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A Note from the Editor

Warm greetings from the *Evangelical Review of Theology*. The present issue appears at a time of geopolitical upheaval, drawing people of all ages around the world into the throes of "The Anxious Generation" (to play upon the title of a 2024 book about children born between 1997 and 2012). It is at such moments that Christian faith continues to provide time-tested resources to address the challenges of our unsettled age.

On this note, the first issue of *ERT* was proleptic for its engagement with a plethora of issues. The following are some of the articles, both newly written ones and reprints drawn from other journals, from that issue in 1977:[1]

> The Use of the Bible in Interpreting Salvation Today: An Evangelical Perspective by J. Andrew Kirk
> Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: A Critical Evaluation by Clark H. Pinnock
> Black Theology and African Theology by Byang H. Kato
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> Prophecy and the Gospel in the Middle East by Colin Chapman
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> Present-Day Pastoral Work in Latin America by Pablo Pérez

Nearly fifty years later, the articles in issue 50.1 of *ERT* exemplify the same kind of global cultural engagement using the Bible, theology, and church tradition. Hannes Wiher, a Francophone missiologist, supplies us with a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic look at the Christian concept of the soul. Richard Howell, a leader in theological education in South Asia and beyond, offers a wide-ranging tour of Pentecostalism as a global mission movement. Jonathan Corrado, who recently published on the Lord's Supper in *ERT*, has written a sequel article that looks at baptism's significance in redemptive history. Ni Buxiao, a theologian and historian in Hong Kong, uncovers the lessons for missionary training found in the life of the Canadian missionary to China, Robert A. Jaffray (1873–1945). Jeremy Treat shows how the Christian doctrine of atonement is best understood in light of the global church's pluriform contributions. Finally, Thomas Johnson re-introduces to the work of E. J. Tanis (1887–1958), a Dutch-American theologian whose 1917 essay during the First World War offered a provocative alternative to the pro- and anti-war views that dominate among Christians in wartime, then and now.

I hope you enjoy this issue's journey with Christian scholars who showcase the riches of the global church!

— Jerry Hwang, Executive Editor

1 Available online at https://theology.worldea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ERT-01-1.pdf.

ERT (2026) 50:1, 5–26

The Concept of the Soul in the Light of Scripture and Science: An Anthropological and Missiological Perspective

Hannes Wiher

While the psalmist can address his soul as if it were a conversation partner—for example, in Psalm 103: 'Praise the LORD, my soul!'—contemporary Europeans and North Americans would hardly express themselves in this way. They would be more likely to speak of themselves in terms such as 'I' or 'myself', based on psychology, a science that developed during the 20th century and whose name, incidentally, contains the Greek word for soul (*psychē*). The average African and Asian, on the other hand, would have no problem with the language used by the biblical authors. The committees that revise Bible translations must therefore pursue a way of speaking that can express both what the biblical authors wanted to say and what is understandable to today's readers. When very different cultures belong to the same language area, as is the case with English, this task becomes very challenging.

In this article, I reflect on how we should understand the concept of the soul and how we can talk about it today. We will examine whether soul and spirit can be distinguished from one another, and how the relationship between body and soul should be understood. I will consider these questions in light of Scripture and science. It is thus an interdisciplinary overview with a missiological perspective.

Within the limited scope of this article, I do not claim to cover all aspects of this topic. I will first look at what the Bible says about human beings and will compare this information with the findings of cultural anthropology. I will then examine how Bible translators have proceeded throughout mission history. Next, I will explore the contribution that neuroscience makes to this interdisciplinary dialogue. For assistance in reconciling the findings of the various sciences, I will draw on philosophy. Finally, I draw the different threads together through a critical evaluation in the light of Scripture.

Hannes Wiher (PhD, University of Potchefstroom, South Africa) is professor of missiology at several theological seminaries in French-speaking countries and president of the Network for Evangelical Missiology in French-speaking Europe (REMEEF, https://missiologie.net).

Biblical and theological conceptions of humans

In the Bible, we see how people talk to God. In turn, they are examined, questioned and challenged by God.[1] However, they cannot fully understand the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, redeeming and guiding God (Ps 139). For humans, this Creator God is both near and far. God is close through his intimate knowledge of human beings and his constant help. He is distant as the 'wholly Other', the Creator above creation (Isa 29:16). The relationship between human beings and God is based on the fact that they are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26) and on the covenant made between them (Gen 6:18; 15:18; Ex 19:5; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).

A synthetic approach to the soul in the Old Testament

The Bible does not provide us with a systematic anthropology. In the Old Testament, we find, according to Hans Walter Wolff, a synthetic and stereometric way of thinking to describe human beings.[2] Synthetic thinking means that a part of the body can represent the whole person (Isa 52:7; Judg 7:2). Stereometric thinking, on the other hand, means that the different parts of the body are largely interchangeable and also describe their functions (Ps 6:3–5; 84:3; Prov 2:10; 18:15). In this sense, terms such as heart, soul, body and spirit, but also ear and mouth, arms and hands are interchangeable. The anatomy of the Old Testament depicts humans as a composite of bones, flesh, skin and nerves (Job 10:11). To complete the creation of man, 'God breathed into his nostrils the breath (*neshama*) of life, and man became a living being (*nēphēsh hayah*)' (Gen 2:7). When God wants to bring human bones to life in Ezekiel, instead of *nēphēsh* the Hebrew word *ruach* is used, a term traditionally translated with 'spirit' (Ezek 37:5–6, 14).

Despite the Hebrew synthetic and stereometric thinking, Wolff attempts to characterize the various aspects of the body. The 'bones' (*ētsēm*) refer to the basic structure of human beings (Ps 139:15). Walther Eichrodt (1890–1978) also sees them as an organ of the soul.[3] The 'flesh' (*basar*) emphasizes the fragility of human beings, who were created from dust. According to Wolff, *basar* describes 'man in his infirmity'. The *nēphēsh*, literally 'throat' and traditionally translated as 'soul', refers to the 'needy human being' overflowing with needs and desires. It strives for life, that is, for God. The 'heart' (*leb*) represents the centre of the person. This anthropological concept from the Old Testament is the most common and refers to the body, emotions, mind and will. It encompasses all dimensions of human existence, including what we refer to in the Greco-Roman tradition as consciousness and conscience. Wolff sees it as the 'reasonable human being'. Finally, the 'spirit' (*ruach*) describes the 'empowered human being' who is endowed with the life force given by God. This term can also be used for the various states of mind of human beings (Judg 8:3; Josh

1 For biblical anthropology, I draw primarily on relevant articles from *NIDOTTE* and *NIDNTT*; Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1974); Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (trans. J. A. Baker; London: SCM, 1975), 131–51; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 115–18, 126–30.

2 Wolff, *Anthropology*, 7–9.

3 Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:146.

