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# Introduction to the Lausanne Articles and to This Issue

In honour of the 50th anniversary of the Lausanne Movement and its fourth global congress this September, the first two articles of this issue examine the movement. How we got these articles is itself an example of good collaboration between the two most prominent global evangelical organizations.

Several months ago, Hannes Wiher submitted his essay on Lausanne for consideration. It included candid discussion of the sometimes-sensitive relations between Lausanne and the World Evangelical Alliance, as well as a balanced assessment of Lausanne's contributions.

My immediate reaction was that I could not publish Hannes's article in ERT, lest my publication of it be misinterpreted as an attempt by the WEA to criticize or even undermine our sister organization immediately prior to its upcoming congress. However, on reflection along with my supervisor, WEA Director of Global Theology Theresa Lua, we identified a better alternative. With Hannes's permission, we sent the article to David Bennett, Lausanne's global associate director, for review and comment.

David graciously read and approved the article with one major caveat: he felt that Hannes's analysis did not adequately take into account developments within the Lausanne Movement since its third congress, at Cape Town in 2010. Accordingly, David offered to submit an article filling that gap—and he proceeded to deliver a tightly constructed essay within one week.

I tend to share the late John Stott's wish that Lausanne and the WEA could become a single organization. But if all their relations could be as smooth and gracious as the interactions that have enabled me to publish Hannes and David's articles side by side, maintaining two separate entities would be no obstacle to the Christian movement's progress. In combination, these two articles should make a great primer for anyone attending Lausanne 4 or who cares about understanding Lausanne's role in global Christianity.

Following the two Lausanne articles, we are happy to present essays by three widely esteemed voices: former Fuller Seminary president Richard Mouw on important issues in Reformed ethics, former WEA secretary general Thomas Paul Schirrmacher on deployment of spiritual gifts, and theological educator Perry Shaw on how to truly embrace Majority World perspectives with equity. We then introduce two first-time contributors. Jill E. Nelson of Regent University presents a principled, practical view on the church's approach to LGBTQ individuals. Worring Kashung offers a fascinating example of contemporary contextualization, analyzing the social meaning of a commonly worn Indian shawl in light of Galatians 3:28. The last article before the book reviews is a reprint of a recent *Christianity Today* panel discussion of the legacy of African theologian Kwame Bediako.

Happy reading!

—Bruce Barron, Executive Editor
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# 50 Years of the Lausanne Movement

## Hannes Wiher

The Lausanne Movement is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year by holding its fourth global congress, in Incheon, Korea, on 22–28 September. In July 1974, 2,400 delegates from 150 countries met in Lausanne, Switzerland. Subsequently, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) was formed, from which the Lausanne Movement emerged.

In this article, I trace the historical background of the Lausanne Movement, including the circumstances of its birth and its development. I then set out its main theological positions, which are considered today as the basis of the evangelical identity. Finally, I evaluate the movement's impact.

### Historical background

It is helpful to interpret the birth of the Lausanne Movement against the background of an earlier wave of enthusiasm about evangelism and mission. Rose Dowsett comments that 'without the proven track record of national evangelical alliances, and their international co-operation through the informal links of the World Evangelical Alliance … the Lausanne Movement could not have been born.'[1] This cooperation produced major international missionary conferences in 1878, 1888 and 1900. The climax of this series of events was the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910.[2] In 1921, after the First World War, the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference became the International Missionary Council (IMC).

In the process leading to the creation of the IMC, no evangelical mission was represented.[3] Relying on John 17:21–23, the organisers of Edinburgh 1910 defended the position that unity was not only the condition for the success of missionary endeavour, but its very purpose.[4] This kind of structural unity without doctrinal and

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1  Rose Dowsett, 'The Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance', in *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*, ed. Lars Dahle et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 399–410.
2  For a full study of the Edinburgh Conference, see Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
3  According to Jacques Matthey, the former secretary of the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, the absence of evangelicals from the IMC was the first break between evangelicals and ecumenicals in the 20th century. Jacques Matthey, 'Édimbourg 1910 et son approche de la relation entre mission et unité', *Histoire et Missions chrétiennes* 13 (March 2010): 89f.
4  Matthey, 'Édimbourg 1910', 78.

ecclesiological agreement, and therefore without a prior process of finding unity in the Spirit, practically excludes the evangelical approach.[5]

The IMC subsequently organized a series of international mission conferences: Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram near Chennai in India (1938), Whitby in Canada (1947), Willingen in Germany (1952) and Achimota in Ghana (1958). In line with the concept of mission as a function of the church, the IMC was integrated into the World Council of Churches (WCC) at the general assembly in New Delhi in 1961 to form its Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME).[6] Later international mission conferences were held under the auspices of the CWME: Mexico City (1963), Bangkok (1973), Melbourne (1980), San Antonio in Texas, USA (1989), Salvador de Bahia in Brazil (1996), Athens (2005) and Edinburgh (2010).[7]

According to Kenneth Latourette, 'The Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference was the cradle of the ecumenical movement.'[8] But according to Billy Graham, two movements emerged from Edinburgh 1910: an ecumenical movement and an evangelical movement.[9] The evangelical movement emerged in the first half of the 20th century as a 'fundamentalist' reaction to the Social Gospel movement. This reaction has given priority to the proclamation of the gospel to the detriment of social action (which was so present in missions during the 19th century). In the wake of the Social Gospel movement, the ecumenical movement took up theological positions that emphasized the socio-political aspects of the gospel. Through its unbalanced interpretation of the notion of *missio Dei*, it elevated secular history to the level of salvation history (by suggesting, for example, that political revolutions would be a means of bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth) and marginalized the role of the church in world evangelization. Finally, it practically removed the notion of mission from the agenda of the ecumenical conferences. Dana Robert summed up this development in the theology of mission as 'From missions to mission to

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5    For the structural and 'spiritual' notions of unity adopted by the ecumenical and evangelical movements, see Henri Blocher, 'The Nature of Biblical Unity', in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers and Responses*, International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, ed. James D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 380–99; Klaus Fiedler, 'Edinburgh 2010 and the Evangelicals', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 4 (2010): 319–34, especially 332; David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* (Oxford: Regnum, 2009), 237–62.

6    According to James Scherer, the integration of the IMC into the WCC in 1961 completed the century of predominance of the ecclesiocentric concept of missions among Protestant denominations. This began with the introduction of the concept of the 'three selves' by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the 1850s. After 1960, the concept of the mission of God (*missio Dei*) started to prevail. James A. Scherer, 'Church, Kingdom and *Missio Dei*', in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, ed. Charles van Engen et al. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 82–88.

7    For a summary and appraisal of the IMC and CWME conferences, see Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology,* vol. 2: *Theologies of Mission*, trans. Karl E. Böhmer (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 59–72, 92–115.

8    Kenneth S. Latourette, 'Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council', in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517–1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill, vol. 1 (Geneva: WCC, 1954), 362.

9    Billy Graham, 'Why Lausanne?' in Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 26.

beyond mission'.[10] In other words, the development started from the missions of the churches (*missiones ecclesiae*) in the IMC, passed to the mission of God (*missio Dei*) after Willingen (1952), and ended in the disappearance of mission.

The dividing factors between evangelicals and ecumenicals, according to Billy Graham, were the shift from an individual to a collective approach to conversion, from evangelism to social action, from a mission society parallel to the church to a church that is itself the agent of mission, from reconciliation with God to social reconciliation, and from man 'in this world and in the world to come' to man exclusively 'in this world'. For Graham, these trends stemmed mainly from a lack of clarity in definitions and in the relationship between mission and the church. The takeover of the cause of mission by church dignitaries when the IMC was integrated into the WCC was, according to Graham, the main cause of the lack of zeal for world evangelism. While the ecumenical movement was engaged in major theological debates without much missionary activity, the evangelical movement was characterized by activism and pragmatism accompanied by a lack of theological reflection on mission.[11]

## Birth and development of Lausanne

In the 1950s and 1960s, a 'neo-evangelical' and 'post-fundamentalist' theological movement emerged, linked to Harold Ockenga, Billy Graham, Harold Lindsell and Carl F. H. Henry. It marked an attempt to balance the theology of early twentieth-century fundamentalism, which was a reaction to Social Gospel theology. According to Joel Carpenter, an evangelical theology of mission had to be virtually 'reinvented'.[12]

When, in 1973, the missionary conference of the WCC's Commission for World Mission and Evangelism in Bangkok spoke only of the 'humanization of the world' and 'salvation today'[13] and when the WCC decided to support some revolutionary movements to hasten *shalom*, the time seemed to have come for the creation of a separate evangelical movement. After several precursory congresses,[14] Billy Graham and his association, together with John Stott, organized the first congress for world evangelization in 1974.

In Lausanne, Switzerland, 2,400 delegates from 150 countries met and signed a final document that would become the fundamental charter of the evangelical movement. Remarkably, for the first time some theologians from the Majority World were given a platform at a gathering still dominated by Westerners. These included René

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10   Dana L. Robert, 'From Missions to Mission to Beyond Mission: The Historiography of American Protestant Foreign Missions since World War II', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18, no. 4 (1994): 146–55.

11   Graham, 'Why Lausanne?' 26.

12   Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (eds.), *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880–1980* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 131.

13   Peter Beyerhaus, 'Theology of Salvation in Bangkok', *Christianity Today* 13, no. 30 (March 1973); Beyerhaus, 'Mission and Humanization', *International Review of Mission* 60, no. 237 (1971): 11–24.

14   Wheaton (1966), Berlin (1966) and Frankfurt (1970). The congresses are summarized in Hannes Wiher, *Holistic Mission: An Historical and Theological Study of Its Development, 1966–2011*, WEA World of Theology Series 25 (Bonn: Culture and Science Publications, 2022), 19–22.

Padilla, Samuel Escobar, Vinoth Ramachandra and Zac Niringyie, among others. They made a substantial contribution to the success of the congress. Significantly, most of them came from the new evangelical student movement, in which John Stott was fully involved.[15]

In 1974, Billy Graham was at the height of his evangelistic ministry, which featured a revivalist style of evangelism with a simple conversionist message. This approach, which had a great influence on the congress, proved difficult for the theologians of the Majority World to accept. As a result, 400 of the 2,400 delegates, mainly representatives from the Majority World, did not sign the final document but instead drafted what would become known as the 'alternative Lausanne declaration' with the emblematic title, 'Theological Implications of Radical Discipleship'.[16] The document provoked very lively and controversial reactions. Strikingly, John Stott signed it. With his support, it was also included in the congress proceedings.[17]

The follow-up committee to the first congress became the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE). It organized two other world congresses (in Manila in 1989 and Cape Town in 2010) and around 50 thematic consultations.[18] According to Jacques Matthey, the creation of a separate structure signified a third break between the ecumenical movement and the evangelicals; the first was the absence of evangelicals from the IMC, and the second was the refusal by certain evangelical missions to join the WCC when the IMC was integrated into it.[19]

The evangelical movement is very diverse, comprising currents as diverse as pietists, Pentecostals, charismatics, African, Asian and Latin American initiated churches, and insider movements, i.e. Christian groups without visible structures. Structurally, evangelical identity does not necessarily stand out; evangelicals can be found in all Christian churches. Historically, the spirituality of evangelicals is based on that of the second great revival, which produced the 'second wave' missions known as faith missions.[20]

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15   In 1947, 10 national movements founded the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). For the history of IFES, see Timothée Joset, *The Priesthood of All Students: Historical, Theological and Missiological Foundations of a University Ministry* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2023).

16   'Theological Implications of Radical Discipleship', in Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 1294–96. For a brief discussion, see Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, chapter 8; Wiher, *Holistic Mission*, 26–28.

17   See Alister Chapman, 'Evangelical International Relations in the Post-Colonial World: The Lausanne Movement and the Challenge of Diversity, 1974–89', *Missiology* 37, no. 3 (2009): 355–68; Brian Stanley, '"Lausanne 1974": The Challenge from the Majority World to Northern-Hemisphere Evangelicalism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64, no. 3 (July 2013): 533–51.

18   For the declarations and the reports of the consultations (the Lausanne Occasional Papers, LOP), see the Lausanne website, https://lausanne.org.

19   Matthey, 'Édimbourg 1910', 89f.

20   See Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions* (Oxford: Regnum, 1994). For a more detailed discussion of the history of the Lausanne Movement, see Robert A. Hunt, 'The History of the Lausanne Movement', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 2 (April 2011): 81–86; Samuel Escobar, 'A Movement Divided: Three Approaches to World Evangelization Stand in Tension with One Another', *Transformation* 8 (October 1991); John Stott, 'Twenty Years after Lausanne: Some Personal Reflections', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 19, no. 1 (1995): 50–55.

## The Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance

After the Lausanne Congress in 1974, many people, including John Stott and Jack Dain, argued that there should be no other evangelical world structure, and the WEA made a formal appeal to that effect. However, others lobbied for the creation of a new entity, perhaps because they came from cultures where multiple competing organizations are simply an expression of an entrepreneurial spirit and perfectly acceptable. Billy Graham favoured a new organization, with evangelism as its sole objective.

Since 1974, a merger between the Lausanne Movement and the WEA has been sought on several occasions. Until the end of his long life, Stott continued to pray for a closer relationship, or even a merger, between the two organizations. In 1980, the WEA launched a formal appeal to Lausanne in favour of a merger. Ironically, many of those who had served Lausanne over the years were also members of their national alliance, and Lausanne continues to rely heavily on the leaders and networks fostered by the national alliances, as well as the ministries of the WEA, including its commissions. In 2011, a request was made for one of Lausanne's working groups to join a parallel WEA commission, but the request was rejected by Lausanne's leadership.

## Theological positions of the Lausanne Movement

More than 100 years after the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, and 50 years after the first Lausanne Congress in 1974, there are four main Christian branches (Catholic, Orthodox, ecumenical Protestant and evangelical),[21] with distinct structures and theological positions. Since the Lausanne Movement has a missionary aim, when I talk about theological positions, I will be talking about statements within the framework of the theology of mission. Indeed, one of the most enduring legacies of the Lausanne Movement is the theology of mission set out in its main declarations: the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto and the Cape Town Commitment.[22]

### The Lausanne Covenant (1974)

In a moving ceremony at the end of the Lausanne congress in 1974, the evangelical leaders signed the final document, which was subsequently accepted and spread throughout the world. Within a few years, the Lausanne Covenant became the statement of faith of countless churches, new Christian movements, seminaries and mission societies. The document is not just a theological summary expressing an evangelical consensus, but a firm commitment by evangelical leaders. We will see a similar dynamic in the Cape Town Commitment.

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21   For a more detailed discussion, see Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 40.

22   These three documents are available at https://lausanne.org. In this section, I draw mainly on Timothy C. Tennent, 'Lausanne and Global Evangelism: Theological Distinctives and Missiological Impact', in Dahle, *The Lausanne Movement*, 45–60. See also Robert J. Schreiter, 'From the Lausanne Covenant to the Cape Town Commitment: A Theological Assessment', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 2 (April 2011): 88–92.

Today, the Lausanne Covenant is widely regarded as one of the most important theological documents of the evangelical movement. Its influence has been considerable. Christopher Wright notes:

> This text helps us to understand the different aspects of mission. It emphasises the parallel needs of proclaiming the Gospel and social action. The Covenant recalls the need to teach and train for mission in a culturally sensitive way. And it reflects the integral dimension of biblical teaching. This declaration has helped to unite evangelical Christians around a core of common convictions and faith relating to mission.[23]

Ian Rutter, in turn, praises the quality and depth of the document, the attitude of humility and repentance and the contribution of theologians from the Majority World:

> The Lausanne Congress, and more precisely the studies that it gave rise to, is marked by a quality and depth of reflection superior to those of its predecessors. A certain maturity emerges from these documents: a change of attitude expressed in particular by the penitent tone of the Declaration, a greater appreciation of the complexity and diversity of the problems facing the church, and the new contribution of theologians from the Third World, particularly Latin Americans, with regard to the social responsibility of the church.[24]

The Lausanne Covenant comprises 15 articles setting out the main theological positions of the Lausanne Movement. Each of the document's central statements will be explored below.

*The purpose of God* (article 1). The triune God is a missionary God who calls us to participate in his redemptive mission in the world. 'He has been calling out from the world a people for himself, and sending his people back into the world to be his servants and his witnesses, for the extension of his kingdom, the building up of Christ's body, and the glory of his name.' In other words, mission is more about God and who he is than about us and what we do.

*The authority and power of the Bible* (article 2). For the Lausanne Movement, the role of the Bible in evangelization is of paramount importance. It affirms 'the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures ... without error in all that it affirms'.[25] The Lausanne Movement embraces both

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23  Christopher Wright, 'Loving God, Serving the World', *Christianity Today* 9 (October 2010): 15.
24  Ian Rutter, 'Une analyse des fondements théologiques des déclarations récentes du Conseil œcuménique des Églises, de l'Église catholique romaine et du mouvement évangélique à propos de la mission et de l'évangélisation', doctoral thesis, Marc Bloch University, Strasbourg, 2004, 156.
25  Biblical inerrancy is the belief that the Bible is without error in all its teaching. Some affirm inerrancy of the present form of Scripture, others only in the original manuscripts; some equate inerrancy with biblical infallibility, while others do not. The belief in biblical inerrancy is of particular importance within parts of the evangelical movement, especially among US evangelicals. The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy (1978) stated, 'We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science' (https://defendinginerrancy.com/chicago-statements). Signatories to the statement came from a variety of evangelical denominations and included J. I. Packer, Francis Schaeffer, Donald A. Carson and John MacArthur. The document produced an intensive debate on the subject.

those who understand 'without error' to mean inerrancy in every detail and those who affirm a limited inerrancy that recognizes that the Bible is entirely trustworthy, even if the authors have not always been technically accurate about certain historical or scientific facts, or when different details emerge from multiple witnesses to the same event. In this way, the Lausanne Movement has avoided the problems that have seriously hindered the development of the WEA.

*The uniqueness and universality of Christ* (article 3). The Lausanne Movement affirms that 'there is only one Saviour and only one gospel. ... Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-Man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and people.' The Lausanne Movement therefore rejects traditional universalism as well as the various Christocentric forms of universalism (such as inclusivism) by insisting not only on the supremacy of Jesus Christ, but also on the importance of the explicit call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

*The nature of evangelism; the church and evangelism* (articles 4 and 6). While article 4 focuses on evangelism, article 6 makes it clear that the task of world evangelization centres on the church. The gospel is not simply a verbal message, but one embodied in a living community of faith in this world. 'In the church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary. ... The church is at the very centre of God's cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the gospel.' Later, a phrase from this article became the watchword of the Lausanne Movement: 'The whole gospel by the whole church to the whole world.' It had a particularly strong influence on the Manila Manifesto.

*Christian social responsibility; freedom and persecution* (articles 5 and 13). The Lausanne Movement has led the global evangelical movement to listen to the voices of many Christians around the world who felt that the church has not shown sufficient solidarity with those who were marginalized, persecuted or deprived of justice. In a way, it recognized the witness of both Billy Graham and Mother Teresa. However, it has not always known how to relate the two. For some, social action is the *bridge* to evangelism, for others the natural *consequence of* evangelism, and for still others its complementary *partner*.[26]

*Cooperation in evangelism; churches in evangelistic partnership* (articles 7 and 8). The Lausanne Movement affirms that those who share the same biblical faith should be closely united in fellowship, work and witness. It provides a global platform on which often-neglected evangelical churches have been able to meet and form viable partnerships for world evangelization. Although church-centred, Lausanne has also helped to link a multitude of parachurch organizations involved in Bible translation, theological education, literature distribution, radio, television and evangelism, to name but a few areas.

*The urgency of the evangelistic task* (article 9). The Lausanne Movement has as its particular goal the advancement of world evangelization and has given impetus to a whole wave of research to understand the socio-cultural barriers that prevent people from understanding and accepting the gospel.

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26   For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between evangelism and social action, see Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 387–406; Wiher, *Holistic Mission*, 79–88.

*Evangelism and culture* (article 10). While every culture manifests the power of sin, it is also true that every culture is 'rich in beauty and goodness'. The Lausanne Movement affirms that God is the source and sustainer of physical and social culture. It supports the Christian conviction that God is beyond all human cultures and yet has chosen to reveal himself in the particularities of human cultures.

*Education and leadership* (article 11). The Lausanne Movement has helped evangelical churches to understand that evangelism cannot be reduced theologically to 'decisions for Christ' or to a concept of salvation that is identified solely with the doctrine of justification. On the contrary, evangelism fundamentally includes discipleship and the formation of a new generation of theologically trained Christian leaders.

*Spiritual conflict* (article 12). A theological position that flows from the broader framework of the mission of God is the recognition that the advancement of the church is not ultimately a logistical or managerial task but an integral part of spiritual warfare that must be waged through prayer. The church is not simply fighting the forces of liberal theology, ideologies or non-Christian religions. We are engaged in a spiritual battle against the powers of evil that seek to thwart the church and hinder the progress of world evangelization. This is why the Lausanne Movement emphasizes the call to purity, fidelity in prayer and recognition of the spiritual powers that oppose us.

*The power of the Holy Spirit* (article 14). Certain expressions of the church have been fundamentally Christocentric, but have not always integrated the centrality of the triune God in the work of world evangelization. The Lausanne Movement affirms that the Father is the initiator, sender and goal of the mission. The Son is the embodiment of God's redemptive mission. Finally, the Holy Spirit is the powerful presence of God in his mission in the world. Without the power and witness of the Holy Spirit, no one will be convinced of sin, be able to place their faith in Christ or grow in the Christian faith. The Spirit renews the church and enables us to be his witnesses in the world. The Spirit also enables the church to manifest all the realities of the New Creation in the midst of a world subject to sin and death.

*The return of Christ* (article 15). Finally, the Lausanne Covenant embraces a Christian vision of history that is part of an eschatological perspective in which the glorious and visible return of Jesus Christ will bring human history to an end, judge the world and accomplish his salvific plan and his eternal kingdom. The church's mission takes place between the ascension and the return of Christ through an intentional cross-cultural witness.

### The Manila Manifesto (1989)

In 1989, over 4,000 Christian leaders gathered in Manila, the Philippines. The resulting Manila Manifesto (1989) and the subsequent Cape Town Commitment (2010) were not designed to replace the Lausanne Covenant or to initiate major changes of theological positions. Rather, the purposes of these documents were to build on the foundations of the Lausanne Covenant and to highlight new challenges facing the church or missiological themes that require further clarification and deeper reflection.

The Manila Manifesto contains 21 introductory affirmations that broadly restate the substance of the Lausanne Covenant. The 12 following articles go into greater depth on certain theological, cultural and ecclesial aspects. The affirmations include two distinctive elements that were not explicitly present in the Lausanne Covenant. First, Affirmation 5 states that the Jesus of history is the same as the Christ of glory. Second, Affirmation 18 calls for spending more time studying society so that we can better understand its 'structures, values and needs' as part of the wider framework of developing a missionary strategy. This implies an in-depth analysis based on cultural and social anthropology. One could refer to this development as the 'cultural turn' of the Lausanne Movement.[27]

*The Cape Town Commitment (2010)*

In 2010, more than 4,200 evangelical leaders from 198 countries met to reflect on the progress of world evangelization. It was the first Lausanne congress with more representatives from the Majority World than from the West. The Cape Town Commitment is on one hand a clear affirmation of the theological positions of the Lausanne Covenant, and on the other hand a comprehensive reframing of how the gospel can be proclaimed more effectively in the new contexts of the 21st century.

In its first part, the Cape Town Commitment reorganizes all the theological work of the Lausanne Movement around the theme of God's love: 'We love because God first loved us' (1 Jn 4:19). This is in fact a new presentation of the first article of the Lausanne Covenant.

The second part of the document identifies six key themes which, once again, take up many of the classic themes of the Lausanne Movement. Several new elements are introduced, including creation care (II.B,5) and a strong critique of the prosperity gospel (II.E,5). The document calls believers to humility, integrity and simplicity (II.E) and to remain faithful in the midst of a broken world that is increasingly hostile to the gospel (II.B).

## Missiological impact

The Lausanne Movement's missiological impact must be measured in relation to the socio-cultural, demographic and theological context of the early 21st century, which is very different from that faced by the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910.[28] Timothy Tennent identifies seven main trends influencing world mission:[29] (1) the collapse of Christendom in the West; (2) the rise of a postmodern (or late

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27  The notion of 'cultural turn' can have different meanings in the social sciences and missions. Originally, it implied the shift to the semiotic (heuristic) model of culture in the 1960 to 1980s, observed by Clifford Geertz, 'Blurred Genres', *American Scholar* 49 (1980): 165-79. See also Michael A. Rynkievich, *Soul, Self, and Society: A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 1-10; Paul G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts* (Harrisburg, PA: International Trinity Press, 1999); and the discussion below under the subheading 'Enabling access to the gospel'.

28  For other assessments, see René Padilla, 'The Future of the Lausanne Movement', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 2 (April 2011): 86–88; Tennent, 'Lausanne and Global Evangelism', 53-59.

29  Timothy C. Tennent, 'Seven Megatrends That Are Shaping Twenty-First Century Missions', in *Invitation to World Missions*, 18-50.

modern) culture that is creating a cultural, theological and ecclesiastical crisis in the West; (3) the collapse of the 'from the West to the rest' paradigm; (4) Christianity as a global phenomenon and the transfer of its centre of gravity to the south and east; (5) the emergence of a very heterogeneous fourth branch of Christianity, which Tennent groups as 'independents', alongside Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant sensibilities; (6) globalization with the accompanying phenomena of migration, urbanisation and new transport and communication technologies; and (7) a deeper meta- and post-structural ecumenism.

In the following, I will present the main areas where an impact of the Lausanne Movement seems detectable, whether positive or negative.

### A common goal: 'The whole gospel by the whole church to the whole world'

According to its website, 'The Lausanne Movement connects influencers and ideas for global mission, with a vision of the gospel for every person, disciple-making churches for every people and place, Christ-like leaders for every church and sector, and kingdom impact in every sphere of society.' This statement, known as 'Lausanne's fourfold vision', has given enormous impetus to the gathering and identity of evangelicals, to theological and missiological reflection and to the efforts of evangelicals in world evangelization. Article 6 of the Lausanne Covenant contains a phrase that sums up this statement and has become the movement's watchword: 'The whole gospel by the whole church to the whole world'. This formulation is short and to the point, which is probably why it has become so widespread. I will come back to it below.

If we compare the Lausanne slogan with the threefold aim of the WEA, we will find several elements in common. The latter includes (1) 'the spread of the gospel' (Phil 1:12); (2) 'the defence and confirmation of the gospel' (Phil 1:7); and (3) 'sharing in the gospel' (Phil 1:5). While the WEA sees itself as a general representative of evangelicals, the Lausanne Movement has understood itself, especially at the outset, primarily as a network for world evangelization.

### Strengthening the evangelical identity

The Lausanne Movement gave a boost to the clarification of the evangelical identity in a way that the WEA itself could not. With the Lausanne Covenant, a text of evangelical identification was created that gained large diffusion. The numerous Lausanne consultations, which reflected on a wide range of themes perceived as new challenges for the evangelical faith at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, created a sense of inclusion, especially among evangelicals from the Majority World, and widened the space for evangelical participation.

Theologically speaking, the Lausanne Movement takes up the four common traits of evangelicals according to David Bebbington, which are biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and missionary activity.[30] These four features form a *positive identity* for evangelicals. They also set evangelicals apart from other traditions of Christianity; the authority of Scripture is opposed to both the autonomous reason

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30   David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730 to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–3.

of the Enlightenment and to church traditions. The need for personal faith moves away from belief in the efficacy of the sacraments. The emphasis on evangelism rejects the modern syncretism that considers all religions equal ('as long as you are sincere'). This opposition to the dominant currents in some Christian churches implicitly expresses a *negative identity* for evangelicals.

Based on the link between biblical doctrine and personal experience, Jacques Blandenier speaks of a bipolar identity of evangelicals: 'Sometimes the content of revealed teaching (*fides quae creditur*: the faith transmitted to the saints once and for all); sometimes the believer's attitude in the face of his God (*fides qua creditur*: your faith has saved you).'[31] The varied relationship of doctrine and experience has given rise to diverse nuances within evangelicalism that the Lausanne Movement has been able to bring together. Spiritual experience is primary for pietism, Methodism, revivalism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement; doctrine predominates for the Anglican and Reformed movements.

