁷ Villanueva's words are helpful:

One contribution we can make as Filipinos to this spirituality of the 'dark night of the soul' is to take advantage of our communal practices. Let us organize groups where people can come not only to rejoice with us, but also to mourn, without fear of being judged or thought of as immature Christians. Let us create an environment where people can feel that 'It's okay to be *not* okay', a group where they find they have someone with them.⁵⁸

Villanueva's writings on lament are deeply rooted in Filipino experiences (e.g. calamities, corruption, poverty and injustice). This is one reason why he argues that the place where we are situated is significant in theologizing. This assertion helps us understand Villanueva's 'cries'. However, his argument that it is understandable or acceptable for Christians to feel 'not okay' and to bring our anger, complaints and questions to God are relevant to non-Filipinos.

53 This is the act of implicitly showing that one is offended, usually in the form of silent treatment.

54 Federico Villanueva, 'My God, My God', 82. For references to physical illness, see Psalms 6:2; 38:3; 41:3.

55 Maggay, 'Trauma Care for Disaster Survivors in Tacloban', 178.

56 Violeta Villaroman-Bautista, 'Spirituality and Resilience in Disaster Situations: Sources of Life and Strength in Critical Times', in *Walking with God: Christian Spirituality in Asian Context*, ed. Charles R. Ringma and Karen Hollenbeck-Wuest (Manila: OMF Literature, 2014), 172.

57 Villanueva, 'Reading the Psalms with Asian Resources', 44.

58 Villanueva, 'The "Dark Night of the Soul"', 135.

Conclusion

Lament teaches us that we are limited people. We cannot escape the influence of our situations, experiences and genes, or of other effects on our emotions and bodies. That is why we get sick and experience mental strain and emotional turmoil. Since we are finite beings located in a specific time and space, we are affected by our interaction with others, experiences in life, and places we go to. These factors may produce happiness, loneliness, anger or other emotions. Our environment is not neutral in influencing our perspectives and our emotions.⁵⁹ Furthermore, we live in a broken world susceptible to calamity, violence, corruption and pain, which evoke strong emotional responses.⁶⁰

One major spiritual challenge for evangelicals in the Philippines and elsewhere is triumphalism. We want to be celebratory through and through. We have familiarized ourselves with only one note (rejoicing) as a response to God. While celebration or rejoicing is important, it can be inappropriate or even insensitive to express that response amidst suffering.⁶¹ Although we know that God has won the ultimate victory, we are living in the here and now, which necessitates dealing with our crises and sufferings realistically. Federico Villanueva's wisdom and deep theological reflections, grounded in intense personal experiences, can help all of us understand our humanness and the resulting need for times of lamentation.

59 K. T. Strongman, *The Psychology of Emotion*, 5th ed. (West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 232.

60 Villanueva, *It's OK to Be Not OK*, 49.

61 Villanueva, 'Reading the Psalms with Asian Resources', 49.

The Beauty of Christ: Evangelicals and Clerical Clothing

Fritz Gerald Melodi

Evangelicals tend to reject clerical robes and other distinctive clothing items as too formal, traditional, pompous and over-emphasizing the clergy-laity differentiation. This article urges a rethinking of that question, based on the positive message such clothing can communicate.

To introduce my interest in the topic of this essay, I will share two personal anecdotes. As a young boy growing up in a fundamentalist church in the Philippines, I happened to encounter two evangelical pastors attending a birthday dinner. When we arrived home, I asked my mother why the two pastors were wearing military-style camouflage pants and casual round-neck shirts. In my young religious imagination, something did not feel right about that. My mother responded by affirming my observation and told me that she thought it would be better if ministers had ‘dress codes’.

Many years later, when I entered college, I encountered a Jesuit priest for the first time. He was wearing leather sandals, a wooden pectoral cross, simple black trousers and a batik shirt. Intuitively, though I did not yet have the liberal-arts perspective to understand his self-presentation, his clothing communicated to me that this particular priest stood for something. Clothing may seem superficial to some people, but it is unavoidably expressive.

Evangelicals, as part of the free-church tradition, have had a diverse array of clothing choices for ministers. This sartorial diversity spans Rick Warren’s casual Hawaiian shirts, the business suit and tie popular among many Southern Baptists, the late Robert Schuller’s preaching robes, and Francis Chan’s casual jeans, t-shirts and flip flops. We have also had more hip and trendy fashion displays by megachurch pastors, such as former Hillsong pastor Carl Lentz.

In my homeland of the Philippines, many evangelical pastors have patterned themselves after Western megachurch models such as Willow Creek and Hillsong in their practices and ethos. However, quite recently, some Philippine evangelical pastors have begun to use the pectoral cross, clerical collar and stole. This revival of traditional clerical apparel may somehow suggest a kind of ache or longing for more spiritual depth and for stable, historically grounded expressions of the Christian faith.

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Pastors of Davao Chinese Baptist Church before the service begins. In the clerical robe is senior pastor Rev. Arnel C. Tan.