2:11) and is similar to the use of the heart. Thus, it becomes the centre of human will and action.

The New Testament unity of man in continuity with the Old Testament concept

Since most of the authors of the New Testament were of Jewish origin, we find a clear influence of the Old Testament in it, but also some changes of meaning under Hellenistic influence. The concept of the body (Hebrew *basar*) is rendered in the New Testament as *sarx* ('flesh') and *soma* ('body'). *Soma* refers to human beings as persons, while *sarx* describes human beings as weak creatures corrupted by sin. In the Old Testament, on the other hand, the body (*basar*) refers to the part of human beings that suffers from illness or death, but not to desire, which is represented by the term 'throat/soul' (*nēphēsh*). The concept of the 'centre of the person' is conveyed in the New Testament by two terms: *kardia* ('heart') and *nous* ('mind, reason, sense'). The semantic domains of soul and spirit are largely identical in both testaments; i.e. *psychē* ('soul') and *pneuma* ('spirit') largely correspond to the Hebrew terms *nēphēsh* and *ruach*. In contrast, the contemporary English terms have different meanings.

During one's lifetime, the soul is intimately united with the body, both being a gift from God. Furthermore, the body is, according to the apostle Paul, a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). After the death of the body, the soul continues to exist in a disembodied state (Heb 12:23; Rev 6:9–10). After this intermediate period, the soul will be reunited with the body at the final resurrection, this time an imperishable, immortal body (1 Cor 15:52–54; 2 Cor 5:1–5; Phil 3:20–21). Thus, the Bible teaches an embodied soul and a bodily resurrection.

Synthesis

According to Wolff, when we talk about the immaterial aspect of human beings, we must not forget that for a Hebrew, human beings form a unity: they do not have a soul but are a soul; they do not have a body but are a body.[4] Wolff's approach to Old Testament anthropology is decidedly holistic. However, in view of the doctrine of the intermediate state—when the soul exists in a disembodied state[5]—humans also are an ontological duality of body and soul, implying, in philosophical terms, a 'substance dualism'.[6] Older concepts such as dichotomy[7] and trichotomy[8] describe this dualism by naming the different parts of humans. Originating from Greek anthropology and arising from analytical thinking, they stand in tension with the Hebrew

4 Wolff, *Anthropology*, 7–9.

5 Stan W. Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds? Neuroscience, Neurotheology, the Soul, and Human Flourishing* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2024), 126–29; John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 160–64: 'It is clear that the doctrine of the intermediate state logically requires the possibility that persons can exist without earthly bodies' (164).

6 Ontology (from Greek *ontos*, 'being', and *logos*, 'study') is the study of what is, the nature of being. Ontological dualism can be divided into three types, among them substance or Cartesian dualism.

7 The concept that humans consist of two parts, one material and one immaterial, body and soul.

8 The concept that humans consist of three parts: body, soul and spirit.

synthetic and stereometric thinking about the unity of man.[9] Trying to combine the two approaches—holistic and dualistic—into one concept, Millard Erickson speaks of man as a 'conditional unity', and John Cooper, Stan Wallace and others of a 'functional unity' and a 'holistic dualism'.[10] Furthermore, Hebrews see humans as part of the community, as 'social beings' (*homo socialis*) who are preserved and connected within the family, kinship, clan and people.[11] Wheeler Robinson describes this group orientation as corporate personality (Deut 26:5–10; Josh 24:15; Jer 31:29–30).[12] Accordingly, concepts such as salvation and justice contain communal elements that relate to the welfare of the community and the behaviour of individuals.

The secular view of humanity differs fundamentally from the Hebrew view. It regards humans as autonomous individuals who are independent of God, other people and nature. This individual consciousness, combined with individual responsibility, contrasts sharply with the Hebrew group identity. According to analytical thinking, human beings consist of different parts that are often in conflict with each other. Thus, the antagonism between body and spirit is emphasized, and greater importance is attached to one or the other. The Bible, on the other hand, warns us against another dichotomy, that between outward behaviour and inner motives (Isa 26:13). The frequent connection between body and sin follows from the misinterpretation of Paul's use of the term 'flesh' (*sarx*). The distinction between heart and head, feelings and reason, is also not biblical (cf. Prov. 23:7). It has its origin in the Greek division of the centre of the person (see the section 'Mission history' below). In contrast, the Hebrew term 'heart' encompasses feelings, reason and will.

In summary, the secular view in Europe and North America focuses on the human being. Whereas individualistic Europeans and North Americans are autonomous, Africans and Asians are embedded in a network of interpersonal relationships in which it is necessary to maintain harmony. The biblical view of humans is primarily theocentric and relational.

Cultural anthropological conceptions of humans

Concepts of the soul vary greatly across cultures. Traditional religions have a very particular approach to the soul. Cultural anthropology has summarized them by the scientific term of animism, based on the notion of *animus/anima*, the Latin term for 'soul'. The *animus/anima* was a spiritual being in the Roman universe that accompanied the body and ensured its well-being. In this section, I will therefore limit my presentation to the concept of the soul in animism.

As interpretations of life experiences, animistic conceptions are ways of seeing oneself and the world, or worldviews. Lothar Käser has developed two models that

9 Cf. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 520–27.

10 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 536–38; Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life*, 5; Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds?*, 27, 52–55, 97, 123–25; Joel B. Green, ed., *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 18–19. In line with the Hebrew holistic approach and in view of the obvious duality, other authors have proposed various formulations to characterize the specific holism of biblical anthropology.

11 Wolff, *Anthropology*, 186–88.

12 H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 70.

allow us to understand most of these cultures.[13] I first introduce the seat of emotions, intellect and character, and then the concept of the spirit double.

The seat of emotions, intellect and character (SEIC)

An important organ of the body is the seat of emotions (joy, fear, anger), intellect (thoughts, memory) and character (willpower, personality). Some ethnologists call it the 'body soul'. Following Käser, I refer to it with the abbreviation SEIC.[14]

Members of animistic cultures locate the SEIC in a large organ of the body (heart, liver, kidneys, intestines, etc.) and also in the spirit double (cf. Job 19:27; Ps 7:10; 16:7; 73:21, etc.). In many cultures, it is the heart. For the Greeks, it is also the intestines. That is why, when Jesus is moved by compassion, the Greek word for a movement of the intestines is used (*splanchnizomai*, Mt 14:14). Among Native Americans, the scalp is removed and burned to destroy the 'soul'.

The SEIC functions like another organ of the body. It therefore has no independence, as the soul normally does in the Western understanding. With the death of the body, the SEIC ceases to exist. Animals, humans and spiritual beings possess an SEIC, unlike plants and inanimate matter. However, humans differ from animals in that they have higher intelligence and thus a qualitatively different SEIC. Particularly intelligent humans can possess several SEICs.