The Lausanne Covenant and the two later declarations have struck a theological balance that has made them a basis of identity for a large part of the evangelical world.

## A platform for exchange, reflection and encouragement

With its three congresses and numerous consultations, the Lausanne Movement has created a platform for exchange, theological reflection and fraternal encouragement among evangelicals. Gradually, representatives and theologians from the Majority World were included in the debates and in the deliberative and decision-making bodies. Nevertheless, there have been setbacks in the history of the Lausanne Movement, when Majority World theologians have not been listened to or were marginalized in debates and decisions. This was the case, for example, when they felt constrained to draft another text as the 'alternative Lausanne covenant'.

René Padilla was involved in the IFES student movement with John Stott (1959–1982). Following this, he became the founder and general secretary of the Latin American Theological Fraternity (1983–1992), and then the international president of Tearfund and of the Micah Network. He told Douglas Birdsall, then president of the Lausanne Movement:

> I am delighted with the content of the Cape Town Commitment ... It is a remarkable document. For my part, I looked for three things in it: (1) globalization and poverty; (2) a call to radical discipleship; and (3) a concern for the environment. I found all these points, and I'm very happy with the way they were dealt with.[32]

Nevertheless, Padilla criticized the Lausanne Movement for its over-emphasis on the strategy of world evangelization (in his view a US approach), the dichotomy between evangelical spirituality and social responsibility, the insufficient space reserved for theological reflection, a lack of consideration of context, and a failure to take into

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31 Jacques Blandenier, 'Les grandes fractures au sein du protestantisme', *Hokhma* 60 (1995): 3–34.
32 René Padilla, conversation on 3 August 2012 with Douglas Birdsall, then president of the Lausanne Movement, according to an email from Birdsall to the Lausanne leadership.

account the transfer in Christianity's centre of gravity towards the south and east.[33] He further objected that 'the locus of organisational leadership, control of financial resources and strategic decision-making tends to remain within the north and the west.'[34] I will return to Padilla's criticisms in the following sections.

### Enabling access to the gospel through pragmatic, strategic and managerial missiology

One criticism lodged by Padilla, Samuel Escobar and Wilbert Shenk was that strategic missiological thinking and a managerial approach to evangelism seem to have prevailed in the Lausanne Movement. However, a positive aspect of these efforts was in-depth reflection on linguistic and socio-cultural barriers to the gospel.

At the first congress in Lausanne, Ralph Winter emphasized the meaning of the Greek word *ethnē*, usually translated into English as 'nations', which however denotes non-Jewish 'ethno-linguistic peoples'.[35] The analogous modern question is therefore which peoples have not yet been reached with the good news of Jesus Christ. From Lausanne on, many missionary organizations have undertaken research on 'unreached peoples'—an expression introduced by Winter—and the linguistic and socio-cultural obstacles that hinder their access to the gospel. For example, Wycliffe/SIL launched the Vision 2025 project to translate the Bible into every language in need during the 50 years ending in 2025.

Although the term does not appear in the Manila Manifesto, it was at that congress in 1989 that Luis Bush, president of AD 2000 and Beyond, introduced the concept of the '10/40 Window'. It includes the regions of North Africa and Asia between the 10th and 40th degrees of north latitude, where two-thirds of the world's population live, and which have been characterized by the highest levels of poverty and the least access to the gospel.[36] Subsequently, dozens of mission societies and churches have directed church planting work to this part of the globe, which includes the heart of the Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist worlds. The remarkable work of the Joshua Project, the Adopt-a-People initiative, and AD 2000 and Beyond, plus the extensive research of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board and of the World Christian Database, among others, would not be where they are today without the impetus of Lausanne.

The tools of cultural anthropology are used to carry out the necessary research. In addition to social-scientific research, a reflection on the contextualization of the gospel message is undertaken, using the tools of the communication sciences. This

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33  Wilbert Shenk agreed with Padilla and Escobar that strategic reflection takes precedence over theological reflection in the Lausanne Movement. Padilla, 'The Future of the Lausanne Movement', 86–88; Shenk, '2004 Forum for World Evangelization: A Report', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 2 (2005): 31; Escobar, 'A Movement Divided: Three Approaches to World Evangelization Stand in Tension with One Another', *Transformation* 8 (October 1991).

34  Padilla, 'The Future of the Lausanne Movement', 87.

35  Ralph D. Winter, 'The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism', in Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 213–41; see also Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (eds.), *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 379.

36  The 10/40 Window does not include Europe and Indonesia, where there are also few Christians. Given this shortcoming, and after several decades of further secularization, this notion is obsolete today.

is why some people speak of the 'cultural turn' of the Lausanne Movement. Tennent remarks:

> As someone who has followed the Lausanne Movement from the beginning of the Movement, it is probably fair to observe that Lausanne has become more focused on the praxis of missions, sometimes to the detriment of good theological and missiological reflection. In the formative period, John Stott and Billy Graham represented a unique partnership of theological clarity and ministerial praxis. ... However, if Lausanne is to continue as a vibrant force, the theological foundations of the Movement and the call for deeper missiological reflection must remain at the forefront.[37]

### Deeper missiological reflection

As Tennent points out, the Lausanne Movement was launched by an ideal pair: the international evangelist Billy Graham and his association, which had the financial resources to create sufficient momentum, and pastor John Stott, a remarkable theologian, prolific writer and great evangelist and traveller. Stott essentially formulated the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto and the 1982 Grand Rapids declaration on the relationship between evangelism and social action. Stott had already met the theologians of the Majority World with their different, even opposing points of view through his student ministry and had invited them to the first congress in Lausanne. He agreed to publish the 'alternative Lausanne covenant' in the Lausanne congress proceedings. In the debates and in the wording of the declarations, he sought a middle way to keep everyone in the boat.

From the 1990s onwards, in missiology in general and in the Lausanne Movement in particular, the importance of theological reflection as a foundation for mission came again to the forefront. Christopher Wright, John Stott's successor as president of the Lausanne Theological Working Group, brought in more theologians from the Majority World and gave a new shape to theological reflection centred on God's love. He also introduced the notion of the mission of God into the texts of the Lausanne Movement, with the clear understanding that the church is at the heart of God's mission in the world and that the church is the very goal of God's redemption.[38] Padilla and Escobar, in turn, introduced the notions of integral mission and transformation. By analogy to the 'cultural turn', one could speak of a 'theological turn' of the Lausanne Movement.

### The whole gospel: holistic mission

The evangelical movement of the early decades of the 20th century largely set aside the need for a broader commitment to serving the poor, fighting injustice and tackling the structural ills that trap and disenfranchise people. By contrast, a more holistic gospel has been an important component of evangelicals' heritage, and few were as committed to it as the missionaries of the 19th century. However, the controversy between fundamentalists and modernists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

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37  Tennent, 'Lausanne and Global Evangelism', 57.
38  See Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking God's Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

tended to separate evangelism from social action in a new way. In general, funda-
mentalism truncated the gospel by reducing it to a message of personal salvation. By
contrast, the emerging ecumenical movement equated the gospel with a broader so-
cial witness while placing less emphasis on repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The
gospel, of course, involves both. The Lausanne Movement helped to shape and gal-
vanize the church around a broader redemptive mission.

The 1982 Grand Rapids consultation on the relationship between evangelism
and social action was one of many consultations that helped to reframe this issue for
the church. Furthermore, at its September 2001 consultation in Oxford, England, a
few days after the September 11 attacks, the Micah Network formulated its basic
vision in the 'Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission'.[39] This expression,
later largely replaced by the notions of 'holistic mission' and 'transformation', was
situated in the perspective of the radical evangelicals who formulated the alternative
Lausanne covenant. René Padilla also played an important role in the Micah Net-
work. Finally, the Cape Town Commitment endorsed the notion of integral mission
definitively in the Lausanne texts, citing the Micah Network Declaration.

Today, millions of Christians who have been shaped by the Lausanne Movement
are tackling issues ranging from human trafficking and poverty to creation care. In
fact, the Lausanne Movement has sponsored dozens of consultations over the years
on many themes that have enabled Christians to reflect more deeply on issues that
are the legitimate heritage of Christian witness.[40]

*The whole church: including Majority World voices*

Until the 1990s, missionary practice was largely perceived as the Western church
mobilizing to reach the non-Western world with the gospel. The Lausanne Move-
ment gave a voice, and literally a platform, to dozens of new voices in world Chris-
tianity. However, not until the 2004 Lausanne Forum in Pattaya, Thailand,[41] at-
tended by 1,500 leaders from around the world, did Lausanne really begin to become
more intentionally global in terms of leadership, representation at meetings, and se-
riously tackling the many structural, linguistic and cultural challenges that pre-
vented the movement from being fully global. Since then, Lausanne has sponsored
several conferences dedicated to identifying emerging global leaders.

During the 20th century, Christianity was transformed from a Eurasian and
North American phenomenon into a global movement. In 1910, 93 percent of Chris-
tians lived in the northern hemisphere; by 2010, 62 percent of Christians lived in the
southern hemisphere.[42] Walbert Buhlmann and Andrew Walls were the first to

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39   'Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission', https://bit.ly/Micah-Decl-Integral-Mission.
40   For an in-depth discussion of the development of the concept of holistic mission, see Wiher,
*Holistic Mission*, 15–43; for the watchword 'the whole gospel', see Christopher J. H. Wright, '"Ac-
cording to the Scriptures": the Whole Gospel in Biblical Revelation', *Evangelical Review of Theology*
33, no. 1 (2009): 4-18.
41   See David Claydon (ed.), *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call* (Pasadena, CA: William
Carey Library, 2005). Most Pattaya documents are available at https://lausanne.org/documents.
42   Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010* (Edinburgh:
Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

recognize this shift.[43] In a simplifying way, one could say that a post-Christian West is now facing a Christian South and East. This transfer has implications for the missionary movement: whereas in 1910, mission was 'from the West to the rest', in 2010 it is 'from anywhere to everywhere'. The missionary conference in Mexico City (1963) spoke of 'witness in six continents'.

Statistically, the transfer of the centre of gravity towards the south is even more marked among evangelicals than for Christians in general.[44] In 2008, the ten people groups most resistant to the gospel were in Western Europe, while the ten most receptive peoples were in China or India. In fact, the Chinese church was then the fastest-growing church in the world.[45] As a logical consequence, according to *Operation World*, in 2010 the sending of missionaries from the Majority World outnumbered the sending of missionaries from the West, and two-thirds of all missionaries were Asians. However, the number of Western missionaries continues to rise.

In addition to the transfer of Christianity's centre of gravity, Walls saw a reversal in migratory flows in the course of the 20th century. The great European migration, which lasted from the beginning of the 16th century to the middle of the 20th century, and of which the great Western missionary movement must be seen as a part, has been followed by a 'return migration' of people fleeing political problems or economic misery in the Majority World and bringing with them a dynamic Christian faith so typical of those peoples who have not undergone the influence of the Enlightenment.[46] This pattern was confirmed by the many missionaries from the Majority World who have arrived in the West. Missiologists now talk about the 'missiology of the diaspora'.

The most dynamic and fastest-growing Christian movements in the world today are in places that for centuries were considered mission fields. Today, world evangelization is unthinkable without the full collaboration of 'the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world'.[47]

### The whole world: new initiatives

We have already spoken of the impetus given by Ralph Winter at the first Lausanne Congress to reaching ethnolinguistic peoples not yet reached by the gospel. This call was reinforced by Donald McGavran's clarion call not to forget the two billion

43   Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978); Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 68; Walls, 'Christian Mission in a Five-Hundred-Year Context', in *Mission in the Twenty-First Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*, ed. Andrew F. Walls and Cathy Ross (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), 193–204.

44   Johnson and Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010*, 98.

45   David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, 'Missiometrics 2008: Reality Checks for Christian World Communions', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 1 (2008): 29, table B.

46   Walls, 'Christian Mission in a Five-Hundred-Year Context', 193–204.

47   For the watchword 'the whole church', see '"The Whole Church": Statement of the Lausanne Theology Working Group', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 1 (2010): 4–13; Christopher J. H. Wright, 'The Whole Church: A Brief Biblical Survey', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 1 (2010): 14–28.

human beings living in the 10/40 Window.[48] Only 2 percent of all missionaries were to be found in this region of the world. Following these appeals, hundreds of initiatives were launched around the world to 'finish the task' and 'evangelize the world in our generation'.[49] The organization called AD 2000 and Beyond particularly embraced this vision of urgency. While some thought this vision was foolishness, hundreds of Bible translations and recordings of the gospel message in new languages were produced and rural radio stations created, to name but a few initiatives.

As a result of these efforts by thousands of people on mission, the world map has changed. In the Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist worlds, millions of indigenous Christians follow their Lord openly or in secret. In the last 50 years, more people have come to faith in Jesus Christ in the Muslim and Buddhist worlds than during the entirety of preceding church history. The churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia have developed a missionary dynamic similar to what the Western churches enjoyed during the great revivals of the 19th century. They now represent more than two-thirds of world Christianity. The evangelical movement can thank the Lausanne Movement for having been at the origin of these evangelism initiatives through its very targeted efforts.[50]

*A partnership between equals*

One theme that appears in all the major Lausanne documents is the call for closer collaboration in the worldwide church by bringing together the evangelical family. The Lausanne Movement, particularly in the early decades of its existence, tended to avoid collaboration with conciliar Christian bodies. Over time, however, the Lausanne Movement has entered into significant dialogues with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches and the mainline Protestant churches, particularly when it became clear that these movements included many dynamic Christians who shared Lausanne's fundamental commitment to world evangelization. By way of example, the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the World Council of Churches' Programme for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation (WCC-PIDC), together with the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), spent five years meeting and reflecting on a document entitled *Christian Witness in a Multireligious World*, finalized in Bangkok in 2011. It is intended as a set of recommendations to guide ethical Christian witness in today's world.

On several occasions, the Lausanne Movement has facilitated discussions on new concepts of strategic partnerships. For example, at the Forum for World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand in 2004, one issue was the question of healthy partnerships. It became clear that much of what was considered partnership actually

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48   Donald McGavran, 'The Dimensions of World Evangelization', in Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 94‑115, particularly 99.

49   The latter slogan was coined in the context of the Student Volunteer Movement, of which John Mott was a leading figure. See Dana L. Robert, 'The Origin of the Student Volunteer Watchword: "The Evangelization of the World in this Generation"', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10, no. 4 (1986): 146‑49.

50   For the watchword 'the whole world', see '"The Whole World": Statement of the Lausanne Theology Working Group, Beirut 2010', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 3 (2010): 196‑206; Christopher J. H. Wright, 'The World in the Bible', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 3 (2010): 207‑19.

retained traces of unhealthy relationships because of the power differentials that inevitably arise when differences in culture, education and financial power are involved.

It is questionable whether the Lausanne Movement itself has always achieved a partnership of equals. Some theologians from the Majority World have been sceptical. To Padilla, the Lausanne Movement was still dominated by American and English-speaking representation and decision-making structures.[51] According to Rose Dowsett, the Lausanne Movement's highly targeted strategic approach has often bypassed local churches and their leaders and may not have a lasting effect. For her too, such an approach resembles an American conception rather than a Majority World mentality that would adopt a more holistic approach. With regard to the Cape Town Congress, she noted that many Christian organizations, including some national evangelical alliances, felt that this congress and the complex processes that preceded it diverted scarce resources from other ministries, sometimes with devastating effects.[52]

### Duplication: competition or complementarity?

The Lausanne Movement offers a unique platform for a wide variety of groups to meet and collaborate around a common commitment to world evangelization.[53] It has endeavoured to remain a movement rather than an organization. Has it succeeded? Some would say that it has developed into a global organizational structure. As an organization, Lausanne can create confusion in relation to other long-standing organizations such as the World Evangelical Alliance.

The practical relationship between Lausanne and the WEA varies according to time and place. For example, in several northern European countries there is only one body that participates in both organizations. Meanwhile, the Lausanne Theological Working Group has a long history of incorporating active members of the WEA Mission and Theological Commissions. This practice was established by John Stott, who initially chaired the Lausanne Theological Working Group. It has been wisely continued under the chairmanship of Christopher Wright.

It was widely advertised that the Cape Town Congress would be a partnership between the Lausanne Movement and the WEA. In some ways it was, but not in others. The WEA appeared in the publicity only after repeated requests and some protests, and then usually in small print somewhere on the document. There was no agreed-upon protocol between the organizations, no consultation on key decisions, and no invitation to WEA structures to become involved. It therefore seemed to many delegates that a great opportunity to model a much stronger type of partnership had been missed. Others remarked that, since the Lausanne leadership had funded most of the enormous cost of the congress and had employed a large team to bring it to fruition—with great efficiency—they should have the right to quietly sideline the WEA, whose resources are of a completely different order. So this purported

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51  Padilla, 'The Future of the Lausanne Movement', 87.
52  Dowsett, 'The Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance', 408.
53  This section draws on Dowsett, 'The Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance', 407.

partnership runs the risk of looking like a big brother and a little brother, with the latter lacking the means to be a real partner.

# Conclusion

The Lausanne Movement has given the evangelical movement a strong identity, helping it become established as the fourth branch of Christianity alongside the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and the ecumenical movement. It has also motivated various evangelical players to take new initiatives in world evangelization that have changed the world map in the long run. The results of this highly targeted effort are considerable.

The Lausanne Movement sought to remain a movement and a network, but in fact it became an organization, in effect a sister organization to the WEA. The partnership between the two has been not entirely successful and not free from competition. Some critics deplore the fact that the decision-making structures of the Lausanne Movement are still largely dominated by English speakers, often of US origin. Many representatives of the Majority World feel more like little brothers than partners. Is this because they can contribute less materially than Westerners? The Lausanne Movement's record after 50 years of existence is certainly remarkable but mixed.

# A Movement in Motion: A View from the Inside

## David W. Bennett

What, exactly, is the Lausanne Movement? As it celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and prepares for the Fourth Lausanne Congress, to be held this September in Incheon, South Korea, how has the Lausanne Movement changed since the Third Lausanne Congress, which convened in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010? What are some of the trends emerging within the movement, and the priorities shaping its direction?

### From gathering to movement

As confirmed by Hannes Wiher's well-researched history immediately preceding this article, the Lausanne Movement was not initially launched as a 'movement', nor did it describe itself in these terms from its inception. The gathering convened in Lausanne, Switzerland in July 1974 was intended to be a one-time event. It was not envisioned as, nor called originally, the 'First' Lausanne Congress (nor the first of anything). Only afterwards was a Continuation Committee formed and a formal structure authorized, that is, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (which remains its legal name until today). The LCWE provided a minimal structure to facilitate continuing interaction among leaders from a large variety of churches, missions and organizations, united by their evangelical faith (summarized in the Lausanne Covenant) and their desire to reflect theologically on, as well as participate actively in, the cause of world evangelization.

Over the following three decades, under the umbrella of the LCWE, various consultations were organized, several dozen Lausanne Occasional Papers were published, a handful of Senior Associates (topical specialists) were appointed, a second Congress was convened (Manila 1989), a number of special interest groups and networks as well as national and regional committees were formed, and several hundred cooperative initiatives were launched. There were periods when the LCWE as an organization nearly ran out of money as well as personnel (euphemistically called the 'quiet years'), yet the relationships persisted and the vision for global missions continued, especially in portions of the Majority World where missiological reflection and mobilization for cross-cultural mission were accelerating. A movement was forming.

When the Forum for World Evangelization convened in Pattaya, Thailand in 2004, it was partly a test to see if there was enough momentum to reactivate the Lausanne global network and to convene a Third Congress to address the new realities

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of the 21st century. The experiment was a success. A new CEO (Doug Birdsall) was appointed, who expanded and reorganized the board, appointed a new International Director (Lindsay Brown) and 12 International Deputy Directors, and began a search for a suitable site for a Third Congress—which became Cape Town 2010.

But despite the many accomplishments of the Third Congress, shortly afterwards the LCWE was back to a very small staff, burdened by a crushing debt resulting from several unexpected crises that arose in connection with the Third Congress (including a massive cyberattack and an unexpected currency exchange issue). Some wondered whether another set of 'quiet years' was about to begin. But once again, relationships had been formed, vision had been kindled and initiatives had been launched, which provided sufficient foundation for the building and reconstruction of various missional networks while the financial base was being stabilized.

For the first time, the LCWE began to call itself the Lausanne Movement, encouraged by a friend of Lausanne who had studied social movements and who, at a meeting of Lausanne leaders in 2011, noted the parallels with what was emerging through the three Congresses, the consultations, the networks and the publications catalyzed by the LCWE. Over the next 13 years, the leadership of the Lausanne Movement began to work more deliberately to build a structure, with a small staff serving a much larger network of volunteer leaders, that could help to encourage and activate a global mission movement towards a vision of the gospel for every person, disciple-making churches for every people and place, Christ-like leaders for every church and sector, and kingdom influence in every sphere of society.

It has been my privilege to see many of these developments firsthand. As a student of theology and missiology at the master's and doctoral levels for the five years prior to the First Lausanne Congress, I had the opportunity to study under several of the professors who shaped the thinking of that gathering. As a pastor in globally minded churches for 35 years, I used the writings emerging from the Lausanne Movement, and through various teaching and research opportunities in Asia and elsewhere I had the opportunity to interact with Majority World leaders who were active in Lausanne. Another round of doctoral work, as well as a consulting assignment with an evangelical foundation, took me to the Second Lausanne Congress in Manila in 1989. Additional research and teaching on leadership in churches in India over the following decade led to deeper Lausanne involvement, including participation in Pattaya in 2004 and Budapest (a preparatory meeting for Cape Town) in 2007, followed by full-time work for a year on the team overseeing the program for Cape Town 2010, and then an invitation to the senior staff team of Lausanne in 2011, where I continue to serve as Global Associate Director and as Congress Director for the Fourth Congress.

Over the last decade, under the leadership of the current CEO, Michael Oh, I have seen significant advances in the internal structure of the Lausanne Movement as an organization, as well as emerging emphases intended to expand the capacity of the larger missional movement that it hopes to serve as well as catalyze.

## A three-dimensional network of networks

Doug Birdsall once told me that he had four basic goals prior to the Third Congress as he guided the reactivation of the Lausanne Movement: preparation for the

Congress (including deciding on a site and raising funds), reorganization of the board, appointment of regional leaders, and institution of a coordinated structure for the various issue specialists and networks. He accomplished the first three goals but ran out of time for the fourth. So he enlisted me for that task midway through 2011. All the Senior Associates, Special Interest Committees, and issue-related networks with their leaders were consolidated over the next year or so.

In 2014, a regional Lausanne meeting for Europe was held in Vevey, Switzerland, joined by the Lausanne board, staff, regional leaders from around the globe, and Senior Associates (who at that time numbered about 25). The scenery was breathtaking, and we took some stunning group photographs. But the demographic imbalances were unmistakable. Some referred jokingly to the photo of the regional leaders as the 'Men's Chorus', since there were no women. Several Senior Associates were unable to come at the last minute, including some women and people from the Majority World. The group photograph of the Senior Associates showed far less diversity than the networks they were leading, to the point that I was reluctant to have the group photo posted online.

During the meetings in Vevey, several of the Senior Associates proposed a change in name, as well as the possibility for co-leadership of the networks, to facilitate greater global reach and encourage diversity in region, age and gender. Within a year, we had greatly expanded and renamed the group of 'Catalysts' (formerly Senior Associates), with generally two and sometimes three Catalysts co-leading each issue network. Several of these networks have formed partnerships that explicitly bridge to and/or join forces with colleagues in the World Evangelical Alliance (such as Business as Mission, International Student Ministries, Creation Care, and Integrity and Anti-Corruption).

The Lausanne Movement was now organized around two dimensions (regions and issues), but a third dimension was about to emerge.

In 2016, a Younger Leaders Gathering was convened in Jakarta, Indonesia, which launched a ten-year cohort called the Younger Leaders Generation, along with several initiatives for mentoring and equipping younger leaders within the movement. The emphasis on younger leaders was expanded to include inter-generational friendships and collaboration, focusing on working together, with each generation contributing its own gifts, rather than on 'passing the baton' and other images of replacing one generation with another.

Furthermore, instead of one leader for each region (now called Regional Directors rather than International Deputy Directors), each region was now co-led by two Regional Directors (or Regional Director and Co-Director), along with a regional team. With the addition of several female Regional Directors as co-leaders, the 'men's chorus' became a 'mixed chorus'.

If we were to return to Vevey today, there would be no hesitation to take group photographs of the Lausanne leadership teams—board, staff, regional leaders, issue network leaders, generations team—because they include women and men drawn from every continent, younger and older, from a rich variety of cultures and backgrounds. And these leaders serve networks that are even more global and diverse, as has been particularly evident during the numerous online gatherings convened during and since the COVID years, and also during the in-person gatherings convened

during the last three years of the process that led up to the Fourth Congress. More and more gatherings have been initiated that combine regions or involve several issue networks—not centrally initiated or coordinated by Lausanne staff but emerging from the grassroots, as is characteristic of a movement.

Increasingly, we have been exploring the nature of polycentrism in the leadership of a global movement, stimulated by the research and writing of one of our Lausanne Catalysts for Leadership Development, Joe Handley, who completed a dissertation in this area. As the networks have become more diverse and complex, structures need to be reworked and new patterns of communication and decision-making must be designed, so that there is broad understanding and ownership of the purpose, mission, vision and values, as well as empowerment of leaders and teams so that they can be agile and adaptable in their own contexts.

## New forms of content and communication

The last decade has seen a flowering of content, in a variety of formats, from the various networks of the Lausanne Movement, coordinated initially by an interdepartmental Content Team, later enfolded within the Communications Team.

Late in 2012, a new online publication, the *Lausanne Global Analysis*, was launched, now published every other month in French, Spanish, Portuguese and Korean in addition to English, with a global Editorial Advisory Board, authors from every continent, and readership from over 200 countries.

In 2015, a new series of video resources was launched, called Lausanne Global Classroom, in which the various Lausanne issue networks summarized the key challenges and opportunities they were dealing with, based on interviews with members of their network from around the world. Eighteen topics are currently available, and several more videos will be filmed at the upcoming Fourth Congress.

Recognizing that people are increasingly engaging with information online, the Communications Team launched a multi-pronged strategy for digital access and promotion of content produced by the Lausanne networks, including posting on a variety of social media, writing blogs, sharing videos from Lausanne gatherings, and producing podcasts and webinars.

Lausanne Occasional Papers continue to be written and posted on the Lausanne website. Seventy-seven such papers are currently available and additional ones are being prepared. Many of the issue networks have published books in their areas of specialty, through a variety of channels around the world (though unfortunately Lausanne had to close its in-house publishing department for financial reasons several years ago). Some of the more prolific networks include Church Planting, Creation Care, Cities, and Diasporas.

Recently the Lausanne Movement published a massive online *State of the Great Commission* report, soon to be available in seven languages, which includes over 100 original graphics, 40 articles written by 150 authors from around the world on issues and challenges facing the church today as it engages in global mission, and reflections (currently being drafted or in editorial review) from each of the 12 Lausanne regions.

In addition, over the last three years the Lausanne Movement has been engaged in a systematic listening process in its 12 regions and 25 of its issue networks and with younger leaders, addressing five questions:

1. What are the most significant gaps or remaining opportunities towards the fulfilment of the Great Commission (to make disciples of all the nations)?
2. What promising breakthroughs or innovations do you see that can accelerate the fulfilment of the Great Commission?
3. In what areas is greater collaboration most critical to see the fulfilment of the Great Commission?
4. Where is further research needed?
5. To whom else should we be listening as part of this process?

We formed a Global Listening Team, with representatives of all 12 Lausanne regions, co-led by Steve Moon of Korea and Eiko Takamizawa of Japan, to analyze the answers we were receiving through the many different listening calls, focus groups and in-depth interviews. That Global Listening Team has issued three major summary reports, soon to be published as Lausanne Occasional Papers.