The evangelical indifference to and seeming lack of appreciation for symbolism and physical spaces can be traced to a Protestant spirituality that prioritized direct knowledge of God through preaching, leading to a devaluation of the material and visual. However, the Protestant reaction, particularly by Calvin, against the excesses of the medieval Roman Catholic Church also leaned towards a kind of ‘docetism’, a disembodied spirituality that saw cognitive knowledge and direct experience as its priority.¹

In this essay, I will ‘complexify’ the matter of clerical clothing from an evangelical perspective.² I will interact with biblical, historical, social-scientific and theological sources on how clothing as an art form is essentially communicative. Clerical clothing expresses an aesthetic code, mediated non-verbally by the body. In the light of these perspectives, I will invite evangelical pastors to rethink their appraisal of traditional clerical clothing. While continuing to maintain flexibility and freedom, evangelicals could make traditional clerical clothing a meaningful part of their sartorial repertoire. Stoles, pectoral crosses, clerical collars and pulpit robes can engage the senses as aesthetic symbols, convey a sense of sacredness and represent visually the pastoral duty and office. Finally, I will propose some principles, as a type of rubric, on how evangelical pastors can adopt clerical clothing, guided by our understanding of the beauty of Christ.

Biblical perspective

In the Old Testament, YHWH instructed Moses to create distinctive apparel for the priests and the high priest who would function in behalf of the people. In Exodus 28, Moses was commanded to appoint Spirit-filled artisans to create garments for Aaron and his sons, who would serve as priests. These garments were to be holy, created ‘for glory and for beauty’ (Ex 28:2). Whilst the tabernacle and its furniture would become sacred objects and sacred space, the functionaries of the tabernacle, including the priests and high priest as the cultic head, were to be distinguished from the laity through unique clothing.³

The high priestly garments had great symbolic significance. Inscribed in the high priest’s vestments was his vocation both to YHWH and to the nation. The ephod was an apron-like garment made from gold, blue, purple and crimson yarns that had shoulder straps and was tied on by an ornate band around it. Upon the shoulder straps, on two onyx stones, were engraved the names of the tribes of Israel, six on each stone. Fastened to the ephod was the square ‘breastpiece of judgement’, on which were lodged 12 jewels corresponding to the tribes. Additional clothing garments for the high priest included a blue robe beneath the ephod, indicative of high

1 William Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 223–24.

2 I use this term following John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (London, SCM Press, 2016), 15–16. To ‘complexify’ is to recognize that situations are not to be taken only at face value. Phenomena such as clerical clothing are multilayered. Histories, traditions and social factors are involved. Thus, to complexify is to discern and lay bare how a subject is constituted by multifarious components.

3 Nahum Sarna, *Exodus: The JPS Torah Commentary* (New York: Jewish Publication Society), 176.

social rank, and the golden frontlet in the high priest's headpiece, on which were inscribed the words 'holy to the Lord'. Clothed in these articles, as Aaron entered YHWH's sacred presence, he carried with him symbolically the entirety of Israel. This indicated the high priest's distinct role as a person consecrated for divine ministry.⁴

This passage is highly indicative of the symbolic force of religious clothing. The clothing of the high priests and other officiants functioned as tactile and visual representations of their holy office and vocation. Their office required them to have distinct aesthetic representation through garments. Aaron brought YHWH's people into the sacred presence for YHWH to remember them (Ex. 28:12). These priestly clothing were a highly communicative medium that engaged the senses, especially in ritual worship.⁵ Clothing heightened one's awareness of YHWH's sacred presence, mediated in a bodily form through the visual and the aesthetic.

The New Testament is silent about distinctive clothing for its pastors or elders, but neither does it explicitly forbid such attire. Jesus' comment about the distinct clothing of the Pharisees was not against clothing itself, but against their religious pride (Mt 23:5). The Pharisees sought attention and admiration, which Jesus' disciples were to avoid seeking, regardless of what they were wearing.⁶

When the gospels were written, the New Testament church was in its nascent stage. It was a fragile network of local communities constantly threatened by heresy and persecution. Ben Witherington III notes that leadership was very fluid.⁷ Hence, there was not yet a clear ecclesiastical structure or clerical order that oversaw the house churches.⁸ Thus, one of Paul's main concerns in his letters was to provide guidance for appointing faithful leaders who would come after him and the apostles. As early Christian leaders began to emerge, a pattern of Christian leadership was understood to reflect integrity, orthodoxy and humility, patterned after the Chief Shepherd (cf. 1 Tim 3:1–10; 2 Tim 2:2; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 5:2–4).

Although the Levitical priesthood is no longer necessary in the New Testament, as its functions are now fulfilled in Christ's redemptive work, we should still acknowledge YHWH's use of symbolic objects of beauty to communicate function and distinction. As embodied creatures, human beings are engaged through aesthetic and tactile experiences in worship. The silence of the New Testament on distinct clothing, which does not impose or forbid its use for pastors, creates conditions of freedom and flexibility regarding what a pastor wears. Christ's own fulfilment of Old Testament ceremonial law removes mandates and constraints concerning with Christian ministers wear. This reinforces the Protestant argument that clerical clothing is an example of *adiaphora*, or non-theological matters to be addressed with flexibility, as will be noted in the next section.

4 Sarna, *Exodus*, 182–83.

5 Elaine Philips, *Commentary on Exodus*, ed. Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), chap. 4A.

6 David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Robert Yarbrough and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 547.

7 Ben Witherington III, *New Testament History: A Narrative Account*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 352.