The SEIC can be influenced by spirit beings, either through physical contact or simply through their proximity to the body. The presence of a benign spirit being can promote good mood, increased intellectual abilities and appropriate social behaviour. Conversely, malevolent spirit beings cause bad moods, reduced intellectual abilities, and even insanity or aggressive behaviour. Such conditions are understood as illnesses and treated with 'medicines' that can 'brighten' the SEIC. These 'medicines' are helpful in preventing stage fright and shame, passing exams, performing rituals correctly and increasing sexual attractiveness. There are also 'medications' that can 'darken' the SEIC in order to weaken an enemy and prevent them from carrying out an action.

The SEIC is the organ with which one learns (Latin *apprehendere*, 'to grasp, comprehend', originally *ad-prehendere*, 'to attach'). According to animistic beliefs, children learn more easily because they have a soft SEIC, to which it is easier to 'attach' something. Over the course of a lifetime, the SEIC becomes larger and harder and gradually opens up. The child acquires language through the development of the SEIC, or naturally 'without learning'. Malformations of the SEIC result in character deficits, lack of intelligence and self-control. These ideas naturally have significant consequences for child rearing and the treatment of mental illness.

The spirit double

According to the animistic view, the world consists of material beings and objects, as well as spirit beings and objects.[15] The latter are invisible, except during dreams and trance states. They are called spirit doubles. Mountains, rivers, waterfalls, trees, villages, people, animals, statues and masks therefore have spirit doubles. A spirit

13 Lothar Käser, *Animism* (Nuremberg: VTR, 2014).

14 Käser, *Animism*, 145–56.

15 Käser, *Animism*, 158–84.

double accompanies every material object and being during its existence. It is, in a sense, its 'soul' or guardian angel. In this way, nature is thought of as 'animated' in the animistic worldview. The animistic conception of the afterlife therefore differs significantly from that of the Christianized West. The two worlds, the visible and the invisible, are neither geographically nor temporally separated from each other and are intensely interrelated. However, spirit beings have more power and influence. That is why they are worshipped. There is therefore a hierarchical order. Authority and power can be interpreted in the animistic worldview as mana, or extraordinary influence.[16] Based on an animistic worldview, people seek harmony with spirit beings, including the dead (ancestors), often through offerings. These are therefore predominantly relationship-oriented and holistic cultural and religious systems.

The spirit double is identical to its material counterpart in form, colour, taste and smell. However, it is not bound by space or time. It can therefore enter a material being or object (preferably through openings such as the mouth or ears) and influence it. It can have a positive influence (a good idea, a state of happiness) or a negative one (depression, illness, aggression). It is essentially immortal and indestructible, even if the material being is injured or destroyed. For example, it will not have an amputated leg like its material counterpart. In the case of a sacrifice, the one who offers the sacrifice addresses it to the spirit double. Even a sacrifice made before a statue is directed at its spirit double and not at the material statue.

Spirit doubles are considered pre-existent. When a body dies, they can seek another, usually that of a grandchild of the deceased person. Despite the parallel, it is not appropriate to speak of reincarnation.

In literature, the spirit double is also referred to as the 'free soul' or 'dream ego' because it leaves the body during dreams to go on a journey. Dreams are thus considered experiences of the spirit double. If the spirit double leaves the body for a long period of time, the body becomes tired, then ill, eventually comatose, and finally dies. This happens when a specialist in the invisible world (a shaman or medium) removes the spirit double. One refers to him then as a 'soul eater'.

In people who have several spirit doubles, only one of them has the function of the dream ego and occupies a special position. It differs from other spirit doubles in two respects. First, only the first spirit double (the dream ego) survives the death of the body and becomes an ancestral spirit. Second, only the experiences of the first spirit double (the dream ego) become dream content.

Synthesis

The conception of human beings encompasses human anatomy and physiology as well as normative models of how humans should be. Both biblical and animistic views of man are holistic and relational, while the former is theocentric and the latter anthropocentric. In both conceptions, the centre of the person most frequently is the 'heart', which encompasses the emotions, the intellect and the character and is called the SEIC by Käser. The secular worldview is also anthropocentric.[17]

16 Käser, *Animism*, 66–84.

17 For a more detailed discussion of worldviews, cf. Hannes Wiher, *Who Are You, and Who Am I? Biblical and Anthropological Models for Cross-Cultural Understanding* (Carlisle: Langham, 2024), 40–41.

Additionally, both biblical and animistic views of man include a dualism between the material and immaterial aspects. In European history, based on Greek ideas, two conceptions of the composition of human beings were distinguished: body and soul (dichotomy) or body, soul and spirit (trichotomy). More recent conceptions prefer to define biblical anthropology as a 'holistic dualism'. Animistic cultures, in accordance with their worldview, start from a different conception of humans, according to which the body is accompanied in a certain way by three 'souls': (1) its seat of emotions, intellect and character (SEIC), which is located in a large organ, such as the heart, and (2) its spirit double with (3) its own SEIC. Following the Greek-European classification, one could speak of a 'quadrotomy'.[18]

Mission history

Having examined the concept of the soul in Scripture and in animism, I now turn to the efforts in mission history to translate the biblical concepts of the soul for animistic cultures.

Transformation of terms referring to spirit doubles in contact with Christianity

Throughout mission history, terms that once referred to spirit doubles have been transformed through contact with Christianity to refer to a SEIC, the seat of emotions, intellect and character and thus the seat of a person's moral character. This can be observed in Greek terms (*psychē*, *pneuma*), Latin terms (*animus*, *anima*, *spiritus*) and also certain terms from Indo-European languages. For example, the German term *Seele* is composed of *see*, 'lake', and the particle 'l' indicating belonging. Among the animistic Goths, it referred to aquatic spirit beings, i.e. spirits of the dead.[19]

With Christianization, the term was transformed into an SEIC, i.e. a soul (by analogy, the French term is derived from the Latin *anima*). The origin of this transformation can be found in the translation of the Bible into Gothic by the missionary Wulfila (311–383), who rendered the Greek *psychē* as the Gothic *saiwala.* The Common Germanic term—from which the Eastern (Gothic), Scandinavian and Western branches (predecessor of German and English) are derived—gives *saiwalō*, which means 'coming from the lake, belonging to the lake'. We can therefore conclude that via the Old English word *sāwl* and the Old High German *sēula*, the contemporary English term *soul* and the German *Seele* are indirect derivatives of the Common Germanic *saiwalō* and indirect cousins of the Gothic *saiwala.*[20]

Retrospectively, it becomes clear that European Bible translators misinterpreted Greek animistic concepts. This led to a certain confusion regarding the concept of

18 The concepts of SEIC and spirit double are presented practically in Robert Badenberg, *'Just to Be' Is Simply 'Not to Be at All': An Ethno-Linguistic Investigation into Bemba Worldview and Personhood* (Zürich: LIT, 2021).