## Theology and practice

The Lausanne Theology Working Group also began identifying some key biblical and theological areas emerging from the listening process that needed to be addressed in greater depth, such as development of an evangelical hermeneutic, the place of the local church in missions, what it means to be human, the imperative of discipleship, and Christian response to technology and a digital world. They have drafted several Lausanne Occasional Papers on these topics, distilling many of the insights into a document to be shared with the Fourth Congress participants as well.

Following the very able leadership of Chris Wright, as chair of the Theology Working Group leading up to the Third Congress and continuing through the publication of the Cape Town Commitment, there were several years of transition. The Theology Working Group began to rebuild in preparation for the Fourth Congress under the co-leadership of Victor Nakah (Zimbabwe/South Africa) and Ivor Poobalan (Sri Lanka), with theologians drawn from every continent but primarily from the Majority World.

However, in the current life of the Lausanne Movement, the work of missiological and theological reflection is not confined to the Theology Working Group. It is also taking place in the issue networks, where new biblical and missiological ground has been broken on such topics as diaspora theology, creation care and disability concerns. Consultations have been convened since the Third Lausanne Congress to address creation care, the varied faces of Islam, the aberrations of prosperity theology, the role of wealth creation in holistic transformation, ministry to children at risk, and the challenge of nominalism. These consultations as well as various writing projects have brought together theologians, missiologists, strategists and practitioners, from churches and academic institutions as well as multiple sectors of the workplace.

Lausanne has sometimes been described as a movement of reflective practitioners. As a movement, it embraces both people whose strengths are in academic theology and those who primary passion is field-based evangelism, church planting

and/or social engagement. As a movement, it does not have formal membership, so when one speaks about the 'theology of the Lausanne Movement', beyond the three foundational documents (Lausanne Covenant, Manila Manifesto and Cape Town Commitment), one must consider the breadth of publications and reflections emerging from this network of networks in all its three-dimensional breadth and variety—regions, issues and generations. The movement's coherence is found in its biblical anchors, the alignment with the foundational documents, and the commitment to its fourfold missional vision: the gospel for every person, disciple-making churches for every people and place, Christ-like leaders for every church and sector, and kingdom influence in every sphere of society.

Billy Graham once described the 'spirit of Lausanne' as a spirit of 'humility, friendship, prayer, study, partnership and hope'. The Lausanne Movement emphasizes biblically grounded theology as well as missiological strategy. It calls for proclamation of the gospel as well as social justice and care for creation. It emphasizes the need for the spiritual formation of disciples, Christ-like character in leaders, and reliance on prayer and on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And it fosters relationships, personal connections and collaborations. These strands weave through the movement and its networks, though at different times, in different contexts, and in the communications of different leaders, the proportion and emphasis may vary.

## A growing emphasis on the workplace

An emerging emphasis within the Lausanne Movement over the last decade has been the importance of engaging and empowering people in the workplace as part of the work of global mission. At Manila in 2019, Lausanne convened a Global Workplace Forum, in answer to increasing calls within the movement for more explicit discussion of mission in and through the full range of workplace settings in which God's people are placed—business, the professions, the trades, the arts, government, education, the home, service organizations and much more. A majority of the participants at the Global Workplace Forum earned their living from daily work other than that supported by the tithes and offerings of Christian people. The workplace is the arena to which the vast majority of Christians are called, and it is the context where many of us have the greatest proportion of our interactions. Large portions of Scripture include narratives that describe people interacting in the workplace, as well as instructions for living lives of faith and obedience within the course of daily life. Even the apostle Paul combined his proclamation and missional activities with his trade of making tents.

Four of our Lausanne issue networks are explicitly focused on the workplace, and several more have very close relationships with various workplace sectors. The upcoming Fourth Congress will include a workplace track, and the Participant Selection Team for the Congress has set a goal of 40 percent of the participants coming from the workplace.

## The Fourth Congress

The theme of the Fourth Congress is 'Let the Church Declare and Display Christ Together'. The Scripture engagement will focus on the book of Acts, in which the Greek word *homothumadon*, translated as 'together' or 'with one accord', occurs ten

times. The Congress will build on the multi-year listening process that led up to it, and on the various reports, especially the *State of the Great Commission* report, which highlight the emerging issues, challenges, opportunities and gaps we are facing. As we look toward 2050, the midpoint of the century but just one generation from now, we will consider what it means to proclaim the gospel, to make disciples, to bear witness to Christ, to be salt and light, and to be the aroma of Christ in an increasingly complex and challenging world.

Although the Fourth Congress will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the movement, the emphasis will not be on looking back but on looking forward. In particular, the Congress will focus on identifying, envisioning and celebrating opportunities for collaborative action—ways in which we can be better together. We seek ways to close gaps and move through the open doors that the Spirit of God provides as we obey Jesus' command to make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded, and reminding them that all authority has been given to Christ, the Lord of every sphere of human endeavour.

A large portion of Congress time will be spent interacting in table groups and working in innovation labs to seek collaborative solutions for some of the most pressing missiological challenges. There will be a Digital Discovery Center to explore new tools for evangelism and discipleship, as well as places for artistic expression, rest and prayer, including prayer focused on people and places as yet unreached with the gospel.

But the key word is 'together'. The Lausanne Movement seeks to encourage connections, help people to find one another, share resources, build bridges and celebrate what is already being done. It brings together those who share a passion for making disciples among every people and every place, declaring and responding to Christ as Lord in every sphere of life, bearing witness to Jesus Christ, and spreading the aroma of Christ in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Some of those connections will be made through in-person gatherings like the Fourth Congress. Increasingly, connections are happening online. For that reason, the Congress aims to have an equal number of registered participants online and in person. And digital platforms are being designed so that these connections among missionally minded people can extend far beyond the registered participants of the Congress itself.

I am thankful for the generous and appreciative spirit of Hannes Wiher in his assessment of the Lausanne Movement's contribution to the evangelical movement and to the global church over these past five decades. I am also grateful for the work that evangelical alliances have done for decades in sowing the seeds of evangelical cooperation. I pray that the Fourth Congress will strengthen our commitment to biblical missiology, Spirit-led strategy, collaborative action and generous friendships, not only in the Lausanne Movement but among all those who call Jesus Saviour and Lord and who are responding wholeheartedly to his call to make disciples of all nations.

# Some Thoughts about a Divine Command Approach to Ethics

## Richard J. Mouw

*Christians treat the Ten Commandments as God's law because he gave them to us. But is that a sufficient justification for ethics? Is God an arbitrary lawmaker to whom we must blindly submit because of his power and authority? Is it reasonable to trust God's expertise? In this article, a long-respected evangelical ethicist offers mature reflections on these questions and more.*

Shortly before joining the Fuller Seminary faculty in 1985, I discovered H. Richard Niebuhr's 1946 essay, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church'. I was glad that I did, since Niebuhr helped me in my efforts to plan the kind of ethics courses that would be appropriate for the Fuller context.

For the previous 17 years, I had been teaching ethics classes to undergraduates at Calvin College. In those courses, I would spend roughly the first half of the term explaining the dominant schools of thought in moral philosophy: utilitarianism, the ethics of 'duty', and the emerging interest at the time in the primacy of the 'virtues'. Then I would devote the remainder of the course to themes unique to Christian ethics, with a strong emphasis on the moral life as living in obedience to divine commands.

Since most of my students at Calvin College at the time came from Dutch Reformed communities, I did not have to make a special case for an ethical perspective centering on God's commands. It is a requirement in Reformed churches that the Decalogue be read in worship each Sunday. Furthermore, in addition to teaching the Heidelberg Catechism—with its 23 questions and answers on the Commandments—to the youth of the congregation, the Catechism's content must be covered in sermons each year.

I knew that I could not take that strong emphasis on the Decalogue for granted, though, in teaching Fuller students, who came from over 100 denominational and nondenominational church communities. This is where Niebuhr's essay was so helpful to me. He set forth the contours of what he saw as three 'functional unitarianisms' in the Christian community.[1] A group might formally profess a Trinitarian theology but actually favour one person of the Godhead in a manner that leads to a specific ethical pattern.

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1   H. Richard Niebuhr, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church', *Theology Today* 3 (October 1946): 371–84.

Those who give a special emphasis to the first person of the Trinity, Niebuhr observed, favour a morality that features *law*. Catholicism and Reformed thought are the primary examples here, with the magisterial Catholic tradition making much of natural law and the Reformed looking specifically to the Sinai law for moral guidance. Anabaptists are a good example of a second-person emphasis, where a central ethical focus is on the Gospel *narratives* as providing the resources for an ethic that calls for the *imitatio Christi*. Pentecostalism is an obvious case of a third-person ethic, wherein morality flows from the cultivation of the inner life, with a special emphasis on the gifts and the fruits of the Spirit. It often claims that the Spirit is giving quite *specific guidance*, as in 'We prayed about it and the Lord made it very clear that he wanted us to move to Buffalo.'

In my Fuller classes, then, I would explain Niebuhr's tripartite scheme and ask the students which member of the Trinity they thought of themselves as addressing in their prayers. Then we would examine the ethical implications of the differing emphases. I would summarize things by giving my own formulation of a genuinely Trinitarian ethic: *We are to conform, in the Spirit's power, to the Way of Jesus who lived a life of full obedience to the divine law.* That allowed me to spend some time looking at divine commands.

## Trusting expertise

My own efforts to articulate a proper version of divine command ethics began during the 1960s, when as a graduate student in philosophy I was immersed in the analytic movement's 'meta-ethical' discussions that were the preoccupation of Anglo-American ethicists at the time.

No serious attention was given to divine commands in these discussions. When the subject did come up, the treatment was typically of the sort described by the British philosopher Peter Geach, himself a defender of obedience to divine moral imperatives. 'In modern ethical treatises', Geach observed, 'we find hardly any mention of God; and the idea that if there really is a God, his commandments might be morally relevant is wont to be dismissed by a short and simple argument.'[2]

One of those 'short and simple' arguments was set forth by Patrick Nowell-Smith, another British philosopher, and I took his brief critique of divine command ethics as an occasion, in the early 1970s, for engaging in a bit of meta-ethical apologetics.[3] Nowell-Smith insisted that the posture of submitting to imperatives that come to us from a deity is an 'infantile' one, exhibiting the 'characteristics of deontology, heteronomy, and realism which are proper in the development of a child, but not proper in an adult'. Nowell-Smith did not elaborate on this depiction, beyond referring us to the works of Jean Piaget for an understanding of child development.[4]

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2    Peter Geach, God and the Soul (New York: Schocken, 1969), 117.
3    See my 'Commands for Grown-ups', *Worldview* 15 (July 1972): 38–42; the piece was reprinted in Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, eds., *The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology*, Readings in Moral Theology vol. 4 (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 66–77. I developed the views in that essay further in my book *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 6–21.
4    Patrick H. Nowell-Smith, 'Morality: Religious and Secular', in Ian T. Ramsey (ed.), *Christian Ethics and Secular Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 103.

This kind of charge against submission to a divine will is still quite current. Here for example is Sam Harris, a prominent proponent of 'the new atheism': 'In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the human soul is conceived as genuinely separate from the divine reality of God.' This 'dualism' inevitably generates 'some combination of terror, shame, and awe' in the human person,' since it requires submission to 'a divine authority who will punish anyone who harbors the slightest doubt about His supremacy'.[5]

To be sure, I can certainly find examples of that 'terror' kind of experience of divine authority in my own Calvinist tradition. In her fine study of New England Calvinism, Janice Knight shows how William Ames depicted the believer's relationship to the Calvinist God as one of servant to master and subject to king. Ames's deity was 'an exacting lord' and 'a demanding covenanter'.[6]

But Knight also finds a significant alternative to this strand within Puritanism, particularly in the theology set forth by Richard Sibbes, Ames's contemporary in Old England. In the Sibbesian conception of God, mercy and not power was primary. This strand of Calvinism never abandoned the deep conviction of divine sovereignty, but it did downplay any notion of an *arbitrary* sovereignty in favor images of divine *intimacy*. There was an assurance here that, in Sibbes's own words,

> God applies himself to us, and hath taken upon himself near relations, that he might be near us in goodness. He is a father, and everywhere to maintain us. He is a husband, and everywhere to help. He is a friend, and everywhere to comfort and counsel. So his love is a near love. Therefore he has taken upon him the nearest relations, that we may never want [i.e., miss out on] God and the testimonies of his love.[7]

These Sibbesean images permeate the biblical Psalms, where they are explicitly linked to God's faithfulness and 'loving kindness'. But in addition to the 'near relations' aspect of the believer's willingness to obey God's commands, there is also an obvious—at least I think it ought to be obvious—parallel to a wide range of interactions with human expertise. In my decision to follow a course of medical treatment, for example, I do not understand what the prescribing physician takes into account when stipulating the recommended course of action. Similarly, when I agree to an automobile mechanic's counsel about how to keep my car in good running order, I find nothing in myself of terror or shame in my agreement to follow this kind of expert advice. It is simply a matter of trusting the credentials of the prescriber, along with other signals of relevant character traits, such as honesty and reliability.

God is certainly viewed within the biblical framework as the supreme expert on what promotes human flourishing. But the Scriptures do consistently point us to God's credentials. God is the Creator who 'knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust'. And even though our 'days are like grass … the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him', for the Lord will

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5    Sam Harris, 'Waking Up: Chapter One', 2014, https://samharris.org/podcasts/making-sense-episodes/chapter-one.

6    Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 78.

7    Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: J. Nichol, 1862–1864), 4:196, quoted by Knight, *Orthodoxies*, 83.

bestow 'righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments' (Ps 103:14–18).

The expertise dimension of this way of viewing God's moral authority is enhanced, at least in my Reformed understanding of things, by an acknowledgement that God is Redeemer as well as Creator. Redemption is a necessity for creatures in our sinful condition who desperately need moral guidance. The fact that, in the biblical perspective, this moral guidance comes as a gift of grace from a Creator-Redeemer who wants to direct our lives in paths that promote *shalom* is a key consideration in establishing the case for divine moral authority.

These considerations about God's moral authority establish, as I see the situation, that it is a distortion of the actual experience of religious believers simply to depict their willingness to submit to divine commands as dominated by, in Harris's words, a 'combination of terror, shame, and awe'.

## Comprehensible commands

I do need to say a little more about the frequent charge that a Calvinist espousal of a divine command ethic treats God's command as 'arbitrary'. Certainly, many Calvinists have depicted their relationship with God in a manner that fits this picture, assuming a nominalist conception of a deity whose ways with sinful humans—both in dispensing his saving mercies and in imposing his moral directives—are incomprehensible. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre reinforced this understanding of Calvinism in his much-discussed book *After Virtue*, arguing that John Calvin rejected the widely medieval notion of a rationally discernible human *telos.* This meant that Calvin abandoned the role that divine commands played as guidelines that God offers human beings in our rational efforts to act in accordance with our proper natures. We are left with no alternative, then, but to submit without questioning to commands whose rationale we cannot grasp.

I think MacIntyre has Calvin wrong on this point. It is an important truth that God always acts lawfully in his relationship to his creation. We do not need to stand in primitive fear of a divine despot whose ways are totally unfathomable to human beings. God has covenantally bound himself to act towards his creation in ways that are reasonable and reliable, redeeming his people so that they may come to understand and obey his ordinances.

## Moral intuitions

I mentioned at the beginning that H. Richard Niebuhr observed Catholicism and Reformed thought as sharing a preference for an ethic of law, with Catholics emphasizing natural law and Calvinists focusing on the Sinai commandments. Catholicism, of course, does not simply ignore Exodus 20, nor do the Reformed simply reject natural law. As Stephen Grabill has observed, John Calvin incorporated a modified form of earlier natural-law themes into his theology. a practice that was continued by 17th-century Reformed scholastic theologians. And although Calvin and other Reformed thinkers were not inclined to adopt a thoroughgoing natural-law perspective, they did, as Grabill notes, make use of 'subsidiary doctrines of natural theology

and natural law on the basis of God's reliable but obfuscated natural revelation within creation, design of the human body, and conscience'.[8]

The remnants of these subsidiary elements can be detected in non-Christian ethical debates, where arguments for and against a given perspective take the form of appeals to moral intuitions. For example, when utilitarian ethicists argue about how best to formulate the utilitarian principle, it is considered a serious defect if a proposed understanding of what it means to promote 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number' allows for the inflicting of pain on a single victim in order to promote the pleasure of multiple other persons. The same holds for a duty perspective that provides no guidance in a situation when two duties conflict.

Furthermore, when a disagreement occurs about a moral matter between persons who share a moral perspective—because, for example, they 'read' the situation differently—they typically do not resort to a relativist acknowledgement of their impasse; instead, they insist that all things considered, one or the other of them should be shown to be right. Each of them, then, makes a claim to ultimate *vindication*, thus presuming that in claiming that something is good or right, we are implying that our moral judgement would be upheld by persons who are completely impartial and unbiased.

## Divine vindication

I discovered a robust view of meta-ethical vindication developed by William Frankena, longtime ethicist at the University of Michigan, who argued for an 'Ideal Observer' view of the justification of moral judgements. Like many Anglo-American ethicists in the 20th century, Frankena devoted much philosophical attention to the phenomenon of moral disagreement. What is going on when two reasonable, well-informed moral persons disagree on a moral issue? Can such disputes ultimately be resolved? Frankena insisted that they can be—but with a stress on 'ultimately'. He posited that when all rational discussion seems to be of no avail in deciding a moral dispute, and yet a person still insists that his position is the right one, what he is implicitly claiming is that his views conform to an ultimate or ideal consensus.

In proposing this concept of ideal consensus, Frankena was insisting that 'in the end—which never comes or comes only on the Day of Judgment', the person taking a specific moral position is implicitly claiming that the claim 'will be concurred in by those who freely and clear-headedly review the relevant facts from the moral point of view'. The person, he says, 'may be mistaken, but, like Luther, he cannot do otherwise.'[9]

It is important to highlight the presence of the religious allusions in these remarks: 'Day of Judgment', 'like Luther'. Although Frankena did not typically develop theological themes in his ethical writings, he was a Calvinist, and on at least one professional occasion he set forth what came close to an explicit link between his personal divine command perspective and the 'Ideal Observer' perspective that he had developed as a key contributor to meta-ethical discussion. The link occurs in an

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8    Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 187.
9    William Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 112–13.

especially poignant passage in his presidential address at the 1966 convention of the American Philosophical Association, where he concludes with this account of his claim that moral disputes are ultimately adjudicable:

> It has *not* been established that this claim is false; we do *not* know that … ultimate normative disagreements, if they exist, will continue to exist as knowledge grows from more to more among rational men who share the same point of view. There is even some rough evidence to the contrary; historically, religious people who have theological beliefs of certain sorts tend to adopt the ethics of love, and, to-day, it begins to appear that, as the peoples of the world come to share more and more the same points of view and the same factual beliefs, they also come to regard the same things as desirable. At any rate, so long as the case against the absolutist claim is not better established than it is, we may still make the claim; it may take some temerity, but it is not unreasonable.

And then comes Frankena's concluding sentence: 'As for me and my house, there-fore, we will continue to serve the Lord—or, as others may prefer to say, the Ideal Observer.'[10]

## Law and virtue

A strong emphasis on the divine commands as set forth in the Hebrew Scriptures has obviously not been a central focus for the Christian community in general. The absence of that emphasis has certainly been evident in Protestantism, where in different ways various confessional groups have assumed a discontinuity in this regard between the Old and New Testaments. Lutheranism has often spoken of 'law versus love' in establishing moral guidance for the Christian life. The Anabaptist tradition sees a significant shift as having taken place when the nonviolent 'Way of the Cross' took precedence over the coercive moral-law culture of ancient Israel. And the dispensationalism of the Scofield Reference Bible, widely influential in American fundamentalism, has been quite happy to posit a rather deep difference between the soteriological patterns of a dispensation of grace and an older dispensation of law.

As a divine command ethicist, I have engaged these alternative perspectives, exploring the possibility of finding common ground. Even if I fail to win others to my point of view, it is important to see where I can enrich my own perspective by drawing on insights from others.

As an important case in point, I have learned much in recent decades from the discussions in Christian circles about 'virtue ethics'. As Gilbert Meilaender has put it, there is a need to turn away 'from the concept of duty as the central moral concept', so that '*being not doing* takes center stage; for what we ought to do may depend on the sort of person we are. What duties we perceive may depend upon what virtues shape our vision of the world.'[11]

I see nothing in those wise comments by Meilaender that is incompatible with a robust divine command perspective. Making a case for our duty to actually *do* what

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10    William Frankena, 'On Saying the Ethical Thing', in *Perspectives on Morality: Essays by William Frankena* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 123.

11    Gilbert C. Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 5.

God commands should not lead to a denial of the importance of *being* virtuous people. Indeed, John Calvin, who certainly made much of hearing the law and doing what it prescribes, also argued against the idea that the system of laws contained in the Decalogue basically consists of 'only dry and bare rudiments' of morality. The deeper intent of the law is to nurture what Calvin described as 'all the duties of piety and love'.[12] It was important for Calvin that we discern the implicit unity of the Sinai commandments, which points to a pattern that includes not only the actions that the Lord requires of us but also the affections and dispositions appropriate for the lives of persons who have been graciously delivered from bondage to sin. Mere formal conformity to law is not enough, although at certain stages of our lives that may be all we can offer. The process of sanctification must eventually create hearts of obedience in persons who treasure the divine precepts in their inner beings.

I take additional Calvinist encouragement for this focus on ethical 'being' from the 19th-century Dutch Calvinist theologian Herman Bavinck, who looked for ways to place a more central emphasis in Reformed moral theology on *imitatio* themes. In doing so, however, he made the important observation that we can properly engage in 'the true imitation of Christ' only when 'we do the same will of God which Christ explicated and at the cost of His glory and life.'[13] And that 'same will of God', as Bavinck rightly saw it, included some crucial lessons about what it means to live fully in obedience to a law that was issued from an ancient mountain in the form of multiple divine commands.

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12   John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II, viii, 51.

13   Herman Bavinck, 'Wat Zou Jezus Doen?' *De Bazuin*, 48, no. 8 (1900), translated and quoted in John Bolt, *Christian and Reformed Today* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1984), 143. Jessica Joustra helped me gain much wisdom from Bavinck on these matters when I co-directed her excellent 2018 PhD dissertation, *Following the Way of Jesus: Herman Bavinck and John Howard Yoder in Dialogue on the Imitation of Christ*.

# Reflections on the Use and Misuse of Spiritual Gifts

## Thomas Paul Schirrmacher

*Christians are often encouraged to figure out which spiritual gifts they do or do not have, so that they can function most effectively within the body of Christ. But we do not apply this concept consistently; for example, many churches make no effort to balance the gifts of various leaders or treat the head pastor as if he or she should possess all gifts. This article seeks to enhance our practical deployment of the diversity of abilities among believers.*

I always find it astonishing that although for many years there has been extensive discussion in Christian churches about identifying people's spiritual gifts, this discussion seems to have had little impact on the pastoral ministry or training for it. Yet the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the New Testament also essentially relate to the teaching and leadership tasks of a congregation.

While care is taken to ensure that all church workers are deployed according to their gifts, and that they find and develop their gifts, the pastor, just as was the case 400 years ago, is supposedly universally gifted and enthroned above all, shaping his (or her) congregation unilaterally according to his gift. Regardless of many exemplary exceptions, this situation has even been confirmed as a worldwide rule.

For example, let's consider the sermons. Should it not be the case that the preachers alternate, since each preacher with his own gifts shapes his congregation in a manner that is too one-sided if only he preaches? How does a congregation get doctrinal sermons if the pastor is an outspoken evangelist, and vice versa? How does a congregation get a global view of the world and a broad perspective if the pastor takes a more pastoral view of individual problems and sees things primarily at the local level? Conversely, how are these local problems to be taken seriously if the pastor tends to adopt a broad perspective? Very few people can know, love and care for a fish pond and an ocean at the same time.

Granted, an exceptional pastor may even be able to cover two or three gifts, but all of them? Where is that pastor who is equally an apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher in his sermons; who has both a clear focus on individual pastoral care and a broader social perspective; who has an eye on the diaconate and on world mission, all at the same time? He simply does not exist.

Fortunately, it is becoming more common for churches to have full-time work (with full-time pay) not just for the pastor but for every person whose training, experience, skills and gifts are applied within the church on a large scale.

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Of course, the problem is not limited to pastors. Many churches still make the mistake of thinking that they pay their pastor primarily for preaching rather than for staff development and other leadership roles. They accuse their pastor of laziness if he doesn't preach every Sunday ('What are we actually paying him for if he just sits in the pews on Sundays like everybody else?'). But if the church absolutely wants to hear only its own paid pastors in the pulpit, then it should employ two or three pastors with different focuses.

In my 21 theses on alternative theological education, I wrote:

8th Thesis: The gifts of the student should—at least in part—be given strong consideration. The point is to learn as well and as intensively as possible, not to meet certain institutional requirements: For example, does 1 Peter 4:10 ('Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms') not apply to theological education? If we want to prepare people to use their gifts meaningfully and profitably for the kingdom of God throughout their lives, these gifts must play a central role in their training! At the same time, different gifts of the Spirit also require very different learning styles and, in particular, interests. For this reason, a study program should offer the opportunity to 'specialize' in content according to gifts in addition to the basic knowledge that is important for everyone. The specialization options based on traditional theological subjects do not correspond enough to specific gifts and only partially offer the necessary development opportunities.[1]

Is there not also a danger that the gifts of the pastor (or the most influential members) will shape the church in too one-sided a manner, contrary to the will of the New Testament apostles?

The church leadership, with a broad spectrum of experience, gifts, talents and abilities, is—under Jesus as the head of the church and the Holy Spirit—the highest authority of the church. Leadership should not be entrusted to one person alone, limiting it to his or her gifts, as they might be strong in one particular gift but weak in other areas.

## Unity and diversity in Romans 12:1–8

It is significant that Paul understands the 'will of God' (Rom 12:2) not only as referring to the commandments that are equally binding for all people and Christians (cf. e.g. Rom 13:8–10). Rather, in the exhortative part of the letter to the Romans in chapters 12–15, after the general statement of Romans 12:1–2, he first addresses an area in which Christians differ from one another according to the commandment and will of God. The Bible reveals to us not only where God creates and demands unity, but also where God creates and demands diversity!

Just as the triune God himself is unity and diversity in one, the church of Jesus should also be characterized by unity in teaching, faith, motivation and dedication, on one hand, and diversity in personalities, gifts and ministries on the other.

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1    Thomas Schirrmacher, 'An Appeal for Alternative Education Models for Church and Missions', 2004, https://academia.edu/36827080, also published as *Studies in Church Leadership: An Alternative Theological Education* (Bonn: VKW, 2003, 2nd ed. 2008).

Even at creation, God created the world in unity and diversity, in boundaries and in freedom. Adam and Eve had the freedom to eat from any tree in the garden, and at the same time there was a boundary in that they were not allowed to eat from a particular tree. The serpent distorted this instruction into a statement that people were not allowed to eat from any tree (Gen 3:1, 2, 16–17).

We urgently need to learn to distinguish in our churches where God expects the same from all church members through clear commandments and, in contrast, where God gives freedom or even demands diversity and where complete egalitarianism is repugnant to him.

For example, God does not ask everyone to evangelize as much as someone with the gift of an evangelist, or to give as much as someone with the gift of giving does. No one needs to pray eight hours a day, although God has used some with the gift of faith who have done so and been given the time to do so (e.g. in prison!). How many unnecessary guilty consciences have been created by making one gift or ministry the standard for all church members?

Pastors must ensure that their congregations do not become weak in areas where the pastors themselves are not gifted. Rather, they should seek to ensure that all gifts are present in the leadership bodies of the congregation and in everyday church life. Along with exercising their own gifts in a self-confident manner, they must also be encouraging role models, helping all to use their gifts without suppressing other gifts.

## The spiritual gifts in Romans 12:3–8

'God's will' (Rom 12:2) therefore includes each Christian using the gifts God has given him and humbly accepting that it is God who allocates the gifts, not man. Unfortunately, Christians often become dissatisfied with the fact that God has the right to determine where the individual Christian should apply himself through the allocation of spiritual gifts. This dissatisfaction can manifest itself in two ways: (1) in the arrogance of thinking one can do more than one is gifted to do and (2) in the apparent humility of feeling able to do nothing or hardly anything.