8 Witherington, *New Testament History*, 330.

Historical perspective

Historically, clerical clothing in the Western church evolved from the ordinary clothing of the Roman empire. Roman clothing consisted of two types: long costumes for the wealthy and privileged, and short ones for workers and soldiers.⁹ Art historian François Boucher notes that the shorter clothes persisted in Roman society after the barbarian incursions against Rome, as this was the style of the invaders. The long clothing would remain popular amongst Christians, especially after the Edict of Milan in 313 AD as Christian monks and missionaries continued to wear them.¹⁰ Herbert Norris notes that ‘the conservativeness of religion asserted itself by retaining these old-fashioned garments for the minister after laymen had abandoned them.’¹¹

As long clothing became associated with Christian leadership, this pattern coincided with the progressive establishment of a network of bishops who formalized ecclesiastical garb, as referenced in sixth-century writings. During the sixth century, ordinary clothing took on clerical and symbolic significance.¹² The alb, a long linen garment with long sleeves, was common in the East. However, in 398 the Council of Carthage, followed later by the Council of Narbonne in 589, began to forbid deacons to use it outside of formal gatherings. The now-common stole probably derived from an earlier scarf or band worn by Roman dignitaries as an insignia representing their office or from the decorative bands worn on the Roman stola. Boucher posits that the ‘tunic, dalmatic, alb, chasuble and cape became liturgical vestments while they were still widely worn; then, disappearing from everyday costume, they remained in use in religious contexts with modifications only in details of shape and ornamentation.’¹³ Thus, as ecclesiastical hierarchy became more pronounced during the sixth century, so did distinct clothing become codified to symbolize vocation and position. As fashion continued to evolve among the laity, the clergy kept the classical costume, which persists even into contemporary times.

The Reformation period created upheavals in European society and the Western church. The impulse of doctrinal renewal unleashed varying reactions towards continuity or discontinuity with the medieval Roman Catholic Church. The magisterial Reformers, such as John Calvin, John Knox and Martin Luther, along with the Anglican Church, retained, in varying degrees, some continuity in terms of liturgy and ritual. However, the radical Reformers, such as the Anabaptists, and later dissenting sects such as the Baptists had a more biblicist impulse of ‘returning’ to simpler, more egalitarian forms of church polity and a simplified liturgy; accordingly, they rejected many pre-Reformation traditions. Protestantism thus spawned a variety of attitudes towards clerical clothing.¹⁴

9 François Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion: The History of Costume and Personal Adornment* (New York: Harry Abrams Publishers, 1967), 164.

10 Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion*, 166.

11 Herbert Norris, *Church Vestments: Their Origins and Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 9. Norris’ work traces in depth the origins of the various articles of clerical vestments. It is an instructive and rich historical work.

12 Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion*, 166.

13 Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion*, 166.

14 Joanne Pierce, ‘Vestments and Objects’, in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen Westerfield Tucker (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 844.

Joanne Pierce notes that Protestants, particularly the Lutheran tradition, saw clerical garb, both in liturgy and ordinary life, as falling in the category of *adiaphora* (indifferent matters), or something to be discerned by a community or individual.¹⁵ Martin Luther described the presence of symbols, images and religious art, including clerical clothing, as a matter of Christian freedom. For Luther, symbols, images and vestments were beneficial for ‘memorial and witness’ and ought not be destroyed or discarded. Luther openly criticized iconoclastic figures such as Andreas Karlstadt for burdening consciences with ‘mischievous laws’ and ‘fictitious sins’ by forbidding and destroying religious images and symbols. Luther wrote, ‘I would release and free consciences and the souls from sin, which is truly a spiritual and evangelical pastoral function.’¹⁶

This optionality is seen in the range of Protestant practices. The variety of practices today includes retention of Roman ecclesiastical vestments in the liturgy among Anglicans and some Lutherans; the use of alternative liturgical vestments such as the black Geneva preaching robe among Presbyterians, some Baptists and Lutherans; and lay clothing *as* clerical clothing, blurring any vocational identification, as with many free-church evangelicals.

Among Protestants, the symbolism carried by clothing persists. The black Geneva robes of many Protestant pastors arose as an alternative to the more ornate and elaborate vestments of medieval Roman Catholicism. During the Genevan Reformation, Protestant pastors like Calvin, who were of the scholarly class, began wearing their simple black university robes whenever they officiated at public worship.¹⁷ The black scholar’s robe or the Geneva gown would imply that the pastor was a ‘pastor-preacher-teacher’.¹⁸ The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland noted the gravity of the ministry of the Word as a rationale why a preacher’s dress should be sober and of ‘grave color, as blacke’, so that the Scripture by ‘immoderatenesse, be not slandered’.¹⁹ Welsh Evangelical preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones offered similar insight regarding his habit (no pun intended) of wearing a black preaching robe. Lloyd-Jones stated that the black robe ‘is a sign of the call, a sign of the fact that a man has been “set apart” to do this work. It is no more than that, but it is that.’²⁰

In the mid-20th century, a Liturgical Movement that began in the Roman Catholic Church but also spread among Protestants created renewed interest in clerical vestments. The aim of this movement was more active participation in and renewal of the church’s liturgical life, as an indispensable source of Christian formation.²¹ The Liturgical Movement, along with the emerging spirit of ecumenism in the mid-

15 Pierce, ‘Vestments and Objects’, 844.

16 Martin Luther, ‘Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments’, in *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, ed. Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 132–33.