19 The idea that lakes are where spirits dwell, so to speak the 'reservoir of souls', persists in the Indo-European tradition according to which storks bring babies.

20 Hans-Peter Hasenfratz, *Die Seele* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986); Hasenfratz, 'Seelenvorstellungen bei den Germanen und ihre Übernahme und Umformung durch die christliche Mission' (Germanic Concepts of the Soul and Their Transformation by the Christian Mission), *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 38 (1986), 19–31.

the soul in Indo-European languages and cultures. In contrast, in Hebrew and in languages of animistic ethnic groups (such as the African Malinke and Kikongo), the terms are clearly separated into SEIC (Hebr. *leb*, Malinke *sondomē*, Kikongo *ntima*, 'heart') and spirit double (Hebr. *ruach*, Malinke *nii*, Kikongo *mfumu kutu*).

The adoption of Christianity among the Bakongo at the mouth of the Congo River transformed the spirit double *moyo*, 'breath', into an SEIC, bringing it closer to *ntima*, 'heart'. The term for the spirit double, *mfumu kutu*, literally 'chief of the ear', has largely disappeared. From this I conclude that a biblical view of humans does not need a concept of the spirit double.

Division of the SEIC in Greek culture

In Greek, the transformation of the terms for spirit doubles into a term for SEIC presents an additional complication. At the time of Homer in the 12th century BC, *psychoi* ('souls', plural of *psyche*, 'soul'), and later *psychē*, referred to spirit doubles. After Plato (i.e. after the 5th century BC), *pneuma* ('spirit') replaced the terms *psychoi* and *psychē* to refer to spirit doubles. From then on, the terms *psychē*, *nous* and *kardia* referred to an SEIC. With the Christianization of Greece in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, the term *pneuma* also changed to refer to an SEIC.

The most significant element of change in meaning for us today is the division of the SEIC, on one hand, into *nous*, 'mind, thought', located in the head, and on the other hand, into emotions, located in the heart (*kardia*). This division of the SEIC, which is very atypical for an animistic culture, continues in Latin with *ratio* ('reason') and *cor* ('heart'), and then further in the Indo-European languages.[21]

Synthesis

Efforts to translate the Bible throughout mission history clearly show how confusion surrounding the concept of the soul has found its way into Indo-European languages. While the languages of animistic cultures and Hebrew maintain a distinction between the concepts of the spirit double and the SEIC, Indo-European languages show a blending of the two. Since Greek culture introduced a division of the SEIC, the Indo-European languages and cultures, influenced by it, have continued this separation of emotions and intellect. Today, we find them in their location in the heart and head, respectively, and in the association of the soul with the emotions and of the spirit with the intellect. Based on these findings, it would be advisable to combine the terms for soul and spirit and think of the immaterial aspect of humans as soul/spirit. I conclude that in the contact with Christianity the terms and concepts of the spirit double disappear. Today, they refer to the SEIC.

Neuroscience

Neuroscience is the multidisciplinary study of the nervous system (the brain, spinal cord and peripheral nervous system) that combines approaches of physics, chemistry, physiology, molecular biology, psychology and medicine, to name only a few. Its goal is a better understanding of the biological basis of learning, memory, emotions, behaviour, perception, cognition, and consciousness, all functions of the soul. Since

21 Hasenfratz, *Die Seele*; Hasenfratz, 'Seelenvorstellungen bei den Germanen'.

its entrance into the realm of academic disciplines towards the end of the 20th century, the concept of the soul has been tackled through neurobiological research. Even though this new approach is just one perspective on the concept of the soul among many and cannot truly displace the others, neuroscientists seem to sometimes try to replace the other perspectives. This is why I have attributed more space to specifying the role of the brain in relation to the soul.[22]

Local, modal or global functioning

In recent decades, neuroscience has used imaging techniques to identify the regions of the brain where intellectual activities, emotions such as love, fear, anger, joy, sadness or happiness, motor activities, and tactile, auditory, visual, gustatory or olfactory sensations are located. For example, language skills in right-handed people are located in the temporal region of the left hemisphere of the brain. A stroke in this part of the brain causes the loss of the ability to speak and to understand speech.

However, there is ongoing debate about these localization findings: to what extent are these localizations relevant? Does the brain not function modally with the help of several regions or even both hemispheres to ensure these functions? Or does it rather function with all regions as an inseparable whole? Are these localizations possibly illusions, since the various functions require control loops in several regions or in the entire brain? And in the event of a loss, could other regions of the brain replace or compensate for the function? It cannot be ruled out that essential but undetectable neural activity is taking place in regions where imaging shows no change in neural activity.

A second question is to what extent this imaging provides results that correspond to reality. These imaging techniques do not measure neural activity itself, which is infinitely small, but rather an increase or decrease in oxygen consumption and blood flow. To magnify the minimal differences between brain regions, computers perform subtraction calculations. These are statistical calculations of average values across millions of neurons and large samples of test subjects, i.e. mathematical abstractions. Do they correspond to reality in the brain? Caution is therefore advised when interpreting imaging results.

Largely unconscious functioning

In recent decades, neuroscience has confirmed the hypothesis put forward by Sigmund Freud and later psychoanalysts that most brain activity occurs unconsciously. Only a small portion of neural activity is transmitted to our consciousness by the cortex after passing through the subcortical and cortical regions.

In 1979, physiologist Benjamin Libet conducted a series of experiments.[23] These showed that the motor centre of the brain begins preparing for a movement before

22 In this section, I draw mainly on Mark F. Bear et al. (ed.), *Neuroscience: Exploring the Brain* (Baltimore: Lippincott, 2002); Gerhard Roth and Nicole Strüber, *Wie das Gehirn die Seele macht* (How the Brain Generates the Soul; Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2014); Gerhard Roth, *Über den Menschen* (On Man; Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021); Thomas Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

23 Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

the person consciously decides to perform it immediately. The time delay between the readiness potential and the voluntary decision is about 0.35 seconds, with the actual movement occurring about 0.2 seconds later. The significance of these experiments for the philosophy of mind has been the subject of lively debate.

Libet and many neurobiologists interpreted this first as proof that our brain makes the decision before we consciously perceive it, and that free will is an illusion. Later on, Libet suggested that the conscious will may not initiate the action, but that within a time frame of 0.1 seconds it still has the ability to stop the movement that has already been initiated by a conscious decision (the 'veto' or control function of the will). Later experiments showed that this veto decision is made unconsciously after a readiness potential. Today, neurobiologists generally consider that a movement still can be cancelled when stopping signals appear earlier than 0.2 seconds before the beginning of the movement. For them, this interval seems to be a point of no return.

Theologians, philosophers and psychologists have criticized Libet's and later experiments by stating that the decision to make a movement does not nearly resemble a decision-making process. Such a process does not last some milliseconds but rather days, weeks or even months or years during which several options are weighed against each other. Their critique is thus that these experiments are a completely inappropriate basis on which to draw any conclusion regarding decision-making processes.