This is why Paul admonishes us to 'not think of yourself more highly than you ought' (Rom 12:3). The antidote to overestimating oneself is not to underestimate oneself (a feeling of inferiority), but to think as one ought to think, i.e. 'with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you' (Rom 12:3).

Pride and inferiority complexes are just two sides of the same coin. God can become angry with false humility, as the example of Moses, who thought he could not speak (Exod 4:10–14), shows. Only those who assess themselves according to their gifts—i.e. those who recognize what God has particularly enabled them to do—think correctly. Incidentally, this truth applies not only to gifts of the Spirit, but to all situations. Only those who know their limits really know their abilities, and only those who know their abilities also know what they cannot do. Leaders or managers who do not know their strengths and weaknesses and/or are not open about them are bad and unpleasant leaders, because they do not give their employees space to operate where the leader is actually dependent on their strengths.

In Romans 12:3, as in Ephesians 4:7 and 16, Paul uses the term 'measure' ('with the measure of faith God has given you') to describe the gifts of grace, namely the

'measure of faith' (Rom 12:3), or in Ephesians 4:7 the 'grace [that] has been given as Christ apportioned it'. In this case, are some people more 'faithful' than others?

No. We must distinguish between the fundamental gift of faith, which is the same for all Christians and can also be called a 'gift of grace' (Greek *charisma*), and the personal allocation of gifts and ministries to individual Christians. An overview of all occurrences of the word *charisma* in the New Testament makes this clear.

## Uses of *charisma* in the New Testament

As a designation of things all Christians have in common:

- God's promise (Rom 11:29: 'For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable')
- Salvation or eternal life (Rom 5:15, 16; 6:23)

As a designation of things that distinguish Christians from one another:

- A spiritual gift in the sense discussed in the present essay (Rom 1:11–12; 12:6; 1 Cor 1:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 2 Cor 1:11; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Pet 4:10)
- The gift of being single (1 Cor 7:7)

The difference between the fundamental allocation of faith and the personal allocation of faith in the gift of grace is also expressed in the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Ten Minas (Mk 25:14–30; Lk 19:12–27). In one case, everyone receives the same amount (10 talents each in Luke 19:13), which corresponds to the faith shared by all; in the other case, everyone receives different gifts at the beginning (one, two and five talents, respectively, in Matthew 25:15). Peter therefore says in relation to the divine service that we should be 'faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms' (1 Pet 4:10).

In Romans 12:7–8, Paul uses seven specific examples to emphasize that everyone should stick to what God has enabled them to do. The teacher should teach, the overseer should diligently preside, the exhorter should exhort and so forth. Is that not self-evident? Unfortunately not. How often do people who cannot handle money become treasurers? How often do people teach other people from the pulpit Sunday after Sunday even though they have no gift of teaching and it is therefore difficult to listen to them? And how often do those who can organize ('preside over') well not do this 'with singlemindedness' but rather seek to prove their authority in other areas as well?

Pastors should focus with confidence on the gifts they have received from the Spirit of God. At the same time, however, they must make room for other gifts for the sake of the unity and maturity of the congregation, which means giving ministry opportunities to those whom the same Holy Spirit has endowed with other gifts. This concept applies to leadership committees and ministries and even to who preaches the Sunday sermon.

Even if a leader's gifts and calling may significantly shape the congregation, it is not acceptable for the congregation to unilaterally shift its gift profile from pastor to pastor or for gift bearers to remain mothballed in the congregation until another pastor comes along who appreciates and promotes their gifts. Moreover, it is not good for any congregation if the Sunday sermon is limited to this gift profile for the years of a pastor's tenure. If all sermons are always evangelistic, the growth of those

who are already believers is curtailed. If the sermons are all pastoral, not doctrinal, the doctrinal basis for ethical decisions is soon lost.

Often the one-sided orientation of sermons towards one gift over a long period of time also leads to 'voting with one's feet', as believers look for congregations or preachers with the gift profile that appeals to them the most.

# The significance of spiritual gifts: six theses

The four most important texts on spiritual gifts in the New Testament are Ephesians 4:1–16; 1 Peter 4:10–11; Romans 12:3–8; and 1 Corinthians 12:1–13:3; 14:1–33. (To remember these passages, think of two pairs: Ephesians *4* and 1 Peter *4*; Romans *12* and 1 Corinthians *12* to 14.)

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul wrote, 'Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.' The following six statements should help us avoid ignorance on the important topic of spiritual gifts.

*1. Not only the gifts but also the tasks and the effects of our ministry are very different.*

In 1 Corinthians 12:3–6, Paul places the gifts of grace in the larger context of our service to God:

> Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed', and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Paul thus relates each area with the person of the Trinity who is responsible for it in a special way:

- Various gifts of grace from one Spirit
- Various services from one Lord Jesus
- Various effects from one God

In other words, the Holy Spirit gives the gifts of the Spirit, i.e. the prerequisites for ministry; Jesus Christ is the model for ministry par excellence; and God the Father is the one who works everything and thus also decides on the effects of ministry.

Even if two Christians have two completely identical gifts of the Spirit, this does not mean that they have the same task or the same ministry! Furthermore, if two Christians could have completely identical gifts and ministries, the results of these ministries could still differ greatly. For instance, two evangelists might work in the same place at the same time, but one might reap the fruit of a few life-transforming conversations while the other triggers a community revival.

In this context, it is also important to note that the same gift can be given in different degrees. Recall our discussion of the 'measure of faith' (Rom 12:3) or the 'measure of the gift of Christ' (Eph 4:7) above. The gift of evangelism or teaching can be given and can grow to different degrees, which is one reason why the use of the same gift by different Christians has very different effects.

*2. Since every Christian receives a gift, the use of the gifts of grace is a natural part of the life of faith.*

> Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10–11)

Here, Peter briefly summarizes what Paul deals with in greater detail and sometimes in a way that is more difficult to understand (cf. Peter's statement about Paul in 2 Peter 3:15–16). Peter teaches the following:

- that every Christian has a gift of grace,
- that he should serve the Lord using 'whatever gift he has received' and not otherwise,
- that the Christian is only a 'steward' of God's grace (stewards are accountable but are not the masters of the gift),
- that the gifts are meant for the service of others, and
- that the gifts are meant for the glorification of God, not for self-glorification.

Pastors must therefore ensure that all the gifts given by the Holy Spirit are brought to bear in the congregation at all levels. They must model this principle in their own work. For example, if they are the only ones who preach, they implicitly convey that gifts other than the ones they possess are not needed in the pulpit.

*3. The lists of gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament are not exhaustive. Rather, they are only illustrative. Therefore, there may well be other spiritual gifts not mentioned in the New Testament.*

Since every list of gifts in the New Testament presents only a selection of gifts and since many of the gifts mentioned in the various passages overlap, we must conclude that none of the passages is intended to present a complete list of all possible gifts. Even if some gifts (e.g. the five ministry gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11) are mentioned very frequently and are obviously always needed, no single gift is mentioned in every case. Therefore, in my opinion, it is also justified to identify important gifts that are not mentioned explicitly in the New Testament (e.g. the gift of hospitality or the gift of consolation). Incidentally, some of these unnamed gifts are found in the Bible in practice, in other contexts, or in the Old Testament, such as the gift of writing songs (David) or proverbs (Solomon) or the gift of artistic design and carving for the house of the Lord (Exod 31:1–6; 35:30–35).

| The gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the New Testament lists | |
|---|---|
| 1 Pet 4:11 | Speaking and serving [general classification] |
| Eph 4:11 | Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers |
| Rom 12:6–8 | Practitioner of prophecy, serving individual, teacher, exhorter, giver, manager, practitioner of mercy |
| 1 Cor 12:8–10 | Word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, spiritual discernment, tongues, interpretation of tongues |
| 1 Cor 12:28–30 | Apostles, prophets, miracle workers, teachers, healings, assistance, leadership, different types of tongues, translation of tongues |
| 1 Cor 13:1–3 | Speaking in tongues, prophecy, secrets and knowledge, faith, giving food, martyrdom |
| 1 Cor 14:26 | Psalms, teaching, tongues, revelation, interpretation of tongues |

In addition, in practice there are great differences between Christians who have the same gift, such as among individual evangelists. Some evangelists are gifted for personal conversation, others for speaking to large crowds, and others as book authors. I remember Billy Graham saying how difficult it was for him to speak to individuals about the gospel. That's why it's not enough to simply assign yourself to one of the gifts mentioned in the New Testament. What is decisive is the actual gift as it manifests itself in the practice of faith and in the church.

This observation allows us to address the problem of a one-sided influence on a congregation in the pulpit and in church life in an even more differentiated way. A pastor with the gift of evangelism usually evangelizes in a certain way. Even if he wanted to promote evangelism exclusively, he would have to ensure that others in the congregation, whose gifting for evangelism is very differently oriented, are also given opportunities to exercise their gift, both in leadership responsibility and in the practice of the congregation.

*4. Each gift, which not everyone has in special measure, corresponds to a general call for all Christians.*

In other words, the identification of spiritual gifts highlights responsibilities that should be part of the life of faith of all Christians. Some people have the special gift of service, but all should serve. Some have the gift of faith, but all believers have faith. Some have the gift of mercy, but all Christians must be merciful. Some have the gift of exhortation, but all should admonish our fellow believers. Only some have the gift of healing, but any Christian can pray for healing. Some are gifted evangelists, but every Christian is called to share the gospel. Some are gifted teachers, but every Christian must be equipped to give an account of their faith. Some may have the gift

of tongues, but all Christians are to worship God. Some have special gifts of discernment, but all of us are called to discern the spirits.

If the pastor promotes and features only his own gifts, he not only prevents others from practicing their gifts in leadership roles but diminishes the spiritual faith practice of all. For example, if the pastor has the gift of teaching but does not allow evangelists to occupy the pulpit or be experienced in church life, this not only causes the gift of evangelism to atrophy in the church but typically causes *all* members of the congregation to be less evangelistic in their personal lives.

*5. Possessing a gift does not mean that you are the only one who should do something or the only one who can do it. Rather, it means that you are specially authorized by God to do a certain task.*

Recognizing this authorization is essential if you want to recognize and understand your own gift or the gifts of others. In my opinion, authorization is expressed by

- taking particular pleasure in a task (yes, being a Christian can be fun!),
- pursuing this task as if of your own accord,
- doing a task particularly well, where 'well' is measured by the effect on others, or
- using this gift and bringing forth 'benefit', i.e. God blesses the service.

A few practical examples may illustrate this point. I like to be hospitable. But my hospitality is so boisterous that everyone notices it. However, when I have to hold a difficult meeting, I like to involve Christians who have the gift of hospitality. Through their gift, they create a warm, peaceful atmosphere where you hardly notice their presence and certainly don't find it distracting.

Those who have the gift of teaching may notice their sense of fulfilment when they spend hours answering certain questions with the aid of the Bible or discussing fundamental issues with others. Or perhaps, when they present their insights, others may suddenly realize that they have finally grasped the context of the Bible because 'pleasant words promote instruction' (Prov 16:21). Intensive work of this type brings joy and bears fruit as others come not only to understand the Bible better but also to live it out more faithfully. On the other hand, those who do not enjoy intensive Bible study, or who only 'preach at' people and never see people gain deeper understanding and change their lives accordingly as a result of their instruction, are unlikely to have the gift of teaching. If they try to exercise a gift they do not have, they may eventually become mere theorists or, frustrated, may conclude that biblical teaching is impractical.

Those who have to force themselves to serve, who never see fruit from their labours, who feel unfulfilled in their service, or who even become envious should not ask themselves only whether they lack the fruit of the Spirit. Rather, they should also consider whether they really have put their unique gifts to work. The proper use of one's gifts should lead to satisfaction in the kingdom of God, including satisfaction with how God has distributed his gifts.

*6. The diversity of gifts threatens the unity of the church if the fruit of the Spirit does not determine the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit.*

God has made us 'stewards' (1 Pet 4:10) of his gifts and mercifully does not immediately take them away from us if we are arrogant, selfish or unloving. After all, they are 'gifts of grace'. We do not automatically lose our gifts if we are misusing them or even if we are living in sin.

However, it also follows that the possession and use of gifts of the Spirit are no guarantee of a spiritual life. The spiritual status of a Christian cannot be measured by gifts of the Spirit but only by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). This is precisely the subject of 1 Corinthians 13! Paul wants the Corinthians to be zealous for the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1), but in love (1 Cor 13:1–13). He announces, 'And now I will show you the most excellent way' (1 Cor 12:31b), as he introduces his chapter on love.

This is why Paul and Peter, in all their passages on the gifts of the Spirit, exhort us to unity, to love, and also not to live as the world does. The table below illustrates this point.

| The context of the main texts on gifts of the Spirit | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Chapter** | **Exhortation to love** | **Gifts of grace** | **Not to live as the world lives** | **Unity in the body** |
| Rom 12 | 12:9–21 | 12:3–8 | 12:1–2 | 12:4–5 |
| Eph 4 | 4:1–3, 15–16 | 4:8, 11 | 4:1, 17–24 | 4:3–6, 12–16 |
| 1 Pet 4 | 4:8–9 | 4:10–11 | 4:7 | 4:8 |
| 1 Cor 12–14 | 13:1–14:1 | 12:1–13:3 | 12:1–3 | 12:12–31; 14:1–33 |

It is therefore important for pastors to communicate repeatedly that it is not the gifts that count in the end, but the fruit. This means both the fruit that the use of the gifts produces and the spiritual fruit observed in individuals, the congregation and the church leadership. The pastor himself must not stifle the necessary encouragement and exhortation to spiritual growth by pointing to his obvious gifts and overlooking the need for spiritual maturity in exercising any gifts.

# Towards Indigenous Cosmopolitanism in Theological Education

## Perry Shaw

*Cross-cultural communication is difficult in any context due to conflicting worldviews, intellectual frameworks and cultural assumptions. It is even more difficult without sympathetic appreciation of the problem. Through acknowledgement, acceptance, appreciation and adaptation, it is possible to move to a posture of mutual enrichment in multicultural engagement.*

When we moved to Beirut after ten years in Syria, my wife, Karen, was keen to go deeper in her understanding of Islam. Through the mothers of our son's friends, she was able to join a women's weekly Qur'an study. Week after week she would return home and debrief with me over lunch. Repeatedly, her comments were along the lines of 'How can these women think this way?'

The plausibility framework and the pathways to meaning-making that Karen experienced among these Muslim women were so fundamentally different from how we were raised to process information and form meaning. We realized that we were not going to change these women's frameworks. To have any hope of communicating the gospel meaningfully, we would need to enter into their world, respecting their understandings of what is or is not plausible, dealing with issues that they considered important, and using both content and methodology that resonated with their own accepted patterns of learning and meaning-making.

Our experience is hardly unique. Willie Jennings, in *After Whiteness*, laments his inability, while academic dean at Yale Divinity School, to recruit students from the significant First Nations communities that exist in southern New England. Although these indigenous communities have large and vibrant Christian populations, Yale has managed to attract only a tiny number of them. Jennings relates a meeting he had with a Native American alumnus and a current student about how Yale could recruit more students from their community: 'They both gave me a look that carried both sadness and a sense of ridiculousness. "There is no help for us here", the student said in reply to me. The alum not only agreed but added more sober words still: "The work we need to do cannot be done here."'[1]

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1    Willie Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 39.

Liz Mburu, in her seminal book *African Hermeneutics*, points out that in the early days of Christianity, Africans were among the leading Bible interpreters and teachers. However, over the past two centuries the African church has inherited from the missionaries a Western approach to biblical interpretation and theological education that inadequately understands African culture and worldview. The end result has been African Christians whose lives are dichotomized, weakening the African church and causing it to lose its moral voice in the world. A Somali proverb says, 'Don't start out on a journey using someone else's donkey.' Mburu comments, 'We, as Africans, have started off on our journey … with our neighbour's donkey!'[2]

Like many others, I have experienced a stark dissonance between the way in which theological education has traditionally been understood and delivered and the realities on the ground. I have felt compelled by existing systems to train students in particular patterns of meaning-making that are acceptable to the academy, despite the lack of resonance between these approaches and the forms of meaning-making used in the communities where they will be serving. A great task facing 21st-century theological education is to shift our educational paradigms so as to better prepare our students to communicate in local patterns of meaning-making. The starting point is to understand the issues at stake, embrace those issues, and learn new pathways to teaching and learning, all for the sake of greater missional impact.

What we need is what cultural anthropologists describe as 'indigenous cosmopolitanism', which refers to 'the ability to understand and act from two different worldviews or the ability to operate in multiple ethnic cultures'.[3] The journey to this type of multicultural understanding entails four stages, which I will discuss in greater depth below. The first stage is to *acknowledge* a difference between how we see the world and make meaning and the frameworks that others use. Second, we must *accept* that we cannot force the other to adopt my particular way of looking at the world, and that this is okay. But even at this point, we remain fundamentally monocultural. More mature postures emerge as we *appreciate* the other, recognizing that perhaps there are elements in how others interpret the world that are deeper, stronger and more biblically faithful than the ways in which we have been raised and nurtured. Only through appreciation can we reach the richness of *adaptation*, where we sustain much of our own worldview but allow it to be both critiqued and developed by incorporating elements of the meaning-making frameworks that others use. At this point, we are engaging in genuine indigenous cosmopolitanism. As we reach adaptation, we are in a position to recognize and release the potential for mutual enrichment by encouraging diversity in the ways we encourage students and teachers to make meaning and build knowledge.

## Making meaning

The making and expressing of meaning are how we communicate and create knowledge. Communication is at the heart of our human existence. Through communication, we express our individual identity, our relationship with our commu-

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2    Elizabeth Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2019), 211.
3    Randy Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 3.

nities, and our understanding of the world.[4] Communication encompasses a multiplicity of forms of human expression, including not only the words we use but our gestures, arts, music and traditions—in fact, the whole intertwined complexity of our social and cultural viewpoint.

Tania Zittoun and Svend Brinkmann observe that all our communication entails the interpretation of situations, events, objects or discourses in the light of previous knowledge and experience. This process of meaning-making takes place at three different levels: the semantic, the contextual and the existential.[5] At the semantic level, we make meaning through codes in language, signs and symbols, which are expressed in literacy, numeracy, science and so on. These different codes organize and give meaning to our thinking. At the contextual level, communication is specific to our cultural and social practices and provides cultural and social identity, leading to an overall worldview. At the existential level, we make meaning of our individual lives and our existence within our context, using semantic cues to support our relationships and communication. To fully develop the sort of indigenous cosmopolitanism needed to accomplish the missional task of the church, it is important to move beyond semantics to the contextual and existential levels of meaning-making.

## A missional posture of humble learning

There is a missional imperative in this endeavour. The purpose of theological education is to prepare men and women who are capable of guiding the church to be effective in fulfilling the mission of having Christ acknowledged as Lord throughout the earth.[6] The first step in accomplishing this goal is to gain a profound understanding of the contexts our students will be entering. We and our students need to understand the challenges confronting the church in context, as well as the felt needs of the people our students will serve. But more than this, we need to enter into the minds and hearts of those we encounter, understanding the ways in which people make meaning and how we can we embed the truths of Scripture into frameworks that will be readily understood and embraced.

Evan Hunter asserts persuasively that the global church today needs not so much 'scholar pastors' as 'theological leaders'. The church in every region of the world, he says, is desperately calling for men and women who can develop theological lenses for impactful engagement with society.[7] However, for theological leadership to be

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4    Miranda Jefferson and Michael Anderson, *Transforming Education: Reimagining Learning, Pedagogy and Curriculum* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 89.
5    Tania Zittoun and Svend Brinkmann, 'Learning as Meaning Making', in Norbert Seel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning* (Boston: Springer, 2012), 1809–11.
6    Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, UK: Langham), 2022.
7    Evan Hunter, 'A Context Conducive to Innovation: How Changes in Doctoral Education Create New Opportunities for Developing Theological Leaders', in Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamraj, *Challenging Tradition: Innovation in Advanced Theological Education* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2018), 21–41.

meaningful, it must be developed and presented in conceptual patterns that resonate with the local culture.[8]

Humility is the starting point for the sort of intercultural engagement that is at the heart of a missional vision for theological education. A recent text on teaching across cultures,[9] which included contributions from over 40 leaders, exhibited one common thread running through the whole text: the priority of humble learning. Kramlich and Gilpin-Jackson observe that culturally humble educators are often very knowledgeable about their content matter, but also aware of their limited understanding. 'Far too many approach cultural engagement as a competency that can be learned and checked off. This attitude keeps individuals divorced from curiosity as well as easily shifts into superior stances.'[10] Cultural humility is essential in that culture is not static and is far too nuanced to be understood fully. Key characteristics of cultural humility include respect (valuing other cultures and individuals), openness (withholding judgement), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity).[11]

## Plausibility structures

One of the greatest sources of intercultural misunderstanding is the unspoken difference in plausibility structures. A plausibility structure is a holistic shaping of understanding that acts as a kind of gatekeeper to interpreting the world. Evidence is affirmed through lenses that support and strengthen what we already consider plausible. For example, in much of the Minority World an emphasis on empiricist understandings of the world has created a profound scepticism about the supernatural, and even many Minority World Christians tend to downplay the possibility of anything miraculous. In contrast, for many Africans the world is a mono-sectional reality: God, the spirits, ancestors, human beings and objects all inhabit one world.[12] As such, the existence of a spirit world is taken as given and even the simplest of life experiences are perceived as having a supernatural dimension. In each case, a governing plausibility structure has either negated or affirmed the supernatural. Plausibility structures don't necessarily tell us what is true, but they prevent us from believing claims that do not seem reasonable or at least potentially true within the accepted, overarching worldview framework.[13]

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8    Robert Priest, 'Christian Theology, Sin, and Anthropology', in Walter Adams and Frank Salomone, *Anthropology and Theology: God, Icons, and God-Talk* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 59–75.

9    Perry Shaw, César Lopes, Joanna Feliciano-Soberano and Bob Heaton, *Teaching across Cultures: A Global Christian Perspective* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2021).

10    Deborah Kramlich and Yabome Gilpin-Jackson, 'The Educator's Role in Creating a Classroom Culture of Belonging: Reimagining Diversity, Equity, Inclusion for the Multi-Diverse Classroom', in Loretta Fabbri and Alessandro Romano, *Transformative Teaching in Higher Education* (Lecce, Italy: Pensa, 2022), 121–56.

11    Association for the Study of Higher Education, 'Understanding Intercultural Competence and Its Development', *AHSE Higher Education Report* 38, no. 2 (2012): 23–43.

12    Mburu, *African Hermeneutics*, 33.

13    Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), 'The Role of Plausibility and Community in Shaping Beliefs: Understanding the Significance of Worldviews', 30 September 2022, https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/understanding-the-significance-of-worldviews-2/.

Sociologist Peter Berger was the first to describe plausibility structures as the sociocultural contexts for systems of meaning within which these meanings make sense or are made plausible.[14] According to Berger, the beliefs and meanings held by individuals and groups are deeply embedded within the sociocultural institutions and processes to which we belong, and these institutions and processes provide the framework for understanding what is or is not plausible.

Plausibility is one of the most important and yet least considered aspects of belief formation. To believe something is true, we first must believe it is believable; that is, we must consider it reasonable or possible.[15] Our beliefs are deeply intertwined with our plausibility structures. We embrace a belief to the extent to which we consider it as accurately describing reality. This seeking of correspondence between our plausibility structures and our perception of the surrounding world is common-sense and pragmatic. It is generally a reliable and useful means for distinguishing truth from falsehood, particularly when interpreting what we can experience through our five senses. But what happens when we can't agree on reality? Acknowledging our own plausibility structures, seeking understanding of another's plausibility structures, and having the humility to realize that all of us rely on unstated assumptions can be a first step towards mutual understanding and respect.

## Intercultural rhetorical analysis

Our plausibility structures not only provide a framework for belief but also shape the kinds of argument and rhetoric that we find convincing. For example, what Minority World academia views as a 'logical' approach to building an argument may appear arrogant and aggressive in other parts of the world. In contrast, the common West African predilection for sequential storytelling as a rhetorical strategy strikes many in the Minority World as circuitous, unnecessary and meaningless.

In his seminal work on intercultural rhetoric, Robert Kaplan[16] offers a set of foundational questions that influence patterns of discussion and argument in different cultural contexts:

1. *What may be discussed?* What limitations are imposed on acceptable and unacceptable topics of discussion and research? In some settings, the limitations may be related to social concerns, whereas other settings may define how narrow or broad a discussion topic should be.
2. *Who has the authority to speak or write?* In what ways do social, political and religious authority structures influence the shape and content of what is talked about or studied?
3. *What form(s) may the writing take?* To what extent are the rhetorical patterns of surrounding cultures allowed to influence the forms in which students write?

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14   Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 45, 192.
15   ERLC, 'The Role of Plausibility'.
16   Robert Kaplan, 'Foreword', in Clayann Panetta, ed., *Contrastive Rhetoric Revisited and Redefined* (New York: Routledge, 2008), ix.

4.  *What is evidence?* Minority World patterns of linear, empiricist, logical argumentation can be offensive and distasteful in societies that place greater value on life experience, wisdom and story.

5.  *What arrangement of evidence is likely to appeal or be convincing to readers?* To what extent is argumentation expected to be explicit in students' presentation of their work, or are implicit approaches preferred?

The answers to these questions are profoundly shaped by culture, and what constitutes good reasoning varies across contexts.[17] A wide variety of interpretive frameworks can make good sense of the world, and each one is based on a different set of assumptions.[18] In particular, I have been struck by the fundamentally different understandings of the first two questions between collectivist and individualistic societies. In more individualistic societies, such as Australia and the United States, the normative assumption is that we should promote students' development of a strong autonomous voice. We encourage students to speak with confidence, question assumptions and challenge those in authority, without reference to their relationship to the broader community. In most parts of the world, such individualistic assumptions would be seen as disrespectful, divisive and destabilizing.[19]

The global hegemony of Minority World academic paradigms has often led to a dismissal as substandard of the sort of practical and non-linear rhetorical patterns preferred in much of the Majority World.[20] In contrast, Denny has shown that 'characteristic of all human thought are rationality, logic, generalizing abstraction, insubstantial abstraction, theorizing, intentionality, causal thinking, classification, explanation, and originality.'[21] Minority World thinking seeks to 'objectify' ideas through decontextualization. Such 'objectification' of knowledge is seen as inappropriate in much of the Majority World, where ideas are seen as context-specific and where the emphasis is generally less on 'laws' of logic and more on principles of wisdom, often expressed through proverbs, parables and stories.

In his work on the biography of ideas, Terra Gargano observes the contrast between how ideas are developed in more individualist and in collectivist societies. In much of the Minority World, we learn that we can do anything by ourselves if we work hard enough. In contrast, more collectivist societies assume that you can't accomplish anything by yourself. These are two ends of a spectrum with varying

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17   Jonathan Ichikawa and Matthias Steup, 'The Analysis of Knowledge', in Edward Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/knowledge-analysis/.

18   William Merrifield, *Culture and Critical Thinking: Exploring Culturally Informed Reasoning Processes in a Lebanese University* (PhD dissertation, George Fox University, 2018), 12.

19   Stephanie Black, 'Scholarship in Our Own Words: Intercultural Rhetoric in Academic Writing and Reporting', in Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamraj, *Challenging Tradition: Innovation in Advanced Theological Education* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2018), 127–43.

20   I discuss this topic extensively in 'Culture, Gender and Learning in Theological Education', chapter 12 in Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, 183–92.