17 Scott Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 19.

18 Pierce, ‘Vestments and Objects’, 845.

19 R. A. S. Macalister, *Ecclesiastical Vestments: Their Development and History* (London: Elliot Stock, 1896), ebook version, 209.

20 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 160.

21 Michael Andrew Chapman, ‘The Liturgical Movement: Its General Purpose and Influence on Priestly Piety’, *Liturgical Movement* 4, no. 3 (1930): 9.

1900s, introduced more high-church vestments for Protestants. The alb also saw renewed use along with more creative and colorful stoles, especially among Reformed traditions.²²

Through church history, clothing has been a significant medium by which to convey the identity and vocation of the spiritual leader as a representative of the faith community. Even from the beginnings of the Christian movement, the evolution of Roman long clothing associated with the privileged class persisted as the uniform of monks, evangelists and, later, more formal ecclesiastical leaders. Thus, from fourth-century missionaries to 17th-century Reformers, a pattern seems to emerge: clerical clothing symbolizes the identity of the priest and pastor as sharing and embodying the identity of the spiritual community. The priest or pastor was representing not only himself but the community, as their spiritual guide and leader. Despite diverging theological formulations, clerical clothing can thus be seen as essentially a symbolic representation of the pastor's communal and ecclesial identity.

Social-scientific perspective

The basic function of clothing is to protect the body from the elements. However, clothing also communicates social meaning in a non-verbal manner. Clothing exposes the body to other bodies and expresses social codes. Clothing as communication is articulated within a semiotic universe of costumes.²³ Thus, clothing has meaning within a shared cultural ecosystem that interacts with each individual's choice of clothing. The phenomenon of human clothing has brought greater awareness of the clothed body's capacity for 'communication, in the sense of shared meanings, values, styles, and behavior'.²⁴

Within this shared semiotic universe, the symbolic meaning of clothing tends to evoke particular behaviours. Studies have indicated that clothing influences the behaviour of both wearer and perceiver.²⁵ Adam and Galinsky call this phenomenon 'encloded cognition' as a construct to describe how individuals adopt the traits and qualities that they associate with the clothes they wear.²⁶ Their studies and others imply that clothing has effects on the wearer's behaviour due to the 'symbolic meaning of the dress and the physical experience of wearing that dress item'.²⁷

Empirical studies on the effects of clerical clothing on perceivers have been scarce. One study applied a quasi-experimental approach to determine whether

22 Pierce, 'Vestments and Objects', 845.

23 Patrizia Calefato, 'Wearing Communication: Home, Travel, Space', in *Mediating the Human Body: Technology, Communication, Fashion*, ed. Leopoldina Fortunati, James E. Katz and Raimonda Riccini (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 164.

24 Calefato, 'Wearing Communication', 164.

25 Duje Kodzoman, 'The Psychology of Clothing: Meaning of Colors, Body Image, and Gender Expression in Fashion', *Textile Leather Review* 2, no. 2 (2018): 93, doi:10.31881/tlr2019.22.

26 Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky, 'Encloded Cognition', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 4 (2012): 918–19, 922, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.02.008>.

27 Kim Johnson, Sharron J. Lennon and Nancy Rudd, 'Dress, Body, and Self: Research in the Social Psychology of Dress', *Fashion and Textiles* 1, no. 20 (2014): 9, doi:10.1186/s40691-014-0020-7.

clerical clothing had any effect in evangelism.²⁸ The researcher compared rates of engagement while wearing a clerical collar and business attire. The study found that wearing a clerical collar seemed to engage more people, but only by a small margin. On the other hand, the collar dramatically increased engagement with non-Christians. The study took place in only one university setting, so over-generalization would be unwise. However, the researcher concluded that in some evangelistic settings, it may be 'wise not to blend' with a target culture too much. Vocational symbols such as a clerical collar may lead to 'greater numbers of certain sorts of evangelistic engagements'.²⁹

Anecdotal reports on the Internet provide qualitative data that may corroborate Adam and Galinsky's concept of 'encloded cognition'. One pastor says he felt something was inappropriate when he was wearing casual or business attire during his pastoral duties. After a six-month trial of wearing a clerical collar, his congregation encouraged him to continue doing it. As he slips on his collar, he reports that putting it on reminds him to pray for God's help to become a 'better minister'.³⁰ Another pastor stated that wearing a collar allowed him more undisturbed access in ministry settings, especially hospital visits, and opened opportunities for pastoral care. He reported not taking the wearing of the clerical clothing lightly, as it identifies his identity and purpose.³¹

These two accounts exemplify how some Protestant pastors experience a deeper identification with their vocation when they put on clerical clothing and how it seems to create openness, even attraction, for some perceivers who need pastoral care. As with Adam and Galinsky's 'encloded cognition', clothing is thus symbolically communicative to both wearer and perceiver. One takes on qualities and values of what we wear and engages perceivers' symbolic imagination. Furthermore, by choosing one's clothes, the wearer is constructing a public self. Art professor Maria MacKinney-Valentin posits, 'It is about how we choose to look at a given time as part of staging who we are or who we would like others to think we are.'³² Thus, the choice of clothing displays the private self and communicates simultaneously individual identity and social belonging.