In this debate on the concept of free will, which, incidentally, has been going on for 2,500 years, theologians and philosophers insist on free will as a necessary precondition of ethics, and neurobiologists think it is an illusion. Roth rightly notes that free will as a mental causality is empirically not measurable and thus, from a scientific point of view, neither falsifiable nor verifiable.[24] I will come back to the problem of free will below (see the section 'Brain and person').

Predominantly vegetative-affective functioning

Given the wealth of data produced by neuroscience, Gerhard Roth developed an innovative and simplified four-level model of personality based on neurobiological findings, particularly the limbic system.[25] Neurobiologists regard the limbic system as the seat of the psyche, including emotions, motivations, and unconscious and conscious goals.

The lower limbic level is responsible for regulating vegetative vital functions such as pulse, blood pressure, respiration, digestion and sexuality. This includes several structures of the diencephalon: the hypothalamus, the periaqueductal grey, the blue nucleus and the raphe nuclei.

The middle limbic level regulates unconscious feelings and their equally unconscious evaluation. It is the most important part of the brain for the psyche. This includes other structures of the diencephalon: the amygdala, the basal ganglia, the thalamus and the hippocampus.

The upper limbic level is the level of conscious emotions—such as love, fear, anger, joy, sadness and happiness—as well as conscious motives, socialization and

24 Roth, *Über den Menschen*, 231–32.

25 Roth and Strüber, *Wie das Gehirn die Seele macht*, 63–94, 188–99.

education. This includes the limbic regions of the cortex of the right hemisphere: the orbitofrontal, cingulate and insular cortex.

The fourth level is the cognitive and linguistic level, represented by the associative cortex of the left hemisphere. This includes (1) the primary and secondary sensory regions (somatosensory, visual, auditory, gustatory and vestibular); (2) the primary and secondary motor regions, where voluntary movements are regulated; (3) the associative regions for complex cognitive perception (representation, memory, language); and (4) the executive regions, where behaviour is prepared and planned.

The following table provides a schematic overview of Roth's personality model with its three limbic levels and the cognitive and communicative level. The four levels influence each other, with a stronger influence from the bottom up than in the opposite direction.

The Four levels of personality according to Roth

Cognitive and communicative ego		**Individual and social ego**	
(4) Left associative cortex	⬅ ➡	(3) Right associative cortex	↓⬆
Unconscious self			
(2) Emotional conditioning, reward, motivation (1) Control of vital vegetative functions			↓⬆

Additionally, Roth distinguishes two personality types, starting from the six fundamental psycho-neural systems he discerns.[26] On one hand, the 'dynamic person' is characterized by a pronounced desire for reward, entrepreneurial spirit and openness towards other people, whereas risk perception is not particularly pronounced. On the other hand, Roth introduces the type of the 'stable person', which shows a general tendency to avoid risk. She loves peace and order and prefers lasting relationships.

Based on this personality model, vegetative processes and unconscious feelings seem to have a dominant influence on the functioning of the personality. This would then confirm the findings of psychoanalysis. However, when we consider this personality model, it is important to realize that Roth describes only neurobiological processes and that he adopts the standpoint that mental processes are an epiphenomenon of the brain (see the section 'Brain and mind' below). Later Roth changed his position to adopt 'interactive dualism', which implies a more balanced view on bottom-up and top-down influences between the brain and the personality.[27] I will come back to this topic below (see the sections 'Brain and mind' and 'Brain and person').

26 According to Roth, the six fundamental psycho-neural systems are stress processing, self-reassurance, reward and motivation, attachment and empathy, impulse control, and sense of reality and risk perception. Roth, *Über den Menschen*, 72–75.

27 Roth, *Über den Menschen*, 267–68, 286–91.

Synthesis

The contribution of neuroscience to the concept of the soul is still preliminary due to the novelty of this discipline. The debate about whether the brain functions locally, modally or globally is still ongoing. Sigmund Freud's thesis that the psyche functions predominantly in the unconscious seems to be confirmed by neuroscience. In addition, the personality models of the MBTI[28] (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) and the 'Big Five',[29] which were developed on a purely pragmatic basis and are based on the tested person's auto-evaluation, are being supplemented by a model that consistently implements neurobiological findings. It points to a predominantly vegetative-affective functioning of the personality. However, when evaluating the results of neuroscience, we must recall that this discipline limits itself to the study of the neurobiological processes—that is, the 'effects' of the 'soul/spirit'—and leaves out of focus the mental processes—that is, the 'soul/spirit' itself.

Philosophy

After this interdisciplinary overview, the question arises as to how the findings of the various sciences can be reconciled with the Bible. Philosophy, especially metaphysics[30] and epistemology,[31] helps us lay the foundations for confronting and integrating the various findings. After discussing the relationship of scientific and biblical data in general, I will reflect on the compatibility of findings of philosophy and neuroscience—in other words, the relationship between the mind and the body, especially the brain, and between the person and the brain, and their relationship to the outside world. I conclude this section with a reflection on spiritual formation and human flourishing.[32]

Integration of scientific and biblical data

Mission studies is an interdisciplinary science. It is therefore essential to combine the findings of biblical studies with those of various other sciences. In fact, throughout history, evangelicals have generally been very hesitant to do so. However, I would like to follow the example of the great theologian Augustine who, impressed by the great eloquence of the Milanese preacher Ambrose, was probably the first to systematically apply classical rhetoric to Christian preaching. He did so on the basis

28 The MBTI was developed in 1962 by Isabel Briggs Myers (1897–1980) and her mother Katharine Cook Briggs (1875–1968) and is based on Jungian typology. It defines 16 personality types based on four main axes: the direction of our energy (extroverted or introverted), the way we gather information (sensing or intuition), our decision-making (thinking or feeling) and the way we deal with our environment (perceiving or judging).

29 The so-called 'Big Five', which were extracted from a large amount of empirical data through factor analyses, are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability (neuroticism), known by the acronym 'OCEAN'.

30 Metaphysics (from Greek *meta*, 'behind, beyond', and *physis*, 'nature, natural constitution') is the philosophical discipline that deals with what lies behind the natural world that can be experienced by the senses, the ultimate reasons for existence.

31 Epistemology (from Greek *epistēmē*, 'knowledge') is the branch of philosophy that deals with the question of how we can know.

32 In this section, I draw mainly on Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain*; Roth, *Über den Menschen*; Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds?*

of an idea from the book of Exodus, where the Israelites took gold from the Egyptians, believers of a different religion (Ex 11:2; 12:35–36). Building on this, Augustine decided to make equal use of the wealth of rhetorical methods.