21   J. Peter Denny, 'Traditional Thought in Oral Culture and Literate Decontextualization', in David Olson and Nancy Torrance, eds., *Literacy and Orality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 66–89.

degrees of understanding about human agency and a range of cultural beliefs about innovation in between.[22]

Mburu illustrates the contrast well in her African version of the story of the hare and the tortoise:

> One day, tortoise challenged hare to a race. As you might expect, hare was very amused because he knew that he was much faster than tortoise. However, he agreed to it, and on the appointed day, he and tortoise set off to race. What hare didn't know was that tortoise had asked his family members to help him. They positioned themselves all along the path the race was going to take. So, much to hare's surprise, no matter how fast he ran, every time he turned a corner he saw what he thought was tortoise ahead of him. In what was an upsetting turn of events for hare, he lost the race to tortoise.[23]

Mburu explains:

> What does this story teach us? Westerners might think it is about trickery and deception, but that is not the case. For Africans, this story is about the value of cooperation. Tortoise solicited the help of his family whereas hare opted to run on his own. So the point of the story is all about solidarity versus individualism. This is not a point that is made clear by only one part of the story—the ending— so that we can say at the conclusion 'And the moral of the story is. …' Rather, the moral is brought out throughout the entire story.[24]

The dramatic contrast between the community orientation of the African shaping of the story and the highly individualistic message of the traditional Minority World fable from Aesop is striking. But equally significant is the rhetorical pattern in which the message is delivered through the narrative as a whole rather than simply at the conclusion.

When the community rather than the individual is placed at the forefront, space is provided for a totally different shaping of creativity, which shifts the focus from the individual to the idea. Clapp observes that in the Western tradition, individuals are 'heralded as genius for their feats of greatness' of creative thinking.[25] A shift to understanding how rare it is for ideas to be constructed individually and how commonly they arise from a 'community of practice'[26] resonates strongly with the collective concerns of much of the Majority World. And yet this challenges the almost ubiquitous commitment to assignments and examinations that are completed individually and the promotion of individual competition in higher education.[27] Clapp challenges this individualistic understanding:

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22   Terra Gargano, 'Annotated Timelines and the Biography of an Idea', *Faculty Focus*, 7 August 2023,   https://facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/annotated-timelines-and-the-biography-of-an-idea/.
23   Mburu, *African Hermeneutics*, 60.
24   Mburu, *African Hermeneutics*, 60–61.
25   Edward Clapp, *Participatory Creativity: Introducing Access and Equity to the Creative Classroom* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 91.
26   Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Cf. Gargano, 'Annotated Timelines.'
27   Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, 99–100, 306.

From a traditional perspective, the locus of creativity is thought to lie within the individual. From a more systems-based perspective, the same concepts become socially rearranged and literally redistributed: individuals enact their agency throughout the creative idea development process, but no one individual or group has ownership over any one creative idea.[28]

## Orality and meaning-making

A significant component of plausibility in rhetorical structures is the extent to which communication and the development of ideas take place through oral as opposed to written forms. Oral societies place a high value on verbal, face-to-face communication through stories, proverbs, poetry, music, dance, art and ceremony, in which the social dimension of engagement is prominent.[29]

Misunderstanding can easily ensue when highly literate and highly oral people seek to engage in learning together. For example, at the highly multiethnic church I attended for some years in Beirut, I was invited to teach a series on the book of Acts for the adult Bible class on Sunday mornings. About one-third of the class consisted of migrant workers from West Africa, some of whom had very basic reading skills, and all of whom were oral-preference learners. Drawing on my years of training in the Minority World, I designed discussion questions that I believed would help the class wrestle with the flow of the narrative within its literary and historical context. In response to my questions, repeatedly someone among the West African men would share a long and convoluted story from his family's life, sometimes taking up to half the class time. At the end of the story, he would simply stop without explanation. All the West Africans would nod knowingly. Initially, I was thinking to myself, 'What a waste of class time', but as I gave space for reflection, I and others in the class realized the profound nature of the African story as it sought to bring parallel worlds of text and life to our reading of Acts. I was thinking in linear-logical frameworks, but these were not plausible frameworks for the Africans whose highly oral heritage caused them to seek more analogical-narrative ways of making meaning.

Mburu observes:

> Music and dance, oral traditions such as stories, legends, myths and proverbs, and visual arts such as sculpture, carving, and painting have long been very important in Africa. They were the means by which ideas were passed on from one generation to the next. By examining them, we catch a glimpse of our African worldview. Their importance is yet another example of the way in which African processing of information differs from the Western approach. African thinking, like most non-Western thinking, is holistic, seeing the whole more clearly than the individual parts. A Western approach tends to be analytical, separating out the individual elements.[30]

Similarly, Moon unpacks the significance of proverbs, poetry, songs, symbols, rituals, drama, dance and other modes of communication in oral-preference

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28  Clapp, *Participatory Creativity*, 92.
29  Craig Ott, *Teaching and Learning across Cultures: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 75.
30  Mburu, *African Hermeneutics*, 60.

societies.[31] Proverbs provide concise, easy-to-remember pathways to wisdom. Print-preference cultures with their emphasis on abstract logic and laws are often wisdom-impoverished. During my three decades in the Arabic-speaking world, I came to appreciate the richness of a proverbial culture that has a saying for virtually every situation. Having returned to Australia, I am constantly frustrated by the paucity of these expressions and sayings in English.

The rhythm of poetry and song greatly assists memory and speaks to the emotions in a way that mere prose rarely accomplishes. Even in English, echoes of this power can be seen. For example, Shakespeare places the speech of Brutus in *Julius Caesar* in prose, but that of Marc Antony in iambic pentameter (a form of rhythmic poetry), and the richness of the latter wins over the crowds.[32] As the Chinese Christian poet Xiaoli Yang observes, 'With pervasive metaphors, the poetic voice can trigger imagination, creativity, and emotions.'[33] The Scriptures are replete with poetry, and yet poetry is largely dismissed from the theological academy. Perhaps we need to return to a theological assessment of theological education!

Dance encourages full-body participation that intertwines the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of understanding. Richard Twiss describes how Native Americans 'dance our prayers'.[34] Although this idea may confound print learners, the field of ethnodoxology is exploring the use of various art forms for Christian expression. Acceptance and appreciation of a wider diversity of pathways to understanding do not imply 'dumbing it down'.[35] Even a brief exposure reveals powerful and beautiful expressions of high artistic value and affirmation of human worth.[36]

## Four steps to engagement in indigenous cosmopolitanism

### Acknowledgement

The first step on the journey to positive engagement with different forms of meaning-making is to acknowledge that the difference exists in the first place. Jude Carroll[37] notes the common reaction of denying cultural differences in how people learn and understand: 'Mathematics is mathematics wherever you teach it.' My early teaching experience was in mathematics instruction in Australia, and even in the relatively monocultural context of 1980s Australia, I quickly recognized the extent to which different learners need different instructional strategies. How much more is this the case when we engage with people from other cultural backgrounds.

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31   W. Jay Moon, 'Fad or Renaissance? Misconceptions of the Orality Movement', *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 1 (2016), 6–21.

32   William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 3, scene 2.

33   Xiaoli Yang, 'Poetry as Theology: A Creative Path', in Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamraj, *Challenging Tradition: Innovation in Advanced Theological Education* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2018), 425–45.

34   Richard Twiss, *Dancing Our Prayers: Perspectives on Syncretism, Critical Contextualization, and Cultural Practices in First Nations Ministry* (Vancouver: Wiconi, 2002).

35   Moon, 'Fad or Renaissance?'

36   Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982), 14.

37   Jude Carroll, *Tools for Teaching in an Educationally Mobile World* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2015), 19.

Acknowledgement involves recognizing that even when similar subject content is taught across cultures, numerous other factors play a central role in the communication process. Both in content and in instructional methodology, the nuances of context are significant: the plausibility structures, the balance between theory and practice, the social relations between teacher and students, and much more.

Especially in advanced studies, there continues to be a notable failure to acknowledge the extent to which a particular cultural and philosophical heritage has shaped Minority World education. There is consequently global pressure to conform to Minority World understandings of research and publication, hence profoundly limiting the boundaries for meaning-making. Acknowledgement of difference is a significant first step towards decolonizing discourse and enriching the global Christian movement.[38]

*Acceptance*

Once we acknowledge difference, the next step is acceptance that we cannot expect others to do things our way. Often, teachers recognize a difference but take a 'deficit' approach,[39] whereby other ways of meaning-making are seen as inferior to our way. Over the last 20 years, I have been a consultant and trainer in theological schools across the Majority World. During that time, I have been deeply concerned by several aspects of this deficit perspective:

- The legion of complaints from leaders of Majority World schools as to the arrogant dismissal by visiting Minority World lecturers of the quality of their school and their students.

- The expectation among visiting lecturers that students elsewhere in the world should follow Minority World patterns of knowledge construction, often without any awareness of the long and rich legacy of local knowledges.[40] In particular, the circuitous and indirect approaches of narrative reasoning that are so foundational to thinking in much of the Majority World are often summarily dismissed.[41] Likewise, the strong heritage of spiritual engagement that undergirds much of African and Asian society is dismissed by many Minority World teachers as a substandard framework for theological work, rather than as a pathway towards growth in discipleship.

- An assumption that Minority World approaches to meaning-making are the best way to achieve a healthy church life and accomplish God's mission. This assumption is particularly ironic when instructors from contexts where the church is struggling to survive despise more vernacular approaches to teaching and learning used in contexts where the church is growing rapidly.[42]

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38  Cf. Vhumani Magezi, 'Doing Practical, Public Theology in the Context of South Africa's Decolonization Discourse', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43, no. 4 (2019): 312–29.

39  Carroll, *Tools for Teaching*, 19.

40  César Lopes, 'Nurturing Emancipatory Local Knowledges', in Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamraj, *Challenging Tradition: Innovation in Advanced Theological Education* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2018), 145–65.

41  Black, 'Scholarship in Our Own Words'.

42  Perry Shaw, 'Moving from Critical to Constructive Thinking', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, no. 2 (2021): 128–40.

Craig Ott grants that an international student studying in the Minority World should adjust to the expectations of the host institution. However, when a cross-cultural teacher enters a different cultural and institutional context, the onus is on the teacher, not the students, to adapt.[43] Moving from acknowledgement to acceptance of differences requires awareness, intent and a posture of humble learning and listening.

### Appreciation

I remember attending a missions conference where the speaker asked the participants to discuss in small groups what they loved most about the culture where they were serving. In virtually every group, the participants could find nothing they liked and used the time to complain about everything they disliked. I was taken aback by this inability to see so many rich aspects of our host cultures. Appreciation of another culture recognizes that every culture reflects something of the divine imprint and something of the Fall. When we can see the fallen nature of elements of our own culture and the divine elements of another culture, we are enriched and extended.

It is important to understand, however, the difference between appreciation and appropriation.[44] Appreciating entails understanding and learning about another culture in an effort to connect with and value others cross-culturally. Appropriation, on the other hand, is simply taking one or two isolated aspects of a culture that are not your own and using them for personal benefit. One common form of appropriation occurs when foreign organizations use photographs to stimulate interest and raise money. The photographs perceived as most effective for fundraising urge sympathy and compassion but rarely promote appreciation of the other. Appreciation goes beyond the surface to see how the richness of the other culture critiques one's own cultural perspectives and ways of functioning.

It is time for us to evaluate the neo-colonial exportation of Minority World understandings of teaching and learning and make space for a wider diversity of pathways to meaning-making—many of which resonate more closely with fundamental biblical and theological values. For example, many collectivist societies affirm that young people should see older people as a great source of deep wisdom, a perspective widely affirmed in the Scriptures. This stands in stark contrast to the dominant narrative often delivered to young people in the Minority World, where aging means increasing irrelevance. A pervasive assumption in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and elsewhere is that young adults do not have the maturity to speak with authority. They should first spend time learning from their elders, and then perhaps at a later time their experience and quality of life will earn them the right to speak authoritatively.[45] For example, in a study of self-directed learning in the Korean context (a society greatly influenced by Confucianism), most Minority World educational values were seen as inappropriate. Rather, 'a person becoming independent of his or her parents, teachers or other people tends to be considered threatening [to] the stability of a

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43   Ott, *Teaching and Learning across Cultures*, 21.
44   Kelsey Holmes, 'Cultural Appreciation vs. Cultural Appropriation: Why It Matters', 2016, https://greenheart.org/blog/greenheart-international/cultural-appreciation-vs-cultural-appropriation-why-it-matters/.
45   Shaw, 'Moving from Critical to Constructive Thinking'.

community he or she belongs to. … Becoming independent without being interdependent passes for immaturity or self-centeredness.'[46]

The implications for higher education are profound. Kaplan observes, 'In the United States composition tradition, anyone—even a lowly student—has the authority to write and to hold and express an opinion, but in more traditional cultures, the young have no such authority.' Kaplan suggests that this may be a major reason why students in traditional cultures quote published sources extensively rather than offering more independent insights. These students are often 'accused of failing to exercise critical thinking, but they may not see themselves as authorized to undertake such an act.'[47]

In observing highly collectivist societies firsthand, I have realized that healthy multigenerational communities cannot function without a strong sense of authority, respect for elders and a focus on wisdom. The idea that all opinions have the right to be spoken compromises the overall quality of conversations within the community. We can learn much from the African concept of *ubuntu*, which is foundational to traditional African educational philosophy and practice. Ubuntu expresses concern for human welfare in the context of community, as I affirm my own humanity by recognizing the humanity of others: 'I am because you are.' The purpose of education then becomes focused less on developing an autonomous individual voice and more on the development of virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for others.[48]

### Adaptation

The ideal response to intercultural engagement is the provision of generous space in which both we and the other can treasure diversity, learn from one another, and engage in a level of mutual adaptation. After three decades of teaching and learning in the Arabic-speaking world, I am still a Westerner, but I have been enriched and changed by my engagement with my Arab brothers and sisters. And the warmth which I habitually receive from my former colleagues and students would indicate that the experience is mutual.

An embrace of adaptation is particularly significant in the current globalized environment. Sugirtharajah reminds us that the very idea that there exists some kind of pure, recoverable culture is an illusion. He argues that 'postcoloniality is perhaps the sign of an increased realization that it is not feasible ... to recover the authentic "roots" or even to go back to the real "home" again.'[49] On the other hand, even where Minority World culture has been substantially imposed, the deep local roots are still pervasive. Mburu describes her own experience:

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46   Yoonkyeong Nah, 'Can a Self-Directed Learner Be Independent, Autonomous and Interdependent? Implications for Practice', *Adult Learning* 11, no. 1 (1999), 18–25. Cf. Sheila Fabiano, *Perceptions of Instituto Superior de Teologia Evangélica No Lubango Graduates in Angola: Implications for Theological Education in Learning and Ministry Practice* (PhD dissertation, Trinity International University, 2015), 12–27.

47   Kaplan, 'Foreword', x.

48   Philip Higgs, 'Towards an Indigenous African Educational Discourse: A Philosophical Reflection', *International Review of Education* 54 (2008), 445–58.

49   R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM, 2003), 123.

Some have argued that modernization has eradicated traditional African worldviews. This is simply not true. While obviously not coded into our DNA, worldview is so embedded in the social fabric that it is transmitted both consciously and unconsciously. We have all acquired the knowledge, values, morals, and skills we need to live harmoniously in our communities. This point was brought home to me at university when I had to write an assignment on worldview and culture. I discovered that although I had grown up in an almost entirely Western environment, I still retained traces of a traditional African worldview, picked up unconsciously over the years. I was, and still am, as I concluded in my paper, undoubtedly 'an African in Western garb'.[50]

The search for discrete cultural spaces is no longer possible. The most fruitful pathway is to seek an adaptive 'third space' in which the best from my background is intertwined and integrated with the best from others.

## Application: some practical suggestions

There are many ways in which we can open space for engaging diverse patterns of meaning-making on the journey towards appreciation and adaptation. Here are a few ideas to begin on that pathway.

- *Instructional methodology*. The curse of education is 'covering the content'—an attitude that promotes lecture as the dominant methodology and leaves little space for conversation or mutual engagement and learning. Developing instructional strategies that better resonate with local rhetorical patterns and plausibility structures can create space for extraordinary mutual learning. A move away from a debate mentality with its need to 'win the argument' towards working in diverse teams and seeking win-win solutions that serve the whole community has substantial missional value.
- *Case studies and problem-based learning*. Case studies offer a great basis for stimulating culturally relevant conversations, in which the end goal becomes not so much individualistic thinking but collective resolution of problems.
- *Cultural course content*. As for classroom content, materials and readings that contain examples, stories, poems and videos from the local context can greatly enrich the resulting conversations.
- *Assessment*. Experimenting with multiple modalities of assessment can be an exciting pathway to discovering how people best engage the world around them. Allowing students to respond not only in writing but orally can open new doors of understanding. A shift from individual to collaborative work can communicate a recognition of the richness of the community in learning.

## Conclusion

The journey from ethnocentricity to the richness of intercultural understanding and indigenous cosmopolitanism requires effort and intentionality. It begins with a posture of humble learning and recognition of the validity of the diverse forms of

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50   Mburu, *African Hermeneutics*, 7.

plausibility structures and rhetorical patterns found in the world, as indeed they are found in the Scriptures. We are then positioned to follow the pathway of acknowledgement of difference, acceptance of the other, and appreciation of the richness available in cultures other than my own, towards finding a generous 'third space' of reciprocal benefit and adaptation. As we affirm diverse patterns of meaning, we can experience mutual enrichment and the global Christian movement will become better positioned to engage in the missional task Christ has set before us.

# Three Important Questions in Ministering to LGBTQ+ Persons

## Jill E. Nelson

*Evangelical Christians and congregations* must *deal with highly sensitive, practical questions on how to serve and minister to people with same-sex attraction while upholding the traditional biblical view of marriage and sexuality. This article presents a well-grounded approach to three such issues.*

The presence of LGBTQ+ persons raises tough issues that all Christian believers and their congregations must address, including (1) same-sex attraction and church leadership; (2) church attendance and membership; and (3) how to effectively present the traditional biblical view of marriage and sexuality. In this article, I seek to offer relevant scriptural insights and suggest how we can address these thorny issues with integrity and wisdom.

### Same-sex attraction and church leadership

Some evangelical denominations treat same-sex attraction as a sin and therefore consider even celibate same-sex-attracted Christians ineligible for ministerial leadership. Is this position justified? What does the answer imply for our ability to show love to LGBTQ+ persons?

Considering the Bible's definition of sin will help provide answers. Nowhere does Scripture treat temptation as equivalent to sin. Biblically, temptation becomes sin when it is *willingly* entertained in the mind, eventually leading to sinful behaviour. When anger and envy tormented Cain's mind and he was tempted to murder Abel, God did not say to him that his temptation was sin. He said, 'Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it' (Gen 4:7). If God did not describe the temptations of anger, envy and murder as sins in and of themselves, then why would we categorize any other temptation as sinful until it overcomes the person and is willingly indulged?

On the contrary, temptations assail us all and each of us is more readily susceptible to some types of temptations than to others. We all have our weaknesses, which God urges us to 'rule over' without condemnation or judgement for having been attacked by such a temptation. If, by His grace, we succeed in resisting temptation, we are better for the battle. Our character has been strengthened and we are wiser and more mature Christians, better qualified to lead than believers who have not had to confront and resist such temptation in the power of the Spirit (see Rom 5:1–5).

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Rather than condemning those who are afflicted by the temptation of same-sex attraction, we should celebrate those who live in mastery over their temptation. We should afford them great respect and hope to emulate their courage and devotion to Christ that compels them to deny fleshly desires they despise and did not invite. These are the very men and women of character who *should* lead us, not the ones who should be rejected.

If we are going to show God's love towards our LGBTQ+ neighbours, we must not hold them to a stricter standard than we hold ourselves to. We must not count their sin as more heinous than our own. Nor should we count their temptation as sinful any more than we do our own temptations; otherwise we become hypocrites.

Human nature is often quickest to take offence at faults that we possess but refuse to acknowledge. We should all ask ourselves: Do we decry homosexual temptation because we fear that we may find that particular temptation in our own hearts? Does the type of sin that tempts these others threaten our own inner security? Are we judging with impure motives?

We might justify ourselves by saying same-sex attraction is an unnatural type of temptation. What then? Are heterosexual lust or coveting, envy, murder and gossip—temptations to which many of us succumb or are vulnerable—'natural'? Surely not! Are these other temptations somehow less serious than this one that we so strongly fear and condemn? We deceive ourselves if we say so. Scripture declares, 'No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind' (1 Cor 10:13). There is no special category for the temptation of same-sex attraction. Therefore, we should not create one.

Alan Chambers, who came to Christ in his childhood, recounts the shock he experienced when puberty brought with it same-sex attraction. He states that though he didn't choose to be tempted in this way, he had a choice regarding what to do with the unwanted feelings.[1] Chambers testifies:

> God didn't leap out of my heart because I was experiencing same-sex attraction. … The thing about God is that He knew before He created me—certainly when He came into my heart at the age of six—that I would face a trial so great I would need Him more than ever … those who perceive their same-sex attraction as a need that can draw them to God are on their way to wholeness.[2]

Chambers discovered through suffering this temptation that he had been given an extraordinary opportunity to draw closer to God, and that God was faithful to help him resist and overcome the trial, which resulted in deeper spiritual maturity and greater trust in God.

If we deny church leadership positions to those who are living in the successful mastery of their same-sex attraction, then we must also deny church leadership positions to those prone to temptations of anger, lust, envy, covetousness and so on. We would find no one qualified to lead in any capacity, for we are all 'locked up … under the control of sin' (Gal 3:22) so that we may all acknowledge our utter depravity and throw ourselves by faith on God's mercy. Is it not arrogance to conclude that the temptation experienced by a person with same-sex attraction is more heinous

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1   Alan Chambers, *Leaving Homosexuality* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 13.
2   Chambers, *Leaving Homosexuality*, 14–15.

than our own temptations? God Himself does not hold our temptations against us. Why should we do so to our brother or sister in Christ?

I do not mean to minimize the gravity of this issue. Many individuals, congregations and denominations are wrestling to identify godly solutions that minister spiritual health and peace to their members. Currently, in the United States, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has paused discussion on the topic within its churches until a two-year study can be conducted. The study hopes to shed light on what is sometimes called 'Side B' Christianity—believers who identify as having same-sex attraction but are celibate because they hold to the traditional Christian sexual ethic—and how it relates to the moral standards found in Scripture.[3] Christians should monitor such studies for any insights that may guide policy and practice.

## Church attendance and membership

How should a congregation respond to a self-identifying LGBTQ+ couple who visit their church, profess a Christian commitment and ask to (a) attend services or (b) become members of the church?

This question is relevant to our current global context, as well as intensely practical in its focus. It compels us to not merely grasp theological truth in our minds but apply it in everyday life and relationships.

LGBTQ+ individuals feel the same emptiness without God as any other human being on the planet. Therefore, many will seek the Christian God to fill that void. Some will even profess faith in Christ. Thankfully, our God is the answer to human needs and loneliness. But how do those who hold the truth of Jesus Christ in our hearts minister that truth to individuals or couples who claim to hold Jesus Christ dear and yet acknowledge no sense that they are outside of God's will in their most intimate human relationship?

My conviction regarding the first half of this question—whether we should welcome LGBTQ+ couples at our church services—is absolutely yes. No one, regardless of their lifestyle, should find the doors of the church pre-emptively shut in their faces. Where else will they hear the words of eternal life? Where better to encounter the presence of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit? If hearts are changed by the ministry of Word and Spirit in fellowship with the body of Christ, we have fulfilled a vital aspect of why God has called us to be His ambassadors on earth. If truth is faithfully, lovingly and patiently preached, hearts will either soften and change or become hardened. And hard hearts drive people away from hearing what they cannot receive. If people's hearts become hardened, they will leave—though perhaps not without protest and attempted disruption, but I will address that topic below.

The second half of this question asks if an LGBTQ+ couple who applies to formally join the church should be granted membership. Here, precedent and a church's constitution come into play.

By precedent, I mean how a church has handled similar situations in the past. Has it, as a matter of course, admitted to membership heterosexual couples who are

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3    David Roach, 'Evangelical Presbyterians Take on Debate over Celibate Gay Pastors', *Christianity Today*, 11 July 2024, https://christianitytoday.com/news/2024/july/evangelical-presbyterian-church-epc-general-assembly-sexual.html.

living together without the benefit of marriage? If so, this church has undercut the ethical grounds for refusing membership to an LGBTQ+ couple. Remember, as discussed in the previous question, LGBTQ+ sexual sin is no more heinous than heterosexual sin. Adultery, fornication and heterosexual lust are decried in Scripture even more prominently and frequently than homosexual sin, perhaps because these practices are more common; in any case, they are no less sinful than same-sex conjugal relationships. If a congregation has been lax in this area, addressing heterosexual sin in its midst is necessary to remove the taint of hypocrisy before the church can responsibly refuse membership to LGBTQ+ couples.

By 'constitution', I mean whether the church has a written policy in its foundational documents regarding the nature of biblical marriage and sexual relations. I have served on two committees that prayerfully wrote marriage policies integral to each organization's constitution. Both times, we approached the issue from the positive rather than the negative. The constitutional language clearly stated what we were *for* instead of what we were *against.* Here is language from one such statement on biblical marriage:

> We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen 1:26–27). … We believe that the term 'marriage' has only one meaning: the uniting of one biological man and one biological woman in an exclusive covenant between each other before God as delineated in Scripture (Gen 2:18–25).

Certainly, there are other ways to state these truths and perhaps other things that could be added, but these quotations reflect the heart of what should be present in the church or ministry's constitutional document.

Once this organization formally declared that biblically sanctioned sexual relations are exclusively between one man and one woman, united in covenantal marriage before God, other types of sexual relationships were automatically disavowed without having to add any sort of condemning language. With the groundwork laid in this way, we simply had to affirm our stated conviction with appropriate action. Admitting to formal membership any couple living outside the boundaries would render us hypocrites and nullify our constitution.

Accordingly, despite the risk of causing LGBTQ+ persons to feel slighted or discriminated against, I believe the biblical answer to this twofold question is yes to attendance and no to membership. Self-identified LGBTQ+ persons or couples may be welcome to attend services or small groups, as well as to participate in group activities or any other event not requiring membership. However, a congregation may protect itself against giving a false impression or inviting accusations of discrimination by limiting participation in any area of service or ministry (e.g. providing child care or serving as an usher or greeter) to members, and by taking care to admit into membership only those applicants who conform to the standards of moral purity and integrity outlined in the church's founding documents. The moment of truth will always come for prospective members when they read church constitutional language like the sample provided above. Then it is up to the membership applicant whether they will conform or seek fellowship elsewhere.

## Expressing our view of biblical sexuality

These days, merely affirming a traditional view of sexuality is now often attacked as hate speech. How can we most effectively represent our position in such settings?

In some ways, this question is the most difficult one, because there is no way to guarantee that we will receive a fair hearing, let alone a favourable reception, from those who oppose our position. Since acceptance of the LGBTQ+ lifestyle is a hot topic in our contemporary society, many people's opinions on the subject are rabid and radical. Therefore, a position that does not affirm these lifestyles is unlikely to be heard fairly, much less respected, by those in opposition.

When we are navigating rough waters, it is helpful to realize up front that our position will be met with hostility in many circles. Jesus Himself encountered implacable hostility from certain quarters because of His teachings. Why should we expect to be treated differently by those who have an entrenched, anti-theist mindset? We should not be shocked if we experience virulent rejection and vicious verbal attacks that no amount of reason can counter. We have clear biblical direction to present Christianity positively while under attack by avoiding condemning language and judgemental behaviour, even as we stand our ground on the issue.

The apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor experiencing opposition, 'And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will' (2 Tim 2:24–26). This advice was written to guide a young pastor in dealing with false teaching within the church, but the directive applies equally well to opposition from those outside the church. Sadly, some of the strongest opposition to the traditional stance on marriage and sexuality is coming from within churches that have decided to embrace LGBTQ+ lifestyles as acceptable.

I have tried to emphasize two key aspects of effectively representing the traditional position on human marriage and sexuality. The first is ethical consistency in how we treat people who are actively engaged in any sexual relationship outside of heterosexual marriage. We must display consistency by not condemning one aspect of sexual sin as more heinous than another. Second, we must keep compassion at the forefront. Throughout history, the most effective influence on enemies of Christianity has come through exhibiting kindness and humility in the face of violent words and actions. Certainly, we must stand firm for holiness, but our stance cannot afford any taint of holier-than-thou.