Theological integration

I will now proceed to a theological and pastoral reflection on clerical clothing. Since fashion or clothing in general is an art form, I will ground my theological understanding of clothing as art under the rubric of beauty or theological aesthetics. A recovery of a metaphysical and theological account of beauty can help evangelicals

28 Eugene Curry, 'The Practical Effects of Clerical Clothing on Evangelism: A Quantitative Study', *Great Commission Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (2016): 104, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol8/iss1/15/>.

29 Curry, 'The Practical Effects', 113.

30 Adam Rodgers, 'What to Wear? For a Pastor, Is It a Necktie, T-shirt or Clerical Collar?' *The Herald*, 8 March 2007, https://www.sharonherald.com/community/what-to-wear-for-a-pastor-is-it-a-necktie-t-shirt-or-clerical-collar/article_59b92eda-23d0-58b2-8b9e-b7d169f614cb.html.

31 Alan Rudnick, 'Why I Wear a Clergy Collar', 2011, <https://alanrudnick.org/2011/02/09/why-i-wear-a-clergy-collar/>.

32 Maria MacKinney-Valentin, *Fashioning Identity: Status Ambivalence in Contemporary Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 4.

understand that aesthetics is not merely a superficial matter or a question of skin-deep vanity but an experience that is deeply theological. I propose that ordinary objects such as clothing, as part of material creation, contain the capacity to become mediums of divine disclosure. Clothing, as objects of art and beauty, thus contains in it the promise of a meaningful remembrance of God's presence through symbols.

A Christian theology of beauty

In the Christian theological tradition, beauty as an attribute of objects and beings is not subjective but is objectively grounded in the very nature of God as Creator of all things. Beauty, along with truth and goodness, as an inseparable attribute of the fabric of existence, derives its very essence in God.³³ The beauty found in created things is only a participation in the being of God, who is the very instantiation and essence of the beautiful.³⁴ Augustine captures this concept in his *Confessions*, calling God 'O Beauty, so ancient and so new'.³⁵

As God's very image and revelation, the incarnated Word, Jesus Christ is the 'apex and archetype' of God's objective beauty made visible (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).³⁶ The holy life of Jesus that exemplified mercy, love and justice, culminating in his sacrificial and redemptive death, is thus the ultimate measure and revelation of the beautiful.

This Christian philosophical and theological account of the beautiful, culminating in the beauty of Christ, grounds our Christian appreciation of the physical world. The very incarnation of Christ, who took on physical flesh as the medium of divine disclosure, reaffirms the goodness of the material and the temporal.³⁷ For Hans Urs von Balthasar, God's being and his act of creating the beautiful in material existence, which finds its summit in the person of Christ, are necessary so that the divine nature can be mediated and disclosed.³⁸ Without the material world and its accompanying attribute of beauty, God's nature would remain nebulous and unintelligible. The material world of trees, mountains, stars, bread, wine, films, paintings, architecture, clothing and much more contains all sorts of potential media—symbols that mediate and disclose divine truths (cf. Ps 19:1).

In this sense, the beautiful is an experience that evokes theological memory. For Junius Johnson, the beautiful is captivating because it is a reminder ('theological amnesia') of God our Creator.³⁹ Whenever humans experience the beautiful, they see the physical sign but they also see something else—the Transcendent. This experience of seeing the spiritual in the physical object is what Johnson calls 'contuition'—

33 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikatis (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982), 18.

34 Jennifer Newsome Martin, 'Desiring Beauty: The St. Margaret of Scotland Annual Lecture', *Church Life Journal* (University of Notre Dame), 1 December 2023, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/desiring-beauty-the-st-margaret-of-scotland-annual-lecture/>.

35 Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 297.

36 Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 69.

37 Martin, 'Desiring Beauty'.

38 Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 1:430–31.

39 Junius Johnson, *The Father of Lights: A Theology of Beauty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 21.

'to see two things with one simple act of seeing', i.e. seeing the inner meaning of a visible object.⁴⁰ Therefore, the symbol is a 'translucent' object that enables a different 'seeing'. Symbols reveal a greater reality beyond themselves.⁴¹ For Italian theologian Crispino Valenziano, material symbols are active objects that make the transcendent present to the gathered people.⁴²

A Protestant and evangelical imbalance

Protestantism has a highly cognitive and rationalistic ethos, stemming from our Reformation roots that tended to over-emphasize rational understanding over the sensory. William Dyrness calls this the 'symbolic incapacity of the evangelical tradition'.⁴³ This highly cognitive and rationalistic ethos has shaped many church practices among evangelicals, including evangelism, worship, preaching and catechesis. For instance, the centrepiece of worship is the oral skill and intellectual gifts of one person delivering a highly cerebral sermon. For many, evangelism has been reduced to informational transfer of four propositional laws. Salvation is equated with mental assent through a prayer, while discipleship is thought of as completing a curriculum. There is an over-prioritization of the rational, cognitive and cerebral among evangelicals, rather than the whole person. James K. A. Smith observes:

This rationalist picture was absorbed particularly by Protestant Christianity (whether liberal or conservative), which tends to operate with an overly cognitivist picture of the human person and thus tends to foster an overly intellectualist account of what it means to be or become a Christian. ... It is just this adoption of a rationalist, cognitivist anthropology that accounts for the shape of so much Protestant worship as a heady affair fixated on 'messages' that disseminate Christian ideas and abstract values (easily summarized on PowerPoint slides).⁴⁴

This rationalistic impulse, according to von Balthasar, results in an imbalanced focus on one aspect of being, that of truth or the logical. For von Balthasar, beauty ought to be our 'first word'.⁴⁵ For without beauty, truth or logic is mere boring argumentation. Without beauty, goodness or morality is mere harsh moralizing, losing its attractiveness.⁴⁶

For Protestants and evangelicals who have over-rationalized and over-spiritualized the Christian faith, at the risk of a quasi-docetism, the theological account of the beautiful via ordinary and visible symbols can be an enriching source of renewal.⁴⁷ Here one finds an opportunity to engage the whole person through concrete, visual, aesthetic encounters that evoke spiritual meanings in the imagination.

40 Johnson, *The Father of Lights*, 56.

41 Franklin M. Segler and Randall Bradley, *Understanding, Preparing for, and Practicing Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 156.

42 Crispino Valenziano, 'Liturgy and Symbolism', in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 2: *Fundamental Liturgy*, ed. Anscar Chapungco (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2004), 34.

43 Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 238.

44 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 42.

45 Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 1:18.

46 Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 1:19.

47 Segler and Bradley, *Understanding, Preparing for, and Practicing*, 157.

Humans are not mere creatures of intellect, but embodied persons—which calls for engaging the emotion and imagination through images and visuals, if one is to aspire to comprehensive Christian spiritual formation.

Practical and theological reflection

Building on the theological account given above, I will propose some practical and theological warrants for evangelicals to rethink their appraisal of clerical clothing. I argue that clerical clothing offers important ways to embody our identity, vocation and identification with the church catholic.

Catholicity and continuity

The Protestant and evangelical tradition makes the use of clerical clothing in pastoral functions a matter of Christian freedom. However, clerical forms such as the pectoral cross, stole, collar or preaching robe evoke our identification with and rootedness in the catholicity of the church.

Evangelicals, many of whom are attracted by the promise of seeker-sensitive churches, have been prone to a capitulation towards popular culture, adapting its trends, language and visual imagery, motivated by the quest for numerical church growth. This often-uncritical accommodation of popular culture has resulted in experiences of shallowness and dissatisfaction. The shallowness may derive from the seeker-sensitive emphasis on appealing to the broader youth-oriented culture as its governing ethos. This has led to the ‘juvenilization’ of the evangelical church and to a sacrifice of theological depth, liturgical richness and artistic complexity.⁴⁸

The seeming shallowness and rootlessness of the evangelical church have prompted some to turn to Rome or Eastern Christianity, while others have directed efforts of theological retrieval for the sake of renewal.⁴⁹ Various recent publications have called for evangelicals to retrieve Christian tradition and see ourselves as part of the one, holy, apostolic, catholic (universal) church.⁵⁰ The aim of retrieval is not because one loves antiques, but rather because retrieving tradition can help the evangelical church to renew itself with a stable identity so as to face the future with faithfulness to Christ.

This impulse of catholic retrieval has been visualized by the judicious usage or approximation of clerical clothing among evangelicals. The ongoing use of some form or approximation of clerical attire among evangelical pastors may express a desire for greater spiritual depth, renewal and an affinity with the entire church

48 Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 225.

49 Gavin Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 45.

50 A renewed interest in retrieving catholicity among evangelicals can be seen in works such as Timothy George (ed.), *Evangelicals and the Nicene Creed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Michael Allen and Scott Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023); and Matthew Emerson, Christopher Morgan and R. Lucas Stamps (eds.), *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020).

catholic. Some no longer wish to be siloed at the cost of religious shallowness, tossed to and fro by every wind of cultural trendiness. The judicious use of clerical clothing by evangelical pastors is a visual and embodied reminder that although Christians live in the 'city of man', we truly belong to a different city. Clerical clothing among evangelical churches can be part of the visual language exchanged within the community of the wider church catholic. The physicality of clerical clothing can help to give evangelical communities and ministers a distinct visual 'voice' and 'specific social presence'.⁵¹ Through the use of clerical attire, we can affirm our belongingness to a community that has stretched across both time and space. Clerical clothing can visualize our recognition of indebtedness and reception of a living tradition that has guided Christians throughout the centuries.

Fitted for Christ

As Christ is objectively beautiful, so should our use of clerical clothing be fitted to the same beauty of Jesus Christ. This objective beauty of Christ is found in his self-emptying, his kenotic sacrifice on the cross (Phil 2:3–8). This is radically alien to the narcissistic agenda of the beautiful in much of today's culture. Whereas the beautiful in culture is seemingly a tool for gaining personal power, the beauty of Christ takes the form of a powerless servant, giving his life away for others. This self-giving act on the cross is the height of God's 'self-expression' and 'self-representation'—God expressing his being in Jesus Christ.⁵² A central theme, therefore, in an aesthetic of Christ is that of humble service.

This aesthetic of Christ's self-emptying is the only fitting inspiration for clerical clothing. Our use of such clothing ought to reflect the humble service of Christ. Drawing on the interdisciplinary discussion above, I propose three principles for the judicious use of clerical clothing among evangelical ministers.