But 'has not God made the wisdom of the world foolish?' (1 Cor. 1:20). Since the Creator of the universe is also the God who revealed the Bible, we can assume that the facts of the universe—that is, the data of science—also convey the wisdom of God. The relationship between the Bible, theology and science does not therefore necessarily lead to conflicts with regard to the facts; however, it can lead to different perceptions and interpretations. In practice, we almost always base our analyses on perceptions and interpretations of the Bible as well as on scientific perceptions and theories, i.e. on the interpretation of facts of the universe. There is therefore a potential for conflict between the respective results.

How can the different approaches be reconciled?[33] The aim is to combine a theology based on *critical realism*[34] with scientific findings from a theistic perspective. This is particularly important because, since the Enlightenment, the sciences have generally been developed and conceived on the basis of a secular worldview.

How can one recognize a *critical realist theology*? Put negatively, it does not assume uniform systems of thought in the various sciences. A critical realist theology recognizes that scientific systems of thought are different from its own. It does not expect the different systems of thought to be compatible. Rather, critical realist theology expects different systems of thought to be critically brought together on the basis of a theistic perspective. Furthermore, critical realist theology requires that the diachronic[35] sciences (historical sciences, biblical and narrative theology) and synchronic sciences (social sciences and systematic theology) should complement each other.

Now that the foundations for integrating insights from different scientific fields have been laid, we can ask ourselves how to understand the relationship between mind and body (in particular the brain).

Brain and mind

To begin, we should note that no one has a concrete idea of how the material organ of the brain interacts with the immaterial counterpart of the mind. Since the advent of modern physics at the beginning of the 20th century, the distinction between the material and the immaterial has become rather fuzzy: 'material' elementary particles transform themselves into 'immaterial' energy waves and vice versa. Specialists in the philosophy of mind insist that there exists a fundamental explanatory gap between neurobiological and mental processes. Other philosophers indicate that the dichotomy of brain and mind is only a consequence of Cartesian dualism and that

33 Cf. Paul G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, PA: International Trinity Press, 1999).

34 Critical realism is a philosophical and epistemological position that assumes that our sensory perception accurately reflects external objects in some cases (in accordance with naive realism), but that this is not always the case (in contrast to naive realism).

35 A diachronic approach (from Greek *dia*, 'through', and *chronos*, 'time') considers the development of a phenomenon over a period of time. In contrast, a synchronic approach examines something at a specific point in time.

the conscious will can influence actions. Theologians point out that Jesus and the apostles healed through simple words, so-called speech acts. Thus, the question of the relationship between brain and mind is heavily influenced by the background and philosophical position of the respective author. Three main positions can be distinguished among neurobiologists, psychologists, philosophers and theologians.

The first position assumes that neuronal and mental processes are identical. According to this position, imaging techniques show us the traces of the psyche. In philosophical terms, this represents an obvious reductionism, a so-called reductive physicalism. Physicalism is the position that everything is physical, and that there is nothing above. As such, physicalism is close to naturalism, i.e. the view that the world should be understood as a purely natural phenomenon. It assumes that everything has natural causes and that there is nothing 'supernatural'. Physicalism is therefore also close to scientism, a view that science and the scientific method are the only or the best way to truth.

The second position, which corresponds to the majority view of neurobiologists, holds that the brain generates the soul.[36] Mental processes would thus be an epiphenomenon of the brain and, according to the opinion of many, a pure deception of the carrier in order to satisfy the individual by this illusion. The epistemological prerequisite for this position is metaphysical realism, a non-reductive physicalism also called epiphenomenalism.

The third position assumes a certain autonomy of both entities, i.e. a duality between brain and mind. Among the proponents of this position, essentially representatives of the analytical philosophy of mind, there are very different ideas about the relationship between the two entities. First, there is *interactive dualism*, which assumes that the material brain and the immaterial mind interact somehow. Some hypothesize a physical interaction through electromagnetic energy and suppose an unknown elementary particle, just as the graviton is assumed to be the basis for the gravitational force. Second, there is *phenomenal dualism*, which corresponds to the 'two-aspects identity theory'. It distinguishes between the third-person perspective applied by neuroscience, which analyzes the neuronal process as an object, and the first-person participatory perspective of phenomenological philosophy, which focuses on the person (see 'Brain and person' below). Depending on the philosophical position of the specialists, the brain-mind problem is considered solved, solvable or unsolvable.[37]

Brain and outside world

Proponents of the second position, which assumes that the mind is an epiphenomenon of the brain, believe that the brain constructs the external world on the basis of its sensory perception. With this idea, they follow René Descartes (1598–1650) and subsequent idealism with its image theory of perception. The external world is therefore simply the image that the brain creates of it, and we cannot be sure whether it actually exists. Through their constructivism—in this particular case called neuroconstructivism—neuroscience is reviving idealism and subjectivism. However, the idealistic view of perception overlooks the fact that we are physical beings.

36 E.g. Roth and Strüber, *Wie das Gehirn die Seele macht.*

37 Cf. Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain*, 108.

In this context, the experiment conducted by Richard Held and Alan Hein with newborn kittens is very revealing.[38] As is generally known, these kittens are initially blind. One group of kittens was able to move actively in the test environment. Each kitten in the first group was connected to a kitten in the second group, which passively pulled it along in a trolley. After several weeks of this treatment, the kittens in the first group were freed from their harnesses and moved around normally. The other kittens, which had remained passive, were unable to orient themselves in space and recognize objects; they stumbled and bumped into objects without being able to avoid them. This means that only a sensitive and moving organism shapes the perceived space and develops a sense of balance, based on coherent and interconnected sensory and motor patterns.

The conclusion from Held and Hein's experiment is that the brain is in constant connection with the body and the outside world, an insight that led to the concept of 'embodied cognition'.[39] The world is discovered and changed through active participation. Human existence is thus a 'being-in-the-world'.[40]

Brain and person

The third position regarding the relationship between the brain and the mind assumes a certain autonomy of both entities, i.e. a duality between brain and mind. As mentioned above, there are very different views on the actual relationship between the two entities. However, everyone agrees that it is not the brain that thinks, perceives and acts, but rather the human person, with the help of the brain, which functions as a mediating organ to the body and the outside world.

As far as the relationship between the two entities is concerned, I hold the opinion that the brain is shaped and formatted in the course of human socialization. Due to the brain's plasticity, the person's experiences are imprinted on the brain's structures via the memory. This 'neuroplasticity'[41] is the basis for the potentialities that humans will realize and develop in their lives. Humans therefore benefit from this unity with their bodies through the brain, but at the same time they live in the tension of the duality between body and mind, in philosophical terms an 'ontological dualism'.[42] In fact, Descartes was already well aware of this difficulty: 'The things that belong to the union of the soul and the body can only be dimly perceived by the mind alone; … [only] in the experience of life and personal interaction … does one

38 Richard Held and Andrew Hein, 'Movement-Produced Stimulation in the Development of Visually Guided Behavior', *Journal of Comparative Physiology and Psychology* 56 (1963): 872–76.