Theologically, a biblical position requires a balance between truth and grace. We must insist on repentance from sin, but we must readily offer forgiveness. 'God's kindness is intended to lead … to repentance' (Rom 2:4). Kindness opens the door to honest conversation. This kindness, combined with uncompromising truth, creates an atmosphere for the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction and repentance in the human heart.

Years ago, I attended Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Louisiana, as a member of an evangelistic team. The environment was mind-boggling in its extreme hedonism. Yet God gave us grace to walk among the people, initiate conversations about Jesus and pray with them. Our attitude of humility and compassion won us many open

ears. Only God knows the eternal impact. At the same time, other evangelistic teams present at Mardi Gras were employing a different tactic. They walked around with signs saying 'Turn or Burn' and other threatening slogans. People automatically put as much distance between themselves and these sign-toters as physically possible in a 12-block radius packed with up to a million people. I never saw the 'turn-or-burn' folks interacting with anyone.

If we are to win hearts, blanketing our atmosphere with thundering denunciations will touch no one positively. The most effective tactic is personal and one-on-one as God brings LGBTQ+ people across our paths. Friendship evangelism is the most effective approach with almost anyone. If our offer of friendship is rejected, we should continue to treat people kindly. Since the environment surrounding gender and sexuality issues has grown so heated, we are certain to have plenty of opportunities to turn the other cheek.

I cannot cover every ramification of these challenging contemporary issues in a brief article, but I believe I have outlined a constructive, principled way forward. Such discussions must continue as individual believers and congregations strive to remain faithful to biblical truth while ministering to LGBTQ+ persons with wisdom, compassion and integrity.

# The Nagas' Lohe Shawl and Galatians 3:28

## Worring Kashung

*The four Naga tribes of northeast India, regardless of their tribe, socio-economic status or gender, all wear the same type of shawl, known as the Lohe Shawl. This inclusive tradition could be a contemporary life illustration of Galatians 3:28—except that the Nagas do not fully live out the shawl's implications or properly apply Paul's climactic declaration that 'all are one in Christ Jesus.' This article carefully pairs real-life and biblical exegesis to deepen the power of a classic Pauline lesson.*

On 9 August 2023, when our college celebrated the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Mutsicho Tetseo, one of my favourite students, came in wearing a stunning traditional shawl called *Rira*. 'In our community', he said, 'this shawl is worn only by a person who has passed 10th grade.'

In tribal communities such as those in northeast India, shawls and mekhalas[1] are not just mere textiles; rather, each of them tells a powerful story. Many people tend to speak less and let their traditional outfits do the talking. In Tetseo's case, he did not have to say anything about his educational level; his attire communicated it. When an Ao man wears a *Tsungkotepsü*—an Ao warrior shawl[2]—his outfit powerfully expresses his heroism and wealth.

Anthony Kuriakose,[3] V. Joshi[4] and Adangla Ckj[5] have written about how textiles vividly reveal the socio-cultural values and history of the people. Vizovono Elizabeth states, 'Our [Naga] textiles have always been our cultural language and a way of

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1    The term *mekhala* refers to a female's fabric wrapped around the bottom half of the body and tucked in at the waist. It is found mainly in northeast India and nearby countries such as Myanmar and Thailand.

2    The Ao tribe has two dialects: Mongsen and Chungli. The word *Tsungkotepsü* is from the Chungli dialect. The same shawl is called *Tsungkosü* in the Mongsen dialect.

3    'The Unique Narrative of Shawls Worn among 16 Major Tribes: Reflecting One's Social Standing and the Younger Generation's Changing Tastes—Nagaland', Tribal Cultural Heritage in India, 14 January 2023, https://indiantribalheritage.org/?p=19937#gsc.tab=0.

4    V. Joshi, 'Nagaland and Nagas of Manipur', in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: South Asia and Southeast Asia*, ed. Joanne B. Eicher and Jasleen Dhamija, vol. 4 (New York: Berg Publishers, 2011), 205–11, https://bloomsburyfashioncentral.com/encyclopedia?docid=b-9781847888532.

5    'With the unique motifs, weaves, dyes and prints, textiles have been an age-old visual rhetoric for sharing tales, recording legends and perpetuating myths and folklore.' Adangla Ckj, 'Weaving Memoirs among the Naga Tribals: A Sociological Overview', *EPRA International Journal of Economic and Business Review* 5, no. 3 (March 2017): 34, https://eprajournals.com/IJES/article/8450.

communication … we transcribe our stories through the motifs and patterns on our shawls … the colours and designs on our textiles are like a document, carrying and conveying symbolic stories and meanings … they are like a code language and that is why they are valuable.'[6] For the Nagas, each design or pattern of a textile carries an important message. Likewise, every finished fabric tells a unique story that expresses people's emotions, values and beliefs.

Traditionally, the ancient Nagas preserved their history through oral and textile traditions rather than writing, audio and videos.[7] This method of historical preservation, which has been maintained across generations, highlights their unique approach to literacy and education.

This article identifies three crucial issues that are widespread among the Nagas. I address those issues by employing three critical principles from a Naga textile called the Lohe Shawl. Then, since Nagas are predominantly Christians, I show that the social message expressed by the Lohe Shawl aligns precisely with Paul's message in Galatians 3:28. Therefore, I call on the Nagas and all Christians to live out the truths that both the shawl and the apostle Paul present to us.

## Background

The Nagas belong to a Mongoloid racial group inhabiting mostly mountainous regions and some plains areas. Prior to the Britishers' arrival, they already had a well-established socio-political system.[8] They have over 50 tribes[9] and are found in four Indian states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland—and in the Sagaing Division and Kachin state of Myanmar.[10] The total ancestral lands of the Nagas are 120,000 square kilometres.[11] The Nagas' population is between 3.5 and 4

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6   'Mekhela Stories: Cloths like the Lohe Testify to a Tradition of Oneness', *Morung Express*, 20 October 2023, https://morungexpress.com/mekhela-stories-cloths-like-the-lohe-testify-to-a-tradition-of-oneness.

7   Due to the Christian missionaries' influence—which brought Western education—Nagas have started documenting their history in writing, audio, video and so on. This is a great change. However, it cannot completely rule out the criticality of the oral and textile traditions which strongly reflect Nagas' stories.

8   'The pioneering British administrators, anthropologists and sociologists who have landed to this [Naga] territory were amazed to see the socio-political system of the Nagas during the early 19th century. They were in fact, surprised to see well-defined Naga people and also the well-organized system of village administration based on purist democratic principles of their own.' A. Lanunungsang Ao, *From Phizo to Muivah: The Naga National Question in North East India* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2021), 239.

9   See S. R. Tohring, *Violence and Identity in North-East India: Naga-Kuki Conflict* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2010).

10   Kethoser Aniu Kevichusa, *Forgiveness and Politics: A Critical Appraisal* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Monographs, 2017), 188.

11   The size of the present Nagaland state is 16,579 square kilometers. Kaka D. Iralu, *Nagaland and India: The Blood and the Tears*, 4th ed. (Kohima, India: Kaka D. Iralu, 2017), 3. For several decades, Nagas have been caught up in one of the world's longest-running—and perhaps the least-known—violent national movements, which has claimed thousands of lives. For more details, see Iralu, *Nagaland and India* (first published in 2000); Ao, *From Phizo to Muivah* (first published in 2002); Kevichusa, *Forgiveness and Politics*, 185–230.

million[12] and they are predominantly Christians.

The Lohe Shawl is worn by four Naga tribes (listed alphabetically, not in any priority order): Angami, Chakhesang, Mao and Poumai. All of their stories of migration are associated with a place called Makhel,[13] 'a Mao Naga village now located in Manipur's Senapati District'.[14] The Angamis occupy the 'Nagaland's southern region, in the two administrative districts of Kohima and Dimapur'.[15] The term 'Chakhesang' was coined as a combination of three subtribes: Chokri, Khezha (Kuzha) and Sangtam.[16] The predominant population of the Chakhesang community resides in Nagaland, with a smaller contingent residing in Manipur. While under British rule until the 1940s, the Chakhesangs were identified as the 'Eastern Angamis'.[17]

The Mao tribe predominantly resides in Manipur, with a smaller number in Nagaland. The origin of the term 'Mao' is uncertain but appears to refer to people living in the 'north'.[18] Like the Chakhesangs and Maos, the Poumais also reside in both Manipur and Nagaland. They have more than 80 villages,[19] which are further divided into 'four circles'.[20]

The Nagas have received relatively scant scholarly attention compared to other communities in Asia. Particularly in theological discourse, resources pertaining to the Nagas are notably scarce, requiring me to rely heavily on personal interviews for detailed information on their practices.

This article has three purposes. First, I wish to mine indigenous materials and use them in studying the Bible. In that way, traditional materials will not become extinct. Also, the Scripture will become less foreign and studying the Bible could

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12  Sanjib Baruah, 'Confronting Constructionism: Ending India's Naga War', *Journal of Peace Research* 40, no. 3 (2003): 321–38.

13  Vivolhuno Punyü, 'Angami', International Council of Naga Affairs (blog), 29 November 2021, https://nagaaffairs.org/angami-naga/; Kh. Pou, 'Poumai', International Council of Naga Affairs (blog), 17 November 2021, https://nagaaffairs.org/poumai-naga/.

14  Thepuzo Keyho, 'Chakhesang', International Council of Naga Affairs (blog), 21 October 2023, https://nagaaffairs.org/chakhesang-naga/.

15  Punyü, 'Angami'.

16  Neizo Puro, 'Peacebuilding from the Chakhesang (Khezha) Naga Perspective', in *In Search of Peace: Tribal Resources for Peacebuilding in North East India*, ed. Razouselie Lasetso et al., Tribal Study Series 22 (Jorhat, India: ILEMA, 2013), 270.

17  Keyho, 'Chakhesang'.

18  Lungailin Gangmei and Manine Khrasi, 'Marriage System of Mao Tribe of Manipur: Its Changes', *International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* 4, no. 3 (March 2016): 215. A. Kapesa states that Maos 'bear an important place in the history of migration and dispersion of the Nagas. Makhel being the first settlement area of the Nagas and the *Chütebu-Kajü*, the place of dispersal of the Nagas are located in the Mao territory, the Mao Naga can be considered as the pioneer settler among the Nagas.' Kapesa, 'Ethnographc Study of the Mao Naga Tribe of Manipur, India', *International Journal of Advanced Research* 5, no. 3 (March 2017): 1119, https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/3614.

19  Woba James, 'Peacebuilding from the Poumai Naga Traditional Perspective', in *In Search of Peace: Tribal Resources for Peacebuilding in North East India*, ed. Razouselie Lasetso et al., Tribal Study Series 22 (Jorhat, India: ILEMA, 2013), 217.

20  Pou, 'Poumai'.

become more engaging for the Nagas.[21] Second, I seek to address the needs of theological students—especially the Nagas, but also other tribals in India—who have been struggling to find native materials for their studies. Third, I wish to stimulate further discussion of ways to use indigenous materials to illuminate the meaning of Scripture. To achieve these goals, I will examine the meaning of the Lohe Shawl and how it parallels the message of Galatians 3:28.

## Three social issues of concern for the Nagas

Because of the lack of available written resources, I interviewed 50 people to obtain the information for this section. (For their protection, I have promised anonymity to all interviewees.) The cohort was carefully curated from a spectrum of 25 professions and 16 tribes, thereby delineating a comprehensive portrayal of the varied viewpoints held by the Nagas across multifarious societal and tribal domains.

### Tribalism

When a Naga meets another Naga, often the conversation begins with the question, 'What is your tribe?' or 'To which tribe do you belong?' Such a question can sound polite. However, it can also strongly connote tribalism.[22] Of my 50 interviewees, all but one said that the problem of tribalism exists in various forms. Fourteen of them said tribalism is present at educational institutions from primary school to theological college. In those settings, when making decisions on admission, electing a student body leader or organizing social events, normally one prefers one's fellow tribals. Also, seven respondents observed specifically that with regard to government offices and during political elections, people's loyalty is often determined by their tribal identity.

With regard to church settings, nine people commented that in the process of appointing leaders, the candidate's tribal identity supersedes one's potential as a more influential factor. Moreover, there have been cases of certain Naga tribes from Manipur leaving the Naga Christian Fellowship (NCF).[23] One of the main reasons for their departure has been perceived unfair treatment in leadership and church activities due to the dominance of specific tribes, primarily from Nagaland.

In the context of the Naga national movement too, the division has been—to a large extent—based on tribal identity. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland–

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21   Due to the influence of foreign missionaries, Western civilization has been powerfully shaping the Nagas. In several cases, this has been happening at the cost of the rich Naga traditions. See Yangkahao Vashum, *Christology in Context: A Tribal-Indigenous Appraisal of North East India*, Christian Heritage Rediscovered 49 (New Delhi: CWI, 2017); Taimaya Ragui, 'Decolonising "Christian Mission" of the Tangkhul Nagas', *Journal of North East India Studies* 11, no. 2 (December 2021): 35–53.

22   In this study, tribalism is understood in terms of discrimination based on one's tribal identity. Ethnic conflicts occur occasionally in northeast India. For instance, the communal clash between the Kukis and the Meiteis in Manipur state started on 3 May 2023 and continues as of this writing. See Worring Kashung, 'The Meitei-Kuki Conflict of 2023: Six Potential Responses', *Journal of Tribal Studies* 28, no. 1 (June 2023): 111–44.

23   The NCF can be found in various major cities of India and functions under the Nagaland Baptist Church Council.

Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) is often identified with the Tangkhul tribe.[24] Similarly, other NSCN branches are identified with other specific tribes. Socio-politically speaking, particularly in Nagaland, power is often identified with the elite tribes such as the Ao, Angami, Sumi and Chakhesang.[25] Sadly, though the Konyak ethnic group is a major tribe in terms of population, 'it never has enough space to represent themselves in decision making bodies.'[26]

## Class system

Forty of my 50 informants stated that the Nagas' class system (i.e. a system of discrimination based on wealth, income, occupation, education and social status) presents a serious problem. Sixteen emphasized strongly that the opinions of rich people are valued much more than those of the poor. According to them, during social events, wealthy people are often invited as chief guests even if they have poor leadership qualities and education. A researcher based abroad wrote, 'Even if you have education but your income is zero, you are excluded.' A professor indicated, 'A clan with wealthy people is feared, respected and consequently given more opportunities to speak in public functions … their words are given more weight (possibly because of their financial status and contributions) compared to a clan with only a few educated or wealthy people.'

The church setting is not an exception. Affluent people who tithe substantial amounts of money normally control the church's administration. A leader of one church association wrote, 'Speaking from a village setting, even the pastors in villages seem to be inclined toward the opinion of the wealthy ones.' Regardless of their poor spiritual status and ethical behaviours, the rich people are generally given front seats and speaking opportunities in the church. Moreover, the needs of the well-off receive greater attention even while prayers are conducted.

Five interviewees remarked that in terms of education, economic and other developmental measures, there is a huge difference between the eastern Nagas and other Naga groups. The former are identified as 'backward tribes' and the latter as 'advanced tribes'. T. Longkoi Khiamniungan states, 'Presently there are 17 recognized tribes each having a specific geographical area and out of which six are considered backward tribes in Nagaland who inhabit Eastern Nagaland. They are Khiamniungan, Chang, Phom, Sangtam, Konyak, and Yimchunger. These tribes are considered as the most discriminated and undeveloped in Nagaland.'[27]

24  Phirmi Bodo, 'Why NSCN-IM Isn't the Sole Representative of Nagas and How Its Deal with Govt Would Prove Recipe for Disaster', News18, 23 August 2020, https://news18.com/news/opinion/why-nscn-im-isnt-the-sole-representative-of-nagas-and-why-its-deal-with-govt-would-prove-recipe-for-disaster-2811591.html; 'National Socialist Council of Nagaland–Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM)', South Asia Terrorism Portal, https://satp.org/terrorist-profile/india-insurgencynortheast/national-socialist-council-of-nagaland-isak-muivah-nscn-im. In reality, other tribes are also actively involved in NSCN-IM in various capacities.
25  T. Longkoi Khiamniungan, 'Inequality in Nagaland: A Case Study of "Advanced" and "Backward" Tribes', *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development* 7, no. 2 (2014): 77.
26  Khiamniungan, 'Inequality in Nagaland', 77.
27  Khiamniungan, 'Inequality in Nagaland', 74.

*Gender-based discrimination*

One's home should be a place of safety and comfort. However, for a Naga woman, gender-based discrimination begins in the home itself.[28] Easterine Iralu—a Naga novelist—in her book *A Terrible Matriarchy* powerfully narrates the intensity of the male-dominated Naga system. In her novel, a five-year-old girl named Dielieno is raised by her grandmother. The grandmother guides her towards embodying the qualities of a dignified Naga wife and mother. Throughout, she insists that Dielieno refrain from enjoying the best portions of food at the family dining table, as they are reserved for boys. Additionally, she discourages her granddaughter from pursuing education and playful activities just because she is not a boy.[29]

Related to the Naga women's struggle at home, Monisha Behal, North East Network chairperson and widely known women's rights activist, reports:

> The customary laws of Chakhesang Nagas state that when a married woman is caught for adultery, she is forced to leave her husband's house with only the clothes she is wearing, with a fine imposed on her depending on the gravity of the situation. But if a married man brings his lover home and creates disharmony in the family, he doesn't need to leave, but will have to give his wife half the property acquired during his married life.[30]

In the church setting, most pastors and church association leaders are men.[31] Ukhrul, a district in Manipur, is a home for the Tangkhuls.[32] Some proudly claim, 'Ukhrul town is the Jerusalem of Manipur. Christianity started here.'[33] Despite this assertion and after 125 years of following the Christian faith,[34] the Tangkhuls still have only one ordained woman minister.[35] Zubeno Kithan writes, 'Lotha Church is

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28   What I describe here is a general traditional practice. The situation can differ from person to person, especially for families living in urban settings.

29   Easterine Iralu, *A Terrible Matriarchy* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2007).

30   'Are Women Really Treated as Equals in Nagaland?' *Morung Express*, 16 March 2021, https://morungexpress.com/are-women-really-treated-as-equals-in-nagaland.

31   The exact ratio can differ from tribe to tribe. 'After fighting over two decades for more rights and privileges, the Western Sümi Baptist Akukhuhou Kukhakulu (WSBAK) … has set a benchmark in conferring women with ministry license. Thirty women church workers under the WSBAK are currently licensed ministers. … The license gives these women the right to conduct all religious ceremonies like marriage, funerals, the Lord's Supper, christening and conducting baptism. Till a few years back, such privileges were accorded only to men.' Y Merina Chishi, 'Nagaland: Towards Making Space for Women Leadership in Churches', *Morung Express*, 30 August 2020, https://morungexpress.com/nagaland-towards-making-space-for-women-leadership-in-churches.

32   Initially, the present district of Kamjong was a part of Ukhrul district.

33   P. Ranreiphi Kharei, 'Ukhrul Town Gets a Face-Lift with Project "Paint Ukhrul"', *Ukhrul Times*, 23 October 2021, https://ukhrultimes.com/ukhrul-town-gets-a-face-lift-with-project-paint-ukhrul.

34   Mungchan Zimik, 'TBCA Set to Celebrate 125 Years of Christianity, Baptist Fellowship', E-Pao, 1 April 2024, https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=13..020424.apr24.

35   Tennoson Pheirei, 'Margaret L. Valui, First Tangkhul Woman Ordained as Minister', *Ukhrul Times*, 29 December 2023, https://ukhrultimes.com/margaret-l-valui-first-tangkhul-women-ordained-as-minister/.

deeply embedded in patriarchal values and structures, tightly controlled by men and it is next to impossible to share power with women.'[36]

Concerning Naga women's life outside the church setting, the *Morung Express* reports, 'Women are in charge of domestic issues, such as family and its related issues, while men deal with society, including village administration and councils. Women have therefore been excluded from the political realm. They are not allowed in the traditional village councils that oversee village management, and [are excluded] from "village development boards", smaller local institutions that regulate economic projects.'[37] The present Indian state of Nagaland was established in 1963;[38] however, the state got its first two women members of India's legislative assembly only in 2023[39] and still the other 58 members are men.[40]

## How the Lohe Shawl addresses these issues

The Naga traditional shawl called Lohe is worn by Angamis, Chakhesangs, Maos and Poumais.[41] Concerning this shawl, R. L. Tennyson, a former executive secretary of the Poumai Naga Baptist Association who is well-versed in Naga traditions and history, highlights six things. First, it has red, black and green colours, something common to all these peoples. Second, the 'shawl gives a youthful, energetic and vibrant feeling, which resonates with nature blooming.' Third, 'during festivals, wearing the shawl as a group gives a festive mood.' Fourth, 'along with the shawl, people in the past wore earrings with the same colours, made from wool/thread.' Fifth, 'everyone can wear this shawl. There is no gender or social divide.' Sixth, at present, 'to give a feminine twist, women have begun to replace the red colour with pink.'[42] To extend Tennyson's last point, particularly for the women's Lohe Mekhala, multiple versions with modern designs and in numerous colours have been seen in both Manipur and Nagaland.[43] Some have started creating a Lohe Dress too.[44] These other clothing items still follow the traditional basic pattern.

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36   Zubeno Kithan, 'Ordination of Women: Conflict Between God's Purpose and Church Leadership', in *Lotha Women in the 21st Century: Celebrating Progress, Advocating Gender Equality*, ed. Eyingbeni Hümtsoe-Nienu, A. Abeni Patton and Mhabeni W. (Kohima, India: TDCC, 2021), 184.
37   'Are Women Really Treated as Equals in Nagaland?'
38   Ao, *From Phizo to Muivah*, 81.
39   'Nagaland Gets Its First Women MLAs', *The Hindu*, 2 March 2023, https://bit.ly/article66571124_ece.
40   I do not mean to imply that Naga women do not enjoy any privileges. Compared to women from other areas of India, Naga women certainly have several entitlements.
41   Especially among the Chakhesangs, 'Lohe' is also used as a person's name. The shawl worn by the Maos and Poumais has a slight difference in style, but the basic patterns and colours of the shawl remain the same across all the tribes.
42   R. L. Tennyson, phone interview, 25 April 2024.
43   Johnson Raih, phone interview, 25 April 2024. Johnson is a pastor of the Naga Christian Fellowship, Hyderabad, and also associate regional coordinator for Langham Preaching India.
44   Nisaphi Lyndem and Vandana Bhandari, 'Cultural Appropriation with Reference to Textiles Handwoven in Nagaland, India', *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 8, no. 11 (7 November 2022): 16. Customization reflects people's creativity and can be encouraged. However, it is important not to completely compromise the basic pattern or originality of the Lohe Shawl or Mekhala, as that would be the equivalent of abolishing the original story and significance of those attires.

Theyiesinuo Keditsu, an indigenous feminist, poet, academic and educator known for advocating the use of traditional dress, in a presentation about the Lohe Shawl,[45] stated that these clothes 'tell the story of our Tenyimia weavers'. (Tenyimia is a term sometimes used to refer to the members of all four tribes.) She commented further that though the clothing appears simple, 'it is one of the hardest to weave … without elaborate patterns to hide behind, the weaver must ensure perfect and constant tension throughout the entire panel and reproduce the same in the other panels. [Then,] all pieces must be perfectly sized, aligned and joined together by hand stitching.'[46]

### Inclusiveness

Particularly for the Nagas, the Lohe Shawl communicates three strong statements. First is the concept of inclusiveness despite tribalism. The shawl is worn by four tribes living in four districts (Kohima, Phek, Senapati and Ukhrul) and two states (Manipur and Nagaland). Its inclusiveness is evident despite tribal differences and even geographic boundaries. *The Morung Express* reported, 'Donning a "Lohe Chiecha" [mekhala] and a traditional "Lohe Shawl" on the evening of "Mekhela Stories" … she [Keditsu, the presenter] articulated that she chose to wear them because … "they tell the story of my people, the Angamis and our age-old blood connection to the other Tenyimia peoples—Chakhesang, Mao, and Poumai, all of whom also wear this same cloth."' Also, Keditsu remarks, 'We would do well to remember that cloths like the Lohe testify to a tradition of oneness and hold the power to be pleasing and peaceful means to bring us together.'[47]

In the Lohe Shawl, one can see a strong message of inclusivity and unity irrespective of tribal boundaries, which forcefully counters the problem of tribalism. It categorically confronts any form of discrimination—based on tribal identity—that exists in schools, colleges, seminaries, churches, politics or elsewhere.

### Socio-economic cohesion

Second is the concept of socio-economic cohesion despite the class system. Traditionally, the Lohe Shawl has been worn by both wealthy and poor people. Historically, the Nagas, like virtually any culture, have had members at a wide range of socio-economic levels. Some had massive paddy fields, lands and numbers of cattle; others eked out their survival by cultivating fields owned by others.[48] Irrespective of this huge socio-economic disparity, both rich and poor found commonality in the Lohe Shawl. It could be worn by any person from any socio-economic background. Keditsu avers that the shawl 'tells the story of a notoriously egalitarian people who refuse to be lower or higher than anyone else'.[49] This practice directly challenges the

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45  'Preserving Tradition: "Lohe" Shawl Story by Dr. Theyiesinuo Keditsu', 2023, https://youtu.be/qBCpHdtyGew.
46  'Mekhela Stories'.
47  'Mekhela Stories'.
48  In such a context, traditionally, wealthy Nagas were also known for sharing their resources. For instance, several of them frequently hosted the entire community/village and provided delicious food by butchering pigs, buffalos and other animals. Of course, not all rich Nagas were so generous.
49  'Mekhela Stories'.

rampant class system and reminds us that it is wrong to prefer or promote those with greater income, occupation and social status (especially when they have poor leadership skills) or to surrender church administration responsibilities to those who tithe more.

## Gender equity

Third is the concept of equity despite gender-based discrimination. Both males and females have equal dignity and personhood. Nobody is inferior to anyone else. On that basis, both genders deserve justice in all aspects of life. The Lohe Shawl affirms this.[50]

Traditionally, the Lohe Shawl is unisex. It does not, of course, claim that males and females are identical, since they are fundamentally different in biological and emotional ways, among others. This uniqueness should be acknowledged and maintained, since God created men and women in this way. Rather, as Keditsu asserts, 'It is a lesson in humility, in a shared commonality—one that extends to the sexes because this is a cloth both men and women can wear.'[51] The shawl declares silently that it is wrong to prefer sons over daughters in family settings, education opportunities or anywhere else; to limit opportunities for church leadership only to males; or to place men over women in political circles, whether at village, state, national or international levels.

In sum, an examination of the social function of the Lohe Shawl shows that the ancestors of the Angamis, Chakhesangs, Maos and Poumais knew the importance of inclusiveness despite diverse tribal worlds, equality despite socio-economic differences, and equity despite gender differences. These principles stand starkly against the systems of tribalism, class system and gender-based discrimination that remain pervasive among the Nagas.

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50  Other cultural features also reinforce women's value. To reinforce the concept of equity—especially, women's status—in the Tangkhul tradition, when a woman marries a man from another village, she is called *Pukreila*. This is not her name, but a title and an office based on her marital status. One of her critical roles is to function as a peacemaker for the community. In the past, as M. Horam recounts, Nagas often fought wars for justice, usually village against village. When a conflict happened between the village of a *Pukreila*'s parents and her husband's, she was entitled to intervene and stop the fight. As per the customary law, she was not to be harmed by the either party. Harming a *Pukreila* was considered the same as digging one's grave. The tradition of *Pukreila* still applies today. Like the Tangkhuls, Chakhesangs have a similar tradition of women restoring peace and reconciliation amidst conflict. Moreover, as Zunecho Thingo narrates, 'Whenever the men folk went out for war, the courageous women dressed up properly, carried *dao* and spear, and went round the village and told the people not to be afraid of anything. They shouted and encouraged the people not to be frightened but have courage.' See M. Horam, *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas: The Tangkhul Nagas* (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1992), 91f. For more details on *Pukreila*, see Vashum, *Christology in Context*, 154; Yangkahao Vashum, 'Pukreila and Aksū: Reimagining Naga People's Hospitality and Peacemaking', *QUEST: Studies on Religion & Culture in Asia* 4 (22 February 2020): 1–10; Zunecho Thingo, 'Peace and Reconciliation from Chakhesang Naga Perspective', in *In Search of Peace: Tribal Resources for Peacebuilding in North East India*, ed. Razouselie Lasetso et al., Tribal Study Series 22 (Jorhat, India: ILEMA, 2013), 337–40.
51  'Mekhela Stories'.