Simplicity: A fitting presentation of evangelical clerical clothing ought not to display ostentatiousness or luxury, but only what is functional or necessary. Though there can be no exact formula for what is deemed simple, our Protestant aesthetic tradition can be a guide. Historically, Protestants have been austere and plain in their aesthetic, even with regard to clerical clothing, so as to emphasize gravity, service and the individual's obscurity. The choice of plain black or white robes, along with the clerical stole of a suitable liturgical colour, has often been a standard practice in more formal contexts. The stole and collar have been used for pastoral functions in more flexible contexts. Even more simply, some pastors use only a clerical stole as special attire during public worship.

Service: Clerical clothing is not a visual contradiction of the Protestant dictum of the 'priesthood of all believers'. Clerical clothing is not intended to display a minister's higher spiritual status above the laity. Rather, it functions as a minister's 'uniform' to represent visually one's calling to service. It is the pastor's 'work clothes'. Through visual and tactile means, the clerical uniform helps the pastor to forget about self and direct attention to the pastoral task. It foregrounds the pastor's role

51 Dyrness, *Poetic Theology*, 230.

52 Breandán Leahy, 'Theological Aesthetics', in *The Beauty of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1994), 30.

as a representative of the faith community and thereby strengthens pastoral identity. Furthermore, as indicated above, wearing certain clothing may affect one's attitude and behaviour; thus, clerical clothing may reinforce the minister's own virtue formation in humility and service.

Sacredness: The promise of clerical clothing is its capacity to cultivate sacred space and time in Christian ritual. As indicated above, the symbolic and communicative power of objects such as clerical clothing can evoke a spiritual awareness that in the gathered assembly, Christ is present (Mt 18:20). During the liturgical ritual or in other pastoral rites, the clothing may become a sign by which participants can discern God's holy presence, reinforcing its corollary virtues. Rites or rituals, as 'consecrated behaviour', function by providing its adherents with a coherent interpretation of the world and a motivation for proper behaviour in daily life.⁵³ This sacred nearness experienced during a Christian rite thus shapes a Christian imagination of reality and the motivation to act in ways informed by our faith.

Conclusion

At the outset, one might think of clothing as simply trivial or benign. However, if one takes seriously the creedal confession that God is 'maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible', then there is good reason to affirm that all things are theological. Clerical clothing, though not a matter on which the Christian faith will either stand or fall, has accompanied the church catholic, as a matter of communal expression, since its early beginnings. It has been a distinct symbol of spiritual leadership, pastoral duty and liturgical celebration. Normalizing traditional clerical clothing among their pastors could help evangelicals to recover a sense of depth, sacredness and historical continuity in their spiritual lives.

A renewed appreciation of human beings as embodied wholes has brought our attention to the greater significance of the physical world. There is a sacramentality in the world of the senses as a place where God's presence is truly encountered. There is no dualism between body and spirit. Sacred objects are obedient servants for the purposes of divine disclosure.⁵⁴ Clerical clothing is thus part of the retinue of sacred objects—symbols telling us that the world is enchanted once again.

53 Margaret Mary Kelleher, 'The Liturgical Body: Symbol and Ritual', in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999). 66.

54 Johnson, *The Father of Lights*, 139.

Book Reviews

Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture

Christopher Watkin

Zondervan Academic, 2022

Hb., 605 pp., foreword, preface, bibliography, indices

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and Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano (Italy).*

As John Stott famously noted, Christians are living between two worlds: the world of the Bible and our contemporary setting. How do we navigate between these two worlds faithfully?

Christopher Watkin is a professor at Monash University, Australia with a research focus on literature, philosophy, theology and the history of ideas. His book does not cover primarily the 'what' and 'why' of Christian faith and doctrine. Rather, he focusses on the 'so what?'—namely, the consequences and implications for Christian life and ministry in the 21st century.

Watkin follows the consistent and varied story line of the Bible, much as Augustine did in the second part of his classic *The City of God*. Readers should have their Bible at hand, to reread a passage or reflect on Watkin's observations.

Watkin connects his findings with many vital topics and pressure points of Western culture. Since culture can be a fuzzy term, he organizes his work in terms of six dimensions and expressions of human life and thought: language, ideas and stories; time and space; the structure of reality; behaviour; relationships; and objects. He reflects on how people confront diverging points of view and how they may change their mind on a particular issue. Building on that foundation, Watkin identifies cultural themes concretely and applies what he calls 'diagonalization', a central term in his book.

For Watkin, 'diagonalization presents a biblical picture in which the best aspirations' of a culture 'are fulfilled, but not in a way that the proponents of those options would see coming' (17). For example, he ponders a society's inclination to be either pessimistic or utopian with regard to the future. Whereas the former tendency usually promotes a certain quietism and parochialism, the latter often favours a mood of universalism or could unleash violent activism. Diagonalizing these two outlooks, Watkin discusses a multi-lens biblical anthropology to stress humanity's dignity and fallenness, and how this again relates to human endeavour and the experience of life. He argues that by building on God's purposes and promises, believers have a greater standard and don't have to absolutize or idolize their culture's values. Instead, they can be 'unusually open and nuanced cultural critics' (21).