39 Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

40 This expression was proposed by phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (Abingdon: Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012).

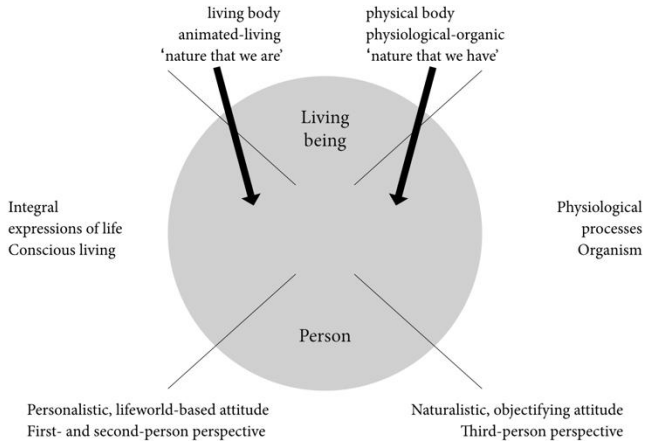
41 Neural plasticity, or neuroplasticity, refers to the ability of synapses, neurons, or even entire brain regions to change their anatomy and function in response to use, in order to optimize ongoing processes.

42 Ontological dualism can be divided into three types, among them substance or Cartesian dualism. Cartesian dualism (from Renatus Cartesius, the latinized form of René Descartes) argues that there are two kinds of substances: mental and physical. It implies that how the mind and brain interact is difficult to imagine. It is thus at the origin of the mind-body problem.

finally learn to understand the union of soul and body'.[43] Thus, when we consider life, consciousness, subjectivity and intentionality, we are talking about the human person, not the brain, which is a very special organ, but still only an organ.

In this sense, Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, both representatives of phenomenological philosophy, proposed supplementing the third-person perspective adopted by the natural sciences in general and by neuroscience in particular, in which humans and the brain are studied as objects.[44] According to phenomenological philosophy, this perspective, which excludes the aspects of life, subjectivity and intentionality, is responsible for the problems caused by the dichotomy between brain and mind. In contrast, the first-person ('we') and second-person ('you') perspectives, which imply a participatory relationship, complement the former approach by the study of the person as a living subject. By introducing the dual aspect of the body as object and subject, phenomenological philosophy attempts to avoid the duality between body and soul in contemporary theories of analytical philosophy of mind (see the previous section). In doing so, it pursues a holistic (non-dichotomous) approach to the concept of the soul. In this sense, it speaks of an 'embodied subjectivity' or a 'physical self'. In contrast, Scripture presents the human being as a 'functional unity' in a 'holistic dualism'. It is because of the biblical background, not phenomenological philosophy, that Stan Wallace speaks of humans as 'embodied souls'.[45] The approach of phenomenological philosophy can be summarized in the following simplified diagram.[46]

The double aspect of the person according to phenomenological philosophy



43 René Descartes, 'Letter to Elisabeth von der Pfalz, June 28, 1643', in *Philosophical Writings*, vol. 3, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). The quotation shows that Descartes was more nuanced than later philosophers thought Cartesian dualism to be.

44 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff; Boston: Kluwer, 1980); Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

45 Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds?* 20, 53, 175.

46 Cf. Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain*, 108, 113.

Brain and human flourishing

Having presented the two-tiered approach of analytical philosophy and the holistic approach of phenomenological philosophy to the relationship between brain and mind (and thus to the person), I conclude this overview with a reflection on the relation between the brain and human flourishing.

The study of the brain (neuroscience) has stimulated the development of many subdisciplines, some being combinations with related academic disciplines. Besides the major branches such as neurogenetics, neuroimmunology, neurolinguistics, neurophysiology and neuropsychology, a lesser-known discipline, neurotheology, has emerged. Due to space limitations, I will only briefly mention some aspects of the debate around this topic.

Neurotheology,[47] also known as 'neuroscience of religion' or 'spiritual neuroscience', uses neurobiological methods to investigate religious and spiritual feelings and behaviours. Therefore, neurotheology must be distinguished from psychology of religion, which examines the psychological prerequisites and processes involved in religious experience, thought, emotion and action.

Researchers in the field of neurotheology study correlations between neurobiological phenomena and religious and spiritual experiences. In 1975, Stephen Waxman and Norman Geschwind reported that patients with temporal lobe epilepsy developed marked changes in self-perception and behaviour, including intense religiosity ('hyperreligiosity').[48] In 1998, Vilaynur S. Ramachandran published behavioural experiments involving the same type of patients, in whom an increased physiological response had been observed specifically in response to words with religious content.[49] In 2002, Andrew B. Newberg used imaging techniques to gain a neuroscientific understanding of the meditation experience.[50] Michael Ferguson demonstrated through biomedical imaging that the periaqueductal grey, a region of the brain stem, is continuously active during religious and spiritual activities.[51] In contrast, Mario Beauregard purported to show that religious and spiritual experiences include several brain regions and not a single 'God spot'.[52] All these researchers observed correlations between neurobiological and mental processes.

Other studies examined the effects of spiritual formation on the brain. Beyond correspondence, they insist on the importance of neuroplasticity for spiritual formation. Notable contributors include the Christian psychiatrist Curt Thompson and

47 Aldous Huxley coined the term 'neurotheology' in his utopian novel *Island* (New York: Bantam, 1963). He described the discipline as a combination of cognitive neuroscience and spirituality. In 1994, Laurence O. McKinney published the first book on the subject, *Neurotheology: Virtual Religion in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: American Institute for Mindfulness, 1994).

48 Stephen Waxman and Norman Geschwind, 'The Interictal Behavior Syndrome of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy', *Archives of General Psychiatry* 32 (1975), 1580–86.

49 Vilaynur S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1998).

50 Andrew B. Newberg et al., *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002).

51 Michael Ferguson et al., 'A Neural Circuit for Spirituality and Religiosity Derived from Patients with Brain Lesions', *Biological Psychiatry* (29 June 2021).