## How Galatians 3:28 addresses these issues

Beginning in Galatians 3:19, Paul, having explained how the law is opposed to the coming of faith—which refers to Christ[52]—asserts that believers have become God's children through faith (v. 26). Then, he states that people who are baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ (v. 27). In verse 28, Paul makes three strong contentions: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.' The first part of verse 28 strongly dismisses difference based on one's ethnic identity. The second part categorically rejects difference based on class or socio-economic status. The third part explicitly condemns claims of difference based on gender. All three assertions are based on the person and work of Christ. The ensuing paragraphs provide a contextual elucidation of the historical underpinnings pertaining to the discourse articulated by Paul in Galatians 3:28.

Concerning Paul's three declarations, Douglas J. Moo writes, 'This well-known saying about the way traditional religious, social, and gender barriers are transcended in Christ is not explicitly tied to its context; unusually for Greek.'[53] However, Moo's contention seems unlikely, as similar expressions of 'gratitude' are found in Greek writings too, which give thanks 'that I was born a human being not a beast, next, a man and not a woman, thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian'.[54] The suggestion that Paul's assertions echo Greek practices is mentioned in the recent works of Craig S. Keener and N. T. Wright.[55] Besides, as A. Oepke writes, 'Characteristic of the traditional position and estimation of woman is a saying current in different forms among the Persians, Greeks and Jews in which man gives thanks that he is not an unbeliever or uncivilized, that he is not a woman and that he is not a slave.'[56]

Wright points out similarities—in terms of contradiction—between these sayings and the 'pagan thought' of that time.[57] Such a possibility makes sense because at least some of Paul's readers[58] were from non-Jewish backgrounds. Internal references show that Paul's primary audience consisted of Gentile converts (Gal 5:2; 6:12). At first, they worshipped not the God of the Bible but something which Paul termed as 'not gods'[59] (4:8–9).

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52   Worring Kashung, 'The Apocalyptic Reading of Paul in Galatians: A Critical Assessment', *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 25, no. 2 (14 January 2024): 12–16.

53   Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 252.

54   Quoted in Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 157.

55   Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 306; N. T. Wright, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 244.

56   A. Oepke, '*gunē*', in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 777.

57   Wright, *Galatians*, 244.

58   Ben Witherington III perceives that 'the majority, perhaps the vast majority', were Gentiles. Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7.

59   Regarding the religious background of Galatia, David W. J. Gill states that Cybele, who was believed to be 'the mother goddess of the earth and regeneration', was worshipped in various parts of Asia Minor. Gill adds that *Mên*, a Phrygian god, was 'worshipped throughout Asia Minor, with strong lunar and astral associations'. Gill, 'Behind the Classical Façade: Local Religions of the Roman Empire', in *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991), 80–82.

Also, differing from Moo, scholars such as John Bligh, F. F. Bruce, Richard N. Longenecker, Witherington, Gordon D. Fee and A. Andrew Das suggest that Paul may be echoing the ancient Jewish prayer wherein the pious Pharisee thanked God that he had not born a Gentile, a slave or a woman.[60] Longenecker states:

> Just why these three couplets, and not others, were incorporated … [in Gal 3:28] is impossible to say. Perhaps their inclusion was a conscious attempt to counter the three *berākôt* ('blessings', 'benedictions') that appear at the beginning of the Jewish cycle of morning prayers: 'Blessed be He [God] that He did not make me a Gentile; blessed be He that He did not make me a boor [i.e., an ignorant peasant or a slave]; blessed be He that He did not make me a woman.'[61]

Such a postulation is possible as Paul was particular about overriding certain Jewish traditions and belief systems in light of his reformulated understanding of the Messiah. For instance, he strongly argued against physical circumcision, stating that Gentiles need not follow Judaism after becoming Christians (cf. Gal 2:15–4:7; Acts 15).

In light of the above discussion, three observations can be made. First, it is hard to determine whether Paul had Greek practices, an ancient Jewish rabbinic prayer or both in mind when writing Galatians 3:28. Second, however, it is impossible to assume categorically that his statements were not related to those traditions. Third, whatever the case, such practices existed in the Greek and Jewish worlds, so Paul's message, whether intentionally or not, would still appear counter-cultural to people accustomed to such practices.

In contrast to these perspectives, Paul introduced a completely new reality. Moreover, the principles we inferred above from the Lohe Shawl correspond to Paul's assertions in Galatians 3:28. As the table illustrates, there are three similarities and one dissimilarity. The similarities reinforce the principles discussed above with regard to the shawl.

| Lohe Shawl | Galatians 3:28 | Declaration | Observation |
|---|---|---|---|
| It is worn by Anga-mis, Chakhesangs, Maos and Poumais | There is no longer Jew or Greek (v. 28a) | Inclusiveness | Similarity 1 |
| It is worn by the rich and the poor | There is no longer slave or free (v. 28b) | Social cohesion | Similarity 2 |
| It is worn by both males and females | There is no longer male and female (v. 28c) | Equity | Similarity 3 |
| | For all of you are one in Christ Jesus (v. 28d) | | Dissimilarity 1 |

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60   John Bligh, *Galatians: A Discussion of St. Paul's Epistle* (London: St. Paul Publications, 1970), 322; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 187; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 157; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 270–71; Gordon D. Fee, *Galatians: A Pentecostal Commentary* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2007), 142–43; A. Andrew Das, *Galatians* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2014), 383; Keener, *Galatians*, 306.
61   Longenecker, *Galatians*, 157; Keener, *Galatians*, 306–7.

## Neither Jew nor Greek

In South Galatia,[62] a Hellenized region,[63] Jews were a minority. However, as Morris recounts, Jews considered themselves religiously superior as God's chosen people. Meanwhile, Greeks considered themselves culturally superior and viewed others as uncultured or uncivilized.[64] In such a context, people like Josephus, a Jewish apologist, defended Jewish identity against Greek cultural chauvinism.[65] At that time, Jews and Greeks had a great amount of conflict, perhaps even approaching a desire for genocide.[66] Thus, bridging such a chasm would be unthinkable for most people of that time.

Against such a background, Paul declares, 'There is no longer Jew or Greek'[67] (Gal 3:28a). As Moo remarks, such an expression 'depicts the key distinction among humans from the Jewish perspective: between those who were chosen to be God's people and all others'.[68] Here, Leon Morris's observation is helpful: 'There are many distinctions in human society, and in the first century the Jews despised the Gentiles (even proselytes were often not fully accepted), the Greeks looked down on uncultured people outside their race, the Romans felt themselves superior to those they had conquered, and so on. … But in Christ all such distinctions are meaningless.'[69]

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62   I assume South Galatia to be the location of Paul's primary audience. See F. F. Bruce, 'Galatian Problems 2: North or South Galatians?' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 52, no. 2 (31 March 1970): 258, https://doi.org/10.7227/BJRL.52.2.2; Longenecker, *Galatians*., lxiii–lxx; Stephen Mitchell, 'Galatia', in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al., vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 871; W. M. Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 306–38; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3–18; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Hendrickson, 2002), 7–8; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4: *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, book 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 808 note 109, 1304; Craig S. Keener, *Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 8–12.

63   See Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 306; Curtis D. McClane, 'The Hellenistic Background to the Pauline Allegorical Method in Galatians 4:21–31', *Restoration Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1998): 135.

64   Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 121–22.

65   Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 103–36.

66   Christopher D. Stanley, 'Neither Jew nor Greek: Ethnic Conflict in Graeco-Roman Society', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1996): 101–24. See H. St. J. Thackeray, trans., *Josephus: The Jewish War, Books I–III*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 305–8, 457, 466–68, 478, 497–98.

67   In Paul's writings, the Greek term *hellēn* is normally construed as equivalent to 'Gentile'. See Rom 1:16; 2:9–10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Cor 1:24; 10:32. Also, see William F. Arndt et al., '*hellēn. ēnos, ho',* in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's* Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der Übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 251–52. Concerning this, James D. G. Dunn writes, 'The "everyone else" here are characterized as "Greeks", rather than "Gentiles"—reflecting the all-pervasiveness of Hellenistic culture in the Mediterranean world, but also the Jewish sense of distinctiveness within an intellectual culture of which they were a part.' Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 205.

68   Moo, *Galatians*, 253–54.

69   Morris, *Galatians*, 121.

As Bruce puts it, 'The cleavage between Jew and Gentile was for Judaism the most radical within the human race.'[70] The tension between Jewish and non-Jewish Christians was so intense that it required a Jerusalem council during the early stage of the Christian movement (Acts 15). Richard B. Hays explains:

> In the old age, the law protected the religious and cultural separateness of the Jewish people, setting them apart from all other peoples (collectively categorized as 'the nations' [= Gentiles]). In Christ, however, this separateness is abolished, because Jews and Gentiles are constituted together as one new people of God (see 6:16; Rom 3:29–30; 15:7–13; cf. Eph 2:11–20). In the light of this new reality, ethnic distinctions no longer matter.[71]

As for why Paul had to deal with the ethnic problem, it is possible that his opponents might have raised the issue. As far as Paul is concerned, based on what is described in verses 26–27, the 'old divisions and inequalities have come to an end and new relationships have been established. The first half of v. 28 speaks negatively of what has been eliminated; the second half, positively of what has been established.'[72]

If Paul had the Jewish prayer or a similar Greek saying in mind when he made those assertions, they would have certainly struck readers as a sternly rebellious act. According to Paul, the age-old socio-religious marker between Jews and Gentiles had to be broken for the first time, and permanently. That would have been unthinkable to many of his readers. But for Paul it was possible, as the new reality had dawned because of Christ. All believers irrespective of ethnic differences become 'one in Christ Jesus'. J. Louis Martyn adds:

> In Christ (in what Paul will later call 'the body of Christ', 1 Cor 12:13, 27) persons who were Jews and persons who were Gentiles have been made into a new unity that is so fundamentally and irreducibly identified with Christ himself as to cause Paul to use the masculine form of the word 'one'. Members of the church are not one *thing*; they are one *person*, having been taken up into the corpus of the One New Man.[73]

Paul introduced a new Christian community that transcends ethnic or tribal boundaries. In this reality, as James D. G. Dunn remarks, God's covenant to bless all nations (Gal 3:8; Gen 12:3; 18:18)—which had an eschatological agenda from the beginning—was fulfilled. To quote him further, in the person and work of Christ, 'The covenant is not thereby abandoned. Rather it is broadened.'[74]

On that note, the first principle inferred from the Lohe Shawl is affirmed theologically, as the shawl is truly inclusive, irrespective of tribal boundaries. Tribalism is completely unjustifiable. Relying on tribal identity in the admission of students, selection of student body leaders, treatment given at government offices, or exercise of democratic rights, as well as in the appointment of church leaders, is theologically

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70   Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 188.

71   Richard B. Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al., vol. 11 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 272.

72   Longenecker, *Galatians*, 156.

73   J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 377.

74   James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 197.

questionable. Such practices fail to prioritize merit, potential or calling, and instead perpetuate unjustifiable biases. Particularly within communities professing Christianity, such as the Nagas, the adoption of tribalism contradicts the theological principle of unity in Christ.

Certain scholars, such as Daniel Boyarin, observe that in Galatians 3:28a, Paul intends to abolish ethnic differences.[75] But that seems unlikely, as elsewhere Paul talks about preserving cultural diversity (cf. Rom 14). Keener summarizes, 'Paul is thus posing not an elimination of differences but rather a unity that encompasses diversity, as in his treatment of diverse gifts in the body in Romans 12:4–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–30.'[76] The point is 'not that all of these distinctions had been removed: Jews in Christ were still Jews (Gal 2:15) … [but] rather that these distinctions had been relativized (cf. v. 6; 1 Cor 7:22; Phlm 16) … they no longer have that significance.'[77] Likewise, for the Nagas, members of individual tribes should continue to live as such, but they should not look on any other tribe as inferior or superior in any sense, for all have found the same identity in Christ.

### Neither slave nor free

During Paul's time, the division between slave and free was seen as necessary for society. Bruce recounts, 'The social inferiority of slaves was marked enough in Jewish society, but still more so in Mediterranean society generally and most of all in Roman law.'[78] Morris writes:

> Throughout the Roman world the division between slave and free was of the greatest importance. Slaves had no rights, and the lowliest free person was infinitely more important than any slave, however gifted. To recognize that a believing slave was just as important in God's sight as the highest among the nobility was to point to a radical abolition of a distinction that was taken for granted throughout Paul's world. These words mark a revolution.[79]

Although laws considered slaves as people—at least in some ways—normally they were treated as property.[80] Slaves could be bought or inherited from a deceased

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75   Daniel Boyarin, 'Was Paul an "Anti-Semite"? A Reading of Galatians 3–4', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 47, no. 1–2 (1993): 47–80; Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 230, 236. See also Denise Kimber Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge, 'The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 2 (2004): 235–51; Roji T. George, *Paul's Identity in Galatians: A Postcolonial Appraisal* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2016), 197.

76   Keener, *Galatians*, 308.

77   Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 207.

78   Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 188.

79   Morris, *Galatians*, 122. Keener recounts, 'In Rome, a slave could be freed in a slaveholder's will or even (more rarely) left a bequest, but children and friends were much more frequent heirs.' Keener, *Galatians*, 305.

80   For more details, see K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (Brussels: Latomus, 1984), 114–16; Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55–68.

person's estate.[81] Pliny the Younger stated, 'Illness is the same in a slave as in a free man', but physicians gave much better treatment to the latter. A slave could never eat together with a free person.[82] During Paul's time, possessing slaves was not considered immoral or socially inappropriate.[83]

Against this background, Paul states, 'There is no longer slave or free' (Gal 3:28b). Due to the severity of the slavery system, Paul's teaching would have appeared as nonsense. Note that he did not call on slaves to seek their freedom in a violent fashion; rather, he is 'declaring that God *has* created a new community, the church, in which the baptized *already* share equality.'[84] As Bruce observes:

> 'In Christ'—and on the practical level that meant in the church—they [Christian slaves] were entitled to enjoy equal rank with their free brothers and sisters. This could mean, for example, that someone who was a slave in the outside world might be entrusted with spiritual leadership in the church, and if the owner of the slave was a member of the same church, he would submit to that spiritual leadership. … The church provided a setting in which the master-slave relationship … was irrelevant.[85]

Bruce cites the example of Callixtus, a former slave, becoming the bishop of Rome in 217–222 AD. Moreover, the letter of Philemon strongly testifies to how Paul reformulated the socio-cultural system of slavery prevalent at that time.

The teaching that slave and free become one in Christ reinforces Galatians 3:26, on the identity of all Christians as God's children. As Hays argues, 'In chap. 4, Paul will take up the slavery/freedom opposition and develop its implications by urging the Galatians to stand firm in their new freedom in Christ.'[86] Thus, in spite of the social hierarchy which differentiates between the rich master and the poor slave, both are related with one another (cf. Phlm 15-16).

Therefore, the second principle extrapolated from the Lohe Shawl above is also theologically justifiable. It is wrong to value the opinions of the rich more than those of the poor, to favour them at social events, or to give speaking opportunities or greater attention in prayer to certain people simply because they are rich. Stott states, 'Nearly every society in the history of the world has developed its class or caste system. Circumstances of birth, wealth, privilege and education have divided men and women from one another. But in Christ snobbery is prohibited and class distinctions are rendered void.'[87]

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81   See W. W. Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 30–72; G. H. R. Horsley, *A Review of Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1976*, vol. 1 (North Ryde, Australia: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981), 69–70.

82   Quoted in Keener, *Galatians*, 311.

83   However, still, such a system was contradictory to the Greek idealization of freedom. See K. H. Rengstorf, '*doulos*', in Kittle, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 261–64.

84   Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', 272.

85   Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 188–89.

86   Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', 273.

87   John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way* (Leicester, UK and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 100. The common identity Christians have in Christ is further discussed below.

## Neither male nor female

In antiquity, women's rights and status varied geographically and culturally. Adam L. Bean recounts that according to the Roman law, generally women were permitted to receive an inheritance.[88] In classical Athens, when a man had only a daughter, the daughter's son later inherited the estate.[89] Also, the Bible records cases of daughters inheriting, when there were no sons (Num 27:8) and when they married within their father's tribal clan itself (36:6–9). Nevertheless, gender-based discrimination was one of the 'most profound and obvious differences in the ancient world'.[90] Morris says:

> While occasionally women might attain importance or notoriety, it was almost universally true that the female of the species was allocated a very minor role. Women were not educated; often it was regarded as a sin to teach a woman. This meant that women had a very limited sphere in life. Their function was to be faithful wives, to bear children, to look after domestic affairs and generally to be subordinate.[91]

In the Jewish world, women 'were disqualified from several religious privileges which were open to free Jewish males'.[92] Gender-based discrimination was explicitly expressed in their spiritual discipline too, as noted above in the traditional Jewish male prayer of thanks that God 'did not make me a woman'.

Against such realities, Paul declares that 'there is no longer male and female' (Gal 3:28c), a statement that would certainly have sounded radical.[93] Regarding the expression 'male and female', Longenecker, Frank J. Matera, Martyn, Hays, George Lyons, Moo and Wright see an allusion to Genesis 1:27.[94] Whether Paul was confronting Greek practice, Jewish tradition or both, he is introducing a completely new system, characterized by equity based on the person and work of Christ despite gender differences.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa asks rhetorically, 'Is Galatians just a "guy thing"?' and contends that the Christ-event has emancipated both women and men from the former age.[95] Wright points out, 'The Galatians [and also all Christians today, including the Nagas] need to know, and to *understand*, that the radical newness of the

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88   Adam L. Bean, 'Inheritance', in *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity*, ed. Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 39.

89   Douglas Maurice MacDowell, 'Inheritance', in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 757.

90   Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 206.

91   Morris, *Galatians*, 122.

92   Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 187.

93   Particularly for Paul's opponents—who were advocating Jewish traditions—Paul's assertion would have been strongly contrary to their culture and religion. As Morris asserts, 'To affirm that *male and female* was an irrelevant distinction, indeed that there was no such distinction, was to make another revolutionary statement.' Morris, *Galatians*, 122.

94   Longenecker, *Galatians*, 157; Frank J. Matera, *Sacra Pagina: Galatians*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 142–43; Martyn, *Galatians*, 376, 380; Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', 273; George Lyons, *Galatians: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 233; Moo, *Galatians*, 254; Wright, *Galatians*, 243.

95   See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'Is Galatians Just a "Guy Thing"? A Theological Reflection', *Interpretation* 54, no. 3 (July 2000): 267–78.

Messiah's family, a newness entered through sharing the Messiah's death and resurrection (Gal 2:19–20), means that they are every bit as much full and true members of God's people as the Jerusalem apostles themselves.'[96] Even Joel 2:28–29 explicitly affirms that the Spirit's work is not limited to men, as it includes women too. It would be absurd to claim that Jesus's Great Commission (Mt 28:16–20) and the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:1–13) should exclude women.

Of course, Paul did not imply literal indistinguishability of males and females. Both genders cannot have the same biological or emotional systems, as God designed them uniquely different from each other. Paul is not promoting 'a kind of gender-neutral or hermaphroditic existence'.[97] Some ancient thinkers did talk about transcending gender. Some proposed that women could further their position by becoming masculine.[98] Moreover, Bruce mentions that Paul's statement was later reflected in the teachings of Gnosticism, which contended that 'in the new age, man would no longer be separated into "male and female" but would revert to a (supposedly) pristine androgynous state.'[99] Additionally, some Jews construed Adam as a hermaphrodite until Eve was created out of him.[100] They perceived that God first created 'male' and then took out the female element; thus, initially Adam was 'neither male nor female'.[101] Paul was not subscribing to any of those understandings. Instead, his emphasis is on the transcendent identity of a new reality despite gender differences.[102]

Hays endorses this view eloquently:

> Those who are in Christ [do not] cease to be men or women. … Rather, [the verse] means that these distinctions are no longer the determinative identity markers, no longer a ground for status or exclusion. … The ritual of baptism, identical for both sexes, is distinctly appropriate as the sign of inclusion within a community in which the old distinction between 'male and female' has ceased to separate those who are in Christ.[103]

Therefore, 'It is not their distinctiveness, but their inequality of religious role, that is abolished "in Christ Jesus".'[104] Paul's assertion of the new reality for both males and females is based on the final clause of 3:28: 'for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'

96   Wright, *Galatians*, 244.

97   Wright, *Galatians*, 243.

98   See Philo, 'On the Embassy to Gaius', Early Christian Writings, 320, https://earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book40.html; Richard A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

99   See Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 189. Keener (*Galatians*, 309 and notes 886 and 887) also mentions some people finding 'an allusion to primeval androgyny, a prototype of the new creation'.

100 David Daube, 'The Gospels and the Rabbis', *Listener* 56, no. 6 (1956): 343, 346; David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, rpt. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 72.

101 Philo, 'On the Creation', Early Christian Writings, 76, 134, https://earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book1.html. See also Robert M. Grant, *Paul in the Roman World: The Conflict at Corinth*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 125.

102 Cf. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 206; Gaventa, 'Is Galatians Just a "Guy Thing"?'; Wayne Litke, 'Beyond Creation: Galatians 3:28, Genesis and the Hermaphrodite Myth', *Studies in Religion* 24, no. 2 (1995): 173–78.

103 Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', 273.

104 Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 189. Also, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 191–201.

We thus observe that Galatians 3:28c confirms the third principle inferred from the Lohe Shawl. It is wrong to prioritize sons over daughters in family settings, atheological to appoint only males as pastors and association leaders,[105] and unethical to prevent women from becoming political leaders,[106] for all have found a common identity in Christ.

## All are one

During Paul's era, certain thinkers aspired to the goal of communal harmony but said it would have to come through conquest, not a peaceful process.[107] Several ancient philosophers emphasized the importance of global citizenship instead of 'ethnic or civic' specificity.[108] Differing from his contemporaries, in spite of ethnic, class and gender differences, Paul wrote that all are 'one' in Christ (Gal 3:28d). This part of his message is not explicitly expressed by the Lohe Shawl.

As Longenecker observes, 'The second half of v. 28 sets out in positive fashion the basis for the new relationship that has been established: oneness in (*heis*) Christ Jesus (*Christō Iesou*).'[109] Grammatically speaking, in light of verse 29, the use of *heis* in verse 28—'one person'—strongly implies the idea of '*if you are Christ's*' or 'if you are part of Christ's body'.[110] In relation to the use of *heis*, Keener (along with Ronald Y. K. Fung, de Boer, and Moo[111]) observes that the 'likeliest assumed predicate nominative is "one person" (*anthrōpos*), as in the "one new humanity" of Eph. 2:15.'[112] Regarding this, Chrysostom wrote, '"You are all one in Christ"—that is, you have one form, one character, that of Christ. … The former Jew or slave is clothed in the form … of the Lord himself and in himself displays Christ.'[113]

In this oneness, all sorts of divisions and injustices are entirely abolished.[114] As Hays states, 'If the church is to be a sign and foretaste of the new creation, it must be a community in which gender distinctions—like the ethnic and social distinctions noted in the first two parts of the formula—have lost their power to divide and oppress.'[115] The basis of Paul's proposition is that 'all are now *heis, one* (or "an entity"), *in Christ Jesus.* … Here … is the concept of the collective whole of the Christian

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105 Some quote passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11–12 to justify male-dominated leadership. However, in that passage Paul was not establishing a universal law. He was addressing a specific group in a particular socio-cultural context.

106 For practical suggestions on responding to gender-based discrimination, see Worring Kashung, 'Female Infanticide and Foeticide in India: Theological Reflection', *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 18, no. 2 (September 2014): 87–91.

107 Keener, *Galatians*, 307 note 866.

108 For more resources, see Keener, *Galatians*, 307 note 868.

109 Longenecker, *Galatians*, 157.

110 R. A. Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 156.

111 Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 176; Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 244; Moo, *Galatians*, 254.

112 Keener translates, 'all of you are one entity in Christ Jesus.' Keener, *Galatians*, 310. He further states in footnote 898 on the same page, 'By this, Paul does not mean becoming the same person as Christ, but rather being part of the new humanity whose identity is defined in Christ.'

113 'Galatians 3:28', Catena Bible and Commentaries, https://catenabible.com/gal/3/28.

114 Longenecker, *Galatians*, 158.

115 Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', 273.

church. It is a short step from this to the use of the "body concept" which sees the totality of believers as the body of Christ.'[116]

Frequently, Paul speaks of multiple believers as 'one', employing the imagery of one body with several members (Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 6:15–17; 10:7; 12:12–20; Col 3:15; Eph 4:4–16). Here, the character of '"oneness" becomes … not as a levelling and abolishing of all racial, social or gender differences, but as an integration of just such differences into a common participation "in Christ", wherein they enhance (rather than detract from) the unity of the body, and enrich the mutual interdependence and service of its members.'[117] In this regard, the focus is not on uniformity but on unity—with respect—amidst diversity. Here, 'Religious, social, and sexual pairs of opposites are not replaced by equality, but rather by a newly created unity.'[118] The point is that practically speaking, equal tribal or racial identity is not possible as humans are made up of various ethnic and people groups. Nor is a complete elimination of the class system possible, as people come from various backgrounds.[119] And equal gender is not possible either, as that would be contrary to the order of God's creation. But in spite of all those differences, all believers have found a common identity in Christ.

Faith in Christ destroys all kinds of prejudices. Also, becoming one is not something that humanity can simply achieve, as true spiritual oneness is based solely on Christ. This is the basis on which Paul makes his preceding three assertions in Galatians 3:28, and this basis is missing from the Lohe Shawl and the social message that it communicates without words. Therefore, the three principles inferred from the Lohe Shawl are theologically justifiable, but they need to be undergirded by the positive statement that our oneness across tribal, socio-economic or gender differences is possible only through Christ.

## Conclusion

Among the Nagas, shawls or mekhalas signify more than mere clothing or fashion. These textiles encapsulate profound historical, cultural and emotional narratives, each weaving a compelling story. We have seen that the Lohe Shawl powerfully communicates three principles: inclusiveness, socio-economic cohesion and equity. Those principles closely parallel Paul's famous declaration in Galatians 3:28. As we have seen, it is wrong for the Nagas—and for everyone else—to practice tribalism, class-based distinction and gender-based discrimination in any settings. But as Paul teaches us with his memorable verse, it is very difficult to achieve social equality unless our oneness is based in Jesus Christ.

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116 Cole, *Galatians*, 156.
117 Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 208.
118 Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 377.
119 One's inheritance (wealth that one receives from one's family), talents, professions, occupations, opportunities and work ethic will differ from those of others. All these factors will have a significant influence on one's socio-economic status.

# Evaluating Kwame Bediako's Legacy

What Luther and Calvin are for evangelical Christians globally, Kwame Bediako is for many African evangelicals. From his dramatic conversion in 1970 to his death in 2008, Bediako was the primary architect of and inspiration for theological work that grappled with the realities of African culture. His memory still reverberates across the continent, as indicated by the seven reflections collected below on his ongoing influence.

Born and raised in Ghana, Bediako was a professing atheist studying existentialist literature as a doctoral student in Bordeaux, France, when an awareness of Christ as the truth powerfully overwhelmed him while he was showering. He finished his degree in French literature but turned his powerful mind to the Bible and theology, later completing a second doctorate in Aberdeen, Scotland, under missiologist Andrew Walls, who called Bediako 'the outstanding African theologian of his generation.'[1]

Bediako attended the First International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974, meeting other prominent Majority World evangelicals including René Padilla, Samuel Escobar and Vinay Samuel. At that time, he conceived the idea of a research centre on the relation between the gospel and African culture. With support from his denomination, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, that vision was realized as the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture (ACI) in 1987.

While self-consciously evangelical, Bediako sought connections between the gospel and African traditional religion. He argued that the gospel's success in Africa 'shows clearly that the form of religion once held to be farthest removed from the Christian faith [i.e., African animism] had a closer relationship with it than any other.'