For evangelical Christians, neither imprudent adaptation to culture nor withdrawal from society is an option. Watkin proposes instead a kind of subversive counter-fulfilment. He uses God's word to unmask cultural contradictions and challenges undesirable compromises in each chapter, on a wide range of topics such as love and

identity, recognition and success, justice and government, creation and miracles. In so doing, he consistently shows how Christians can take a society's values, convictions and hopes seriously, but also how not to fall for Western culture's many half-truths and heresies.

Watkin formulates a Christian social theory that one can critically and constructively connect with today's world. He depends heavily on a biblical-theological approach while also integrating and building on preceding works from throughout church history. This gives his book a very fundamental and conceptual outlook supported by concrete examples, case studies and practical advice.

Despite the complex topic, *Biblical Critical Theory* is not a difficult read. Watkin's style is always personal, clear and friendly. He explains profound realities in simple words and uses suitable illustrations regularly. In addition, over 100 charts help the reader grasp the main points graphically, and every chapter ends with a set of questions to guide readers in going deeper or applying what they have just read.

Some readers will see the potential for more exegetical or systematic-theological reflection. Others will miss a more global vision, while still others might have preferred more practical lessons. Positively, though, Watkin's timely book prepares the way for all these things. Indeed, he explicitly invites his readers to deepen and improve his work. So in a sense, it is our task as readers to appropriate and translate the book's many insights prudentially into our own context.

Christian leaders, missionaries, academics and reflective practitioners can all benefit from this book. *Biblical Critical Theory* can enrich Christian discipleship, church ministry, apologetics and evangelism, as well as Christian research and cultural engagement. It shows how to out-narrate secularism and other mindsets of the Global North. Even more importantly, it offers a better story for our highly paradoxical world by pointing people effectively to Jesus Christ.

***Vernacular Bibles in Africa through European Eyes:
Case Studies in Nineteenth-Century Translation***
Misheck Nyirenda

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Reviewed by Nebeyou A. Terefe, PhD

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Nyirenda is an Old Testament scholar from Zambia, global translation advisor with the United Bible Societies, and research fellow at the University of Free State, South Africa. In this book, he examines two Bible translations—in West Africa and Southern Africa, respectively—during the missionary era.

Missionaries initiated Bible translation across various parts of Africa. These translations not only portrayed the West's cultural and epistemological superiority but also granted agency to the locals, allowing them to transcend the control of the missionaries and the colonizers in political and religious organizations.

The first of the book's four parts provides background on 19th-century translation, focusing on the various approaches employed by Bible translators since the

Enlightenment. Two notable theories discussed are literal and dynamic equivalence, later called functional equivalence. However, challenges to these theories emerged with the development of the Skopos theory, along with its derivatives such as functionalism and performance criticism (oral translation).

The history of Bible translation in Africa is contextualized with broader historical and ideological frameworks. Nyirenda explores the state of epistemological theory within the modern missionary movement, considering the economic and philosophical theories of the day. He illustrates how Enlightenment ideas and imperialism intersected in missionary translation projects across Africa, showing how missionary agendas were shaped by the three colonial objectives of Christianity, commerce and civilization. Additionally, he discusses the impact of Darwinism on mission policy and practice, leading to the devaluation of African societies, which were often considered culturally inferior and in need of civilization.

Part two centres on the translation of the Efik New Testament, which took place in Old Calabar, present-day Nigeria. The missionaries educated the local population using their own curriculum and developed an orthography for the Efik language. However, local agency was largely absent. The project of reducing African languages into a writing system was carried out without substantial input from Africans. It becomes evident that this undertaking represented a radical imposition of an Indo-European epistemological framework onto African linguistic and cultural contexts. The missionaries consulted locals only for linguistic accuracy rather than for input on how to render the biblical text.

Part three shifts to two Chichewa Bible translation projects in Malawi, shedding light on the work of the Livingstonia and Blantyre missions. These translations were undertaken by the Scottish Presbyterian church during the same time period, and the process of language and translation work in Chichewa paralleled that in Old Calabar. Missionaries, regardless of their expertise, collected and memorized vernacular words and then endeavoured to simplify and systematize their orthography.

Finally, the 1885 translation by Laws (from the Livingstonia mission) of Mark 1:1–8 is evaluated against the Greek New Testament, followed by comparison to the translations by Scott of the Blantyre mission (1898) and the Union Nyanja Bible Translation Committee (1922). This analysis yields insights into the nuances and methodologies employed. Nyirenda shows that one translator's grasp of Chichewa morphology and syntax was rudimentary and frequently flawed. The strengths and weaknesses of the approaches to translation are revealed in a helpful manner.

Today, most Bible translations in Africa are carried out primarily by locals, with missionaries only providing guidance. Nevertheless, we still need to train more local people who are proficient in their mother tongue to aid in Bible translation across Africa. The local communities for whom the Bible is being translated must participate actively and play a significant role in the translation process. Additionally, locals should be engaged in describing their own language, which underscores the necessity to train linguists with expertise in their mother tongue.

The book is informative for anyone interested in mission history and Bible translation. It encourages researchers to explore the diverse nature of missionary translation efforts in different parts of Africa. Moreover, it provides valuable lessons and recommendations applicable to current and future Bible translations in Africa.