Bediako contended that Jesus Christ speaks to us in terms of our 'human heritage'. In one of his essays, he argued eloquently from the New Testament, especially the book of Hebrews, that Christ was our 'elder brother' fulfilling the mediatorial function that African traditional religion ascribed to ancestors.

While rejecting claims of radical continuity between African religion and Christianity, Bediako also differed from the emphasis on radical discontinuity associated with Nigerian Byang Kato, first general secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa. That tension between Bediako's and Kato's views on the interaction between the Christian faith and African culture persists today and appears in two of the reflections presented below.

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This article originally appeared as 'Kwame Bediako Still Defines the Debate on African Culture and Christianity', *Christianity Today*, 31 May 2024, in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the publication of Bediako's book *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004). Reprinted with permission.

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[1]  See 'Bediako, Kwame', *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, https://dacb.org/stories/ghana/bediako-kwame/.

**Ebenezer Yaw Blasu, research fellow, Akrofi-Christaller Institute, Akropong, Ghana:** I first met Kwame Bediako in 1988, when I was a Presbyterian student pastor. He was busy sorting books in what is now ACI's Zimmerman Library. In our brief conversation, he exhorted me to ensure 'Africanness' in my ministry. I listened, but without enthusiasm. At the time, my main theological inspirations were Karl Barth and John Macquarrie, who did not say anything about indigeneity in doing theology.

In 1990, I was invited to speak at an evangelistic outreach in Ottawa, Canada, on the role of Christianity in transforming indigenous cultures. Suddenly, Bediako's earlier exhortation resonated in my mind. As if by divine intervention, I ran into him in Accra on my way to the airport. He excitedly handed me a new book he had published, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective*. Reading this book while in flight highly informed my message and contributed significantly to its success. For the first time, I spoke as an African evangelist outside Africa, to the glory of God.

Bediako believed that the theological education curriculum in Africa should equip Christian leaders for their task by connecting them with the redeeming, transforming activity of the living God in the African setting. If Africa is now a heartland of Christian faith, he insisted at a 1996 workshop, then 'a positive affirmation of African Christianity, and not merely an African reaction against the West', should be the driving force in curriculum development.

Kwame's work has liberated my mind by establishing the undeniable truth that Christianity is not a 'Western religion', nor are Westerners the final arbiters of Christian theology and faith. Genuine theology needs contextual inputs, including those from indigenous or grassroots experiences. Hence, African Christianity needs to and can produce African theologies that contribute to the theological thinking of world Christianity.

**Seblewengel Daniel, director, East African Sending Office, SIM, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia:** Kwame Bediako was my PhD supervisor. His lectures were both intellectually stimulating and spiritually nourishing. He was equally committed to the deep rootedness of the Christian faith in the Scriptures and its authentic indigenous expression.

Bediako strongly advocated for a continuous engagement between gospel and culture. He asserted that people should engage their pre-Christian heritage with confidence in the power of the Spirit to guide and illuminate them. Conversion, he said, is not abandoning one's heritage altogether and taking on a foreign identity but turning to Christ with the totality of one's being. The divine encounter, therefore, will enable one to be an authentic African Christian.

Kwame was a charismatic preacher and teacher. The depth of his knowledge about and commitment to the church in Africa was beyond description.

Professor Bediako was very warm toward his students and had a delightful sense of humour. He took great interest in our lives and the lives of our family members. He made time to visit students in their homes, and he and his wife, Mary, invited us to their home for meals.

I value his unwavering dedication to empowering female theologians. He intentionally pursued affirmative action in his institute by appointing women to higher leadership positions.

**Aiah Foday-Khabenje, former general secretary, Association of Evangelicals in Africa; country director, Children of the Nations, Freetown, Sierra Leone:** Kwame Bediako's groundbreaking work *Theology and Identity* framed theology in terms of self-identity as a foundation and hermeneutical tool for theological reflection. *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa* is a collection of articles on how Christ could be the answer to the questions Africans ask about issues relevant to their context, in contrast to the questions raised by missionary Christianity from the West. It demonstrates how God can speak to Africans in African idioms and through hearing in African mother tongues what God has done.

Bediako's theological beliefs were inspired by his personal experience and how some church fathers practised their faith in the context of the Greco-Roman culture. Bediako believed that it was possible for people to connect with Christ through their cultural beliefs, without the gospel having to reach Africa through Western missionaries.

One might assume that Bediako's quest was simply about putting an African face on theology, providing Christian truth with contextually sensitive illustrations and applications. However, these aspirations for African theology were more complex and diverse than contextualization. They also involved an attempt to identify a correlation between Christianity and African culture, or between African traditional religions and the Christian worldview. This aspect of his project has raised doubts about the orthodoxy of his approach.

**Diane Stinton, associate professor of world Christianity, Regent College, Vancouver, Canada:** Under Bediako's supervision of my PhD studies on contemporary African Christologies, I came to appreciate his enduring contributions to theological scholarship. He highlighted Africa's role in Christian history, recovered the importance of primal religions to the flourishing of African Christianity, insisted on an integral identity for African Christian believers, integrated African Christianity into mainstream studies of Christian history and theology, and emphasized vernacular and informal expressions of theology.

After completing my PhD, I helped to launch a master's degree program in African Christianity at Daystar University in Nairobi, inspired by its equivalent at ACI and graced by Bediako's inaugural lecture in 2006.

A central conviction within Bediako's scholarship and ministry was the tremendous significance of mother-tongue Scriptures in Africa. Against the denigration of African languages, cultures, and religions by many Western interpreters, Bediako followed his mentor Andrew Walls in seeing African Christianity as a living demonstration that the gospel is 'infinitely translatable'.

Bediako exemplified what Kenneth Cragg called 'integrity of conversion'. He exhibited an all-encompassing faith that gathers up 'the broken fragments of our history'—a phrase from a Kenyan Anglican Communion prayer that he loved to quote—and places them before Jesus to be redeemed.

**Kayle Pelletier, lecturer, South African Theological Seminary, Sandton, South Africa:** As a seminary student sensing God's call to theological education in Africa, I took a course on African traditional religion (ATR). There, I encountered Kwame Bediako for the first time. In the early 2000s, Bediako was one of the few African theologians whose work was readily accessible.

Now, after 20 years of doing theological education in Zimbabwe and South Africa, I find myself returning to Bediako to better understand why Africa remains such a syncretistic religious environment even though Christianity has been on the continent for more than a century.

Responding to derogatory Western estimations of ATR, Bediako rightly placed value on the primal religious conditions that enabled the gospel's acceptance in Africa. Bediako sought to define an authentic African Christian identity through the African people's pre-Christian religious experiences and beliefs. However, connecting similar, continuous elements of pre-Christian beliefs with Christian beliefs has only exchanged Western philosophical and cultural influence on Christianity for African influence, contributing to a syncretistic, tradition-accommodating gospel. Scripture, through which we must interpret any pre-religious culture imbued with general revelation, transforms belief and practice into its biblical image, creating an authentic Christian identity for all.

**Nathan Chiroma, principal, Africa College of Theology, Kigali, Rwanda:** As a young African theologian (originally from Nigeria), I attended two of Kwame Bediako's seminars in Ghana. He encouraged me, as a young African theologian, to cultivate in-depth theological contemplation ingrained in my African background. Through his works and life, he gave me the confidence and inventiveness with which to approach theology.

One of Bediako's significant contributions to African theology was the concept that African Christians can practise genuine Christianity within their own cultural expressions, dispelling the myth that Christianity is solely a Western or white man's religion. He provided me with a model for doing theology in a way that is true to the gospel and the African context, challenged me to traverse the intricacies of religion and culture from a biblical perspective, and prompted me to reassess my preconceptions about African Christianity that had been taught from a Western perspective.

Bediako profoundly influenced many African theological institutions, originally established by foreign missionaries, that taught Western concepts out of step with our African context. His writings have been instrumental in transforming schools to better align with our local perspectives. In addition to redefining the bounds of African Christianity, his dedication to contextual theology has promoted a more inclusive and representative theological debate.

**Casely Essamuah, secretary, Global Christian Forum, and Ghanaian native:** Before his conversion, Kwame Bediako was an atheist who had arrived at his conclusions intellectually and with such conviction that he couldn't keep them to himself. After his conversion, he believed that an intellectual life without reference to the living God and the living Christ was futile.

Bediako pursued scholarship in a community that had prayer and worship at its centre. He saw scholarship as an opportunity for service and enlarged vision, not merely to please the academy but to equip local church leaders—hence, his insistence that ACI should be located in Akropong, the heart of Presbyterianism in Ghana, and not Accra, the political and educational capital of Ghana. Furthermore, the institute also requires that all master's and doctoral theses must have abstracts in local languages. It is no wonder that the centre he initiated continues to thrive and flourish in his absence.

# Book Reviews

### *Multilingual Church:*
### *Strategies for Making Disciples in All Languages*
### Jonathan Downie

Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2022
Pb., 180 pp.

*Reviewed by Marcus Grohmann, postdoctoral research fellow, Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, Stellenbosch, South Africa*

This book is about making the multicultural church work by harnessing linguistic diversity for effective discipleship, active participation at all levels, and evangelism. Going beyond integration of the marginalized, Downie advocates for a 'new kind of church, not just a new ministry'. The dominance of cultural groups and languages is to be replaced by equality, enabling people from different backgrounds to become who God made them to be.

The book is written mainly from the perspective of Western immigrant societies. It challenges its readers to understand the increasing presence of multicultural cities and communities as a God-given task, and to conceptualize church in a way that is no longer married to the dominant surrounding culture and language. As a seasoned interpreter and consultant for both businesses and churches, Downie provides ideas on a great variety of human and technological ways to deploy 'language provision' in church communities. Outlining their various benefits and challenges, he comes alongside congregations in figuring out how they can best serve God in their environment.

The book has 16 chapters, divided into four parts. First, Downie makes a sociological and theological case for the multilingual church. Second, he explores different strategies that churches use to handle multilingual environments. These range from self-assured monolingualism (holding multiple services in different languages) to multilingual services. Models of language provision considered include spoken interpretation in the corner, sign-language interpretation on stage, translated sermon texts and AI-powered interpreting software. Third, Downie provides the tools for a process of making churches more multilingual, including finding a vision, choosing a strategy, and implementing and maintaining the chosen path. Lastly, he discusses the implications of a multilingual church, the role of majority groups, and considerations beyond Sunday services.

Downie writes clearly and compellingly, using helpful examples. He considers the theological implications of both change and the status quo. His suggestion that multilingualism in church congregations should be viewed not just as charity towards minority groups but as a potential means of discipleship and mission may be groundbreaking. Without pushing for a particular model, he argues rightly that doing church in multilingual contexts needs to be rethought. He hints that home languages may be needed to disciple people effectively. Indeed, if one is convinced that

the gospel can be presented contextually in a multicultural environment, multilingualism would arguably be a prerequisite for doing so.

From my perspective, as a German living in a multilingual South African city, the book also raises several questions. It prioritizes the needs and desires of people. But what about contexts where the dominant language is not just widely spoken across cultures but may be at times a sign of social advancement that people seek? To argue for multilingualism here can be perceived as *creating* barriers, not overcoming them. A related complication is the cultural hegemony that the book seeks to do away with. If the case for a multilingual model of church in such a context is made by speakers of the dominant language (which others may be striving for), would this not be another case of exerting cultural dominance?

Moreover, in contexts with a legacy of settler colonialism such as the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa, would it be appropriate for those who are regarded as privileged through colonial history to be inviting everyone to worship in equality and equity? Downie rightfully identifies the need for dominant languages and groups to be 'decentered' if we want to move away from the provision of services to 'unfortunate migrants' and instead see them as fellow Christians equipped for service and leadership by themselves. Downie states correctly, 'We need incarnational thinking that invites speakers of the locally dominant language to experience their language being marginalized.' However, his argument never leaves the confines of church congregations. The expectation is that the change towards mutual submission and equality between cultural or linguistic groups occurs through transformation from within. Downie ignores the extent to which expressions of faith around the world are deeply rooted in cultural contexts. Thus, even a congregation that comes close to the ideal picture he is painting is likely to exhibit a 'culture'. Newcomers joining this church would be required to give up certain aspects central to their culturally contingent faith due to incommensurabilities with the church's culture.

While not cancelling out the book's value, this observation points to a central dimension missing here: the fact that experiencing worship with other people on their God-given cultural-linguistic terms or the learning of their languages (as suggested by Downie) requires going *beyond* the boundaries of the local church. Moving towards the vision of a multilingual worshipping crowd before God's throne entails coming alongside people where they are, learning their language and culture and how their life experience guides them to think about 'God', relationships, evil forces and so forth. This work is hard, as it demands long-term commitment and a willingness to reappraise one's core convictions through the cultural-linguistic lenses of another. However, such deep engagement may be crucial to enable relevant and contextual ministry.

Despite these limitations, *Multilingual Church*, with its focus on the concept of 'language provision', is a highly original work. It can help churches discover that making their worship and activities accessible to diverse cultural and linguistic groups is deeply biblical. It is also valuable for its accessible language, clear structure and wealth of information.

# A Theology of Migration:
## The Bodies of Refugees and the Body of Christ
## Daniel P. Groody

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2022
Pb., 328 pp., index, illus.

*Reviewed by Jessica A. Udall, adjunct professor, Columbia International University (USA) and Evangelical Theological College (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)*

While many books focus on immigration policy or the practical struggles of immigrants, this book is a meditation on migration that focuses on the inner dimensions. It considers what the realities of migration reveal about who we are as humans as well as their metaphorical resonance with spiritual truth—with 'the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ represent[ing] the defining migration event of human history' (p. 174).

Groody sets out to offer 'a Eucharistic hermeneutic of migration directed toward the redemption of the world' (p. 11), which 'helps us think about migration in more comprehensive, creative, and integrated ways' (p. 17). While the book does not shy away from political realities, it leans hard into the Christian faith, 'not because it offers easy answers to migration's complex issues, but because it keeps us in touch with the bigger picture of who we are before God and who we are called to be to one another' (p. 17).

Groody provides the contours of his theology of migration by engaging in biblical reflection on the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the early church. Moving on to the present day, he draws parallels between the bodies of refugees and the body of Christ, charting a vision of solidarity and reconciliation which involves moving towards justice, valuing immigrants as people and neighbours, and valuing the Kingdom of God more highly than nationalism. He demonstrates that while refugees are often regarded as 'no-bodies' in the eyes of the world, to God and to those who see with God's perspective they are 'some-body' and 'are in fact connected to "everybody"' (p. 216).

I appreciate the location of the author. He has worked on the southern border of the United States for many years, and he has maintained a dual role as both a scholar studying migration (and teaching at the University of Notre Dame) and a priest involved in parish ministry among Latin American migrants. This perspective has caused Groody to develop 'an interest in contextual theology that emerges from the life and soul of a people' (p. 7). Perhaps because of this strong connection with the human experiences he has observed and is a part of, even Groody's most metaphorical interpretations stay rooted in a reality that resonates not only with those who have experienced physical migration but also with those for whom it is only (as of yet) a spiritual experience.

The author's Catholic perspective can provide a complementary reading to a more typically evangelical interpretation of the passages in view, often delving deep into metaphor. Those interested in gleaning from Catholic social teaching and the practices of Catholic Worker volunteer efforts will find several explanations and examples within these pages, perhaps begging the question: is there an evangelical equivalent, and if not, why not? On the other hand, the multiple photos embedded

in the text of the Pope meeting with various immigrant groups seemed superfluous and unnecessarily focused on one person, undermining Groody's encouragement for all Christians to be involved in welcoming strangers as a fundamental part of their identity as strangers who have been welcomed by God Himself.

I found Groody's poetic meditations to be thought-provoking and eye-opening in a way that was both spiritually nourishing and practically motivating. While giving proper acknowledgement to the necessity of borders and national security, he challenges his readers to go beyond knee-jerk reactions and engage in immigration issues contemplatively. The book is a slow read because it is so beautifully written and dense with ideas that invite meditation, not speed-reading. If you just want to learn about the issue of immigration or gain theological acumen on the topic, beware: while academically rigorous and theologically high-level, this book is surprisingly devotional in nature, demonstrating that our beliefs about migrants shape our own humanity and inviting readers to consider how our humanity and that of migrants are inextricably bound up together before God our Creator.

By the end of the book, instead of focusing on immigrants as aliens, Groody asks us to consider if we ourselves are living in an unhealthy alienation, for 'every step we take on our journey of life either leads us closer to … communion or further away from it; we either move closer to God and one another in a shared fellowship in a common body, or we disintegrate and become aliens in every sense of the word' (p. 250). The book is hard-hitting and disturbing in the best of ways, and I recommend it to anyone who would like to consider migration through a spiritual and contemplative lens.

## *Spain and the Protestant Reformation: The Spanish Inquisition and the War for Europe*
### Wayne H. Bowen

London: Routledge, 2023
Hb., 177 pp., bibliography, index

*Reviewed by Andrew Messmer, Academic Dean, Seville Theological Seminary* (Spain)*; Associated Professor, Facultad Internacional de Teología IBSTE* (Spain)*; Affiliated Researcher, Evangelical Theological Faculty* (Belgium)

Bowen reveals an often-overlooked aspect of 16th-century Spanish religion and politics: that the Protestant Reformation was interpreted by the Habsburg monarchy and the Spanish Inquisition as an existential threat, perhaps its greatest one. He shows convincingly that the church and Habsburg monarchy understood theological heresy and political anarchy as working in tandem, and thus the 'heretical Lutherans' were interpreted as an existential threat to Charles V and Philip II, the latter of whom relied heavily on the Inquisition to purge his territory from theological dissent in an attempt to preserve political stability.

The book is organized along chronological and geographic lines. Chapter 1 focuses on Spain before the Reformation, laying necessary groundwork such as the reaction of the Inquisition to Christian humanism and the push for the Habsburg monarchy to continue the *Reconquista* in non-Christian lands. Chapters 2 and 3

discuss the Reformation in Spain and the greater Habsburg Empire, respectively. These chapters include many interesting observations on the politics of the day, but the biographies of the Spanish Reformers are outdated. For example, they draw heavily from the late 19th- and early 20th-century *Bibliotheca Wiffeniana* collection and do not integrate modern research (A. Gordon Kinder is hardly cited). The unfortunate results of this decision include various repeated errors or misspellings, such as 'Constantino Ponce de la Fuente'.

Chapters 4 through 7 focus on England, Spain, France and the Ottomans, and Flanders, respectively. These chapters are among the best and contain large amounts of very interesting information, although it is surprising that figures such as Casiodoro de Reina and Cipriano de Valera did not receive more attention, given their intimate connection with Spain, the Reformation, the Inquisition and the English–Spanish war. Focusing primarily on Philip II, Bowen expertly explains the complicated picture of 16th-century politics and how Philip's total commitment to propagating the Catholic faith dominated his decision making, from marriage to economics and war.

Overall, Bowen presents a sympathetic, even humane reading of the Spanish Inquisition and the Habsburg monarchy of the 16th century, bordering at times on the apologetic. This tendency reaches its high point when the author speaks of 'the Spanish Inquisition's reputation and popularity among the Catholic population' (170). This view is helpful to balance the overall negative press that these figures often receive, but it will prove difficult for those who are sympathetic to Protestants and others who suffered at their hands. A curious lacuna in the book's index is the omission of *The Arts of the Holy Inquisition* (1567), which provides a very different reading of the Spanish Inquisition and is based on eyewitness testimony.

This is an ideal book for anyone interested in understanding the politics of the Reformation from the perspective of the Habsburg monarchy, and the author does a superb job of making connections between theology and politics. Although many other political figures have received treatment in the past, far fewer works have been devoted to Philip II, especially in English, and thus this book is a welcome addition. It provides a different perspective on the Spanish Inquisition and monarchy from what most Protestants are used to reading, and as such, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the events of the 16th century, which ideally will lead to greater objectivity.

### *Mormon Hermeneutics:*
### *Five Approaches to the Bible by the LDS Church*
### Jeffrey S. Krohn

Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022
Pb., 258 pp., appendix, bibliog., indices

*Reviewed by Melesse K. Woldetsadik, PhD candidate,*
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Krohn teaches theology and biblical studies at the Evangelical Theological College, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *Mormon Hermeneutics* begins by discussing the vision of

Joseph Smith, Jr., the founding father of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormonism). He explains the church's teachings, which are based mainly on three books—the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price—in addition to the Bible. Although the church warns against the hazards of a confining creed or statement of faith, the basic parameters of its thinking are contained in its teachings.

The author identifies four Latter-Day Saint (LDS) approaches to the Bible so as to elucidate their interpretive methods. In doing so, he demonstrates that their method focuses on the interpreter's modern horizon while neglecting the text's ancient horizon. He warns those who want to study LDS hermeneutical methods of the dangers of oversimplifying LDS theology or inadequately considering the complexity of LDS interpretations; he notes the lack of any official LDS statement regarding hermeneutics.

Krohn uncovers LDS presuppositions, among which the two foundational ones, for him, are (1) an asymmetrical approach that simultaneously elevates and diminishes the Bible and (2) the acceptance of continuing revelation as part of a normative theology. He also explains their literalistic and allegorical interpretations, which sometimes assume a one-to-one correspondence between locution and reality without considering authorial intent and while ignoring the texts' illocutionary force (pp. 59, 85). A key problem with their interpretive method is that when the text aligns with 'systemic parameters', the LDS Church takes it at face value, whereas when it does not suit them, they try to correct it or consider it an incorrect translation (p. 99). This analysis shows their tendency to cherry-pick Scriptures to their advantage and their lack of respect and reverence for the Scripture they claim to uphold.

Krohn skilfully describes the Mormons' sociological approach and emendatory practices. He points out that their sociological approach reduces the sum of biblical documents to a single reposition of locution with referentiality being ignored (p. 113). As for the emendatory practices of the church, it clarifies and reinterprets passages from the Bible to make them relevant to its new teaching (p. 126) and to the personal and corporate revelations church members have purportedly received. This 're-authorizing' of the biblical texts erodes the authorial intent and authority of the Scriptures and elevates the authority of Joseph Smith, the LDS founder. In other words, Mormon hermeneutics is geared towards adjusting the biblical message to serve the LDS's revelations, organizational vision, and program.

As one example of this re-authorizing, in the interpretation of Hebrews 13:8, the statement 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever' is used to argue that since God revealed himself in the past, often through the prophets, it can be inferred that He continues to speak to us today. This approach emphasizes that God's message of salvation existed before and after the life and ministry of Jesus, as the Spirit remains constant throughout time. Instead of adhering to the original intended meaning, Krohn argues, this practice is used to promote the agenda of the LDS institution (p. 142).

Krohn's detailed work in investigating the LDS hermeneutical approach and how it is used to twist Scripture to fit its theology is commendable. His research indicates the shortcomings of their hermeneutics, although the LDS Church officially claims it has no hermeneutical stance. However, it would have been helpful if Krohn

had first introduced readers to the basic theology and tenets of the LDS and what makes them different from traditional Trinitarian theology. Introducing these doctrines would give the reader a reference point to compare and contrast LDS beliefs with evangelical or Trinitarian Christianity. Moreover, knowing the basic tenets of LDS theology helps readers see how its interpretive approach is used to justify its institutional persuasion, whether by proof-texting or the re-authorizing of personal revelation. Krohn could also look more closely at how the LDS Church applies the 'world in front of the text' approach (i.e. extracting meanings from biblical texts that may differ from the author's original intentions), when focusing on individualistic interpretations that are in line with the modern LDS worldview he describes (p. 179).

Overall, the author has done a great job exposing LDS hermeneutics in actual practice and showing us how we can view their theology in light of their interpretive approach and make our judgements. Krohn demonstrates the Mormons' hidden practice of considering the biblical texts to be corrupted while also claiming that the Bible is authoritative. I recommend this book as a valuable resource, but I also recommend that readers familiarize themselves with basic LDS theology before reading it, so they can benefit most fully from this in-depth examination of LDS theology and hermeneutics.

## *Anglicans and Pentecostals in Dialogue*
### David Hilborn and Simo Frestadius, eds.

Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2023
Pb., 356 pp., index

*Reviewed by Geoffrey Butler, adjunct professor,*
*Horizon College and Seminary and Regent University*

When I was both serving as a Pentecostal pastor (as I still do) and writing my PhD dissertation on the Lord's Supper at Wycliffe College, a theological institution of the Anglican Church of Canada, I would discuss with my committee new works of ecumenical theology by Pentecostals and whether they might help inform my project. I recall David Reed, one of my committee members (who converted from Oneness Pentecostalism to Anglicanism during his graduate studies), mentioning a forthcoming book on Anglican-Pentecostal theological dialogue. I was delighted to see that this work has now been published.

Although the editors state forthrightly that the work arose predominantly from the British context (p. 2), one of the greatest merits of the volume is the diversity of its contributors. Beyond the obvious inclusion of both Pentecostal and Anglican voices, the book's 22 chapters encompass both male and female contributors; American, Nigerian, Ghanaian and British authors; and those holding academic and ecclesial positions of leadership. Such diversity helps to avoid the danger of assuming only one stream of either Anglicanism or Pentecostalism to be representative of the entire movement.

A second notable merit of the volume is the involvement of denominational leadership. Justin Welby, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, penned a thoughtful foreword outlining the history and importance of the dialogue, emphasizing that

the unity sought by participants may, and even must, be achieved under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. David Wells, General Superintendent of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, likewise offered an endorsement of the work on the back cover, expressing his appreciation for the dialogue and his participation in it. As a young Canadian Pentecostal, I found the involvement of a major leader from this country to be a particularly encouraging development.

The chapters on the sacraments were especially intriguing, although not surprisingly, they raised some questions where Pentecostals differ not only with Anglicans but even amongst themselves. For example, I was surprised to learn from Caleb Nyanni's essay on water baptism that it is commonplace for African Pentecostals to insist that new converts must be baptized by immersion prior to receiving the Lord's Supper (pp. 69–70). The recognition by David Hilborn and John Christopher Thomas, in their respective chapters on theologies of ordination, that Anglicans and Pentecostals hold divergent views on the question is not surprising. Nevertheless, this does not prevent Martin Davie, whose chapter on Anglican ecclesiology immediately follows Thomas's contribution, from suggesting that a 'set of acknowledgements could be made between the Church of England and British Pentecostal churches' concerning the mutual recognition of one another's ordained ministers. Jonathan Black's chapter, explicitly refuting the idea that early Pentecostals never granted any conscious thought to developing their ecclesiology, perhaps offers modern Anglicans and Pentecostals alike assurance that convergence on such matters may not be so far-fetched. Finally, as a pastor active in my local ministerial, I found Graham Tomlin and Nezlin Sterling's chapters on local ecumenical relations to be a welcome addition, reminding readers that dialogue between theological traditions is not simply an academic affair.

The volume would perhaps have benefitted from a chapter on sexual ethics, as the only mentions of it are incidental in nature (pp. 29, 235). Given the disputes that have arisen within the Church of England on this topic, Pentecostals seeking to dialogue with their Anglican counterparts in many parts of the world will likely wonder whether common ground exists on that question. On a related note, some prescriptive advice on how Anglicans and Pentecostals globally might learn from the advancements made in the British context would have also been welcome. How much of the ecumenical progress made in the UK can be readily translated to North America, for example? Are there any unique factors in the British context that have enabled the dialogue to thrive there but may not be present elsewhere? Such questions should not be understood as a criticism of the work; indeed, they arise out of an affirmation of the work's importance for Pentecostals and Anglicans globally.

*Anglicans and Pentecostals in Dialogue* could serve as a key catalyst for future discussions between the two traditions. Although the main focus of both the dialogue and this volume is on the United Kingdom, the issues discussed are of interest to Pentecostals and Anglicans globally. No single book on dialogue is likely to overcome the scepticism about interacting with other branches of Christendom that still exists among many lay Pentecostals. Nevertheless, this example of Pentecostals reflecting thoughtfully on how our theology might be enriched by engagement with our Anglican brothers and sisters (and vice versa) is a step in the right direction.