52 Mario Beauregard, 'Neural Correlates of a Mystical Experience in Carmelite Nuns', *Neuroscience Letters* 405, no. 3 (25 September 2006): 186–90.

the Christian psychologist Jim Wilder.[53] Both emphasize attachment—healthy relationships with God and other people. They hold the view that neuroplasticity can be improved and promoted through our conscious behaviour, so that our neural connections correlate with joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (cf. the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23). These developments of neurotheology have been evaluated critically by philosopher and theologian Stan Wallace.[54]

When neurobiologists and psychologists emphasize the correspondence of neurobiological and mental processes, this does not mean that bio-electrical and biochemical processes are identical with thinking, feeling and loving. The brain does not think, feel or love. These are functions of the soul. The brain is only the mediating organ for these experiences of a person. Based on the different options of the relationship between brain and mind, it is easy to recognize in these researchers' positions either epiphenomenalism or interactive dualism. Thompson and Wilder consider spiritual fruit to be gained through the 'redirection of neurons', so-called neuroplasticity, a bottom-up influence which would account for epiphenomenalism. At other places, they suggest that fruit of the spirit can 'redirect neurons', a top-down influence which would fit with interactive dualism. Thus, their position is not very clear. They do not seem to be aware of the concept of holistic dualism and do not refer to holistic dualists in their discussion of what human beings are.[55]

When the relationship between body and mind is conceived without connection to each other, as Platonic and Cartesian dualism do, the problem of interaction between body and mind arises. However, when body and mind are seen in a functional unity and a holistic dualism—as Scripture does—the interaction seems rather natural. The immaterial can influence the material without us understanding exactly how. Jesus and Peter healed the sick through a simple word, or (in terms of communication theory) a speech act (Mk 1:34; Lk 9:42; Acts 9:34).

As opposed to Plato, Aristotle put forward the conception that things are composed of form and matter, which are intimately united; the immaterial form (essence) causes the matter to be what it is. This conception is called 'hylozoism' (from Greek *hylē*, 'matter', and *morphē*, 'form'). Later on, this concept was taken up by Stoic philosophy. Following Aristotle and Stoicism, Thomas Aquinas confirmed this causal relation from soul to body—that the body results from the soul. Thus, for Aristotle and Aquinas, the soul is what animates the body. One can therefore consider Aristotle's and Aquinas' hylozoism as a precursor of Cooper's and Wallace's holistic dualism, a special form of substance dualism.[56]

Based on Aristotle's and Aquinas' conception of body and soul, what can we say about the bottom-up and top-down influences between brain and personality? According to Roth's personality model, the influence is stronger from the bottom up

53 Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: SaltRiver, 2010); Jim Wilder, *Renovated: God, Dallas Willard, and the Church That Transforms* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2021).

54 Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds?*

55 Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds?* 162–63.

56 Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds?* 126–29.

than in the other direction (see the section 'Predominantly vegetative-affective functioning' above). However, Roth's position was that of epiphenomenalism when he conceived the model. This implies that he essentially described the neurobiological aspect of personality. When we introduce the person and the mind into the picture, top-down influences enter naturally into consideration. In the discussion of Libet's experiment above (see the section 'Largely unconscious functioning'), we have encountered the problem of free will. In this section, we run into the problem of human transformation and ethics, which are unthinkable without supposing conscious decision and free will. I conclude that human living, as we all experience it, is based not only on bottom-up but also on top-down influences, which imply the mind inducing actions in the body.

Concerning spiritual formation and human flourishing, Wallace proposes a middle way between Platonic/Cartesian dualist reduction to 'pure spirituality' and the physicalist reduction to shaping our brains, affirming both our ontological duality and functional unity.[57] Neuroplasticity does not produce human flourishing, but 'life with God' will result in abundant life (Ps 66:9 NJB; Jn 10:10). This process can be promoted through spiritual exercises, which in turn will stimulate neuroplasticity. Life with God thus lays the foundation for a fulfilling life and for the drive to help others flourish by seeking to meet the needs of both body and soul.

Synthesis

When we integrate insights from Scripture and science, epistemology challenges us to combine scientific data developed from a theistic perspective with critical realist theology. With this in mind, we have evaluated the findings of analytical philosophy, which proposes a model with a dichotomy between brain and mind, and compared them with phenomenological philosophy, which introduces a holistic approach with the person as an 'embodied self'. The brain does not think or feel, but these are functionalities of the person. The brain becomes the mediating organ for the person, in close and constant connection with the body and the outside world. In this contact with the outside world, the experiences that occur during the socialization of a person imprint an individual structure on the brain. However, there is no question of the outside world being a pure illusion, as idealism and subjectivism hold. Rather, the perception of the outside world is common to a number of people. It therefore cannot be entirely subjective. On this basis, we can conclude that the perception of the outside world is both subjective and objective, which corresponds to the epistemological position of critical realism. Human flourishing is not a function of neuroplasticity, but rather the result of an intimate relationship with God. Spiritual exercises can in turn induce neuroplasticity.

Critical evaluation in the light of Scripture

The Bible sees human beings as counterpart and image of the living God, with whom they are united in a covenant. Human beings are thus both subjects and responders, rooted in the network of relationships within the human community and in the covenant with God. In Hebrew culture, as in animistic cultures, the emotional, cognitive

57 Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds?* 171–75.

and volitional centre of human beings lies in the heart. This is not yet divided as it is in Greek culture, which has shaped Indo-European languages and cultures and created confusion regarding the concepts of the soul. From then on, in European languages and cultures, emotions were associated with the heart and the soul, and intellect with the head (brain) and the mind. Additionally, the soul refers to existence during the afterlife, which animistic cultures assign to the spirit double, while a spirit being—which could be a spirit double—is not associated with the soul but with the spirit. So there is a certain disorder and confusion.

The question arises, then, whether we should consider human beings as consisting of body and soul/spirit (dichotomy) or as comprising body, soul and spirit (trichotomy). On one hand, in a holistic biblical view, human beings form a unity: they do not have a soul but are a soul; they do not have a body but are a body. In view of the biblical synthetic and stereometric way of thinking, distinctions of the terms describing humans would then seem inappropriate. On the other hand, the duality of the material and immaterial aspects of humans is obvious. The marked distinctive semantic domains of 'soul' (*nēphēsh/psychē*) as the 'needy human being' and 'spirit' (*ruach/pneuma*) as the 'empowered human being' would seem to tend towards a trichotomy. Proponents of this view take an analytical approach and stress the opposition between divine influence through the Holy Spirit and human corruption with its sinful consequences on both body and soul. This view was historically held by Gnosticism and today by some branches of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, by some locally initiated churches on various continents, and in dominion and prosperity theology. As a proof-text, they often cite 1 Thessalonians 5:23 ('May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'). This view dismisses the Hebrew synthetic and stereometric thinking and its frequent use of synonyms (cf. Deut 6:5; Mt 22:37; Heb 4:12). Furthermore, mission history shows that the use of different terms for the immaterial aspect of humans is not justified.

The neurobiological processes of the brain constitute the material basis for the psyche, but the latter transcends these in the mental processes. The duality of man in body and spirit, which analytical philosophy and common sense indicate to us, is complemented by phenomenological philosophy through the holistic concept of 'embodied self'. In the same vein, biblical data suggest that humans are 'embodied souls'. In this line of thought, animism, Aristotle and Stoic philosophy—the latter two in the context of hylozoism—produced the analogous concept of the 'animated/living body'. On the other hand, however, we find the duality of body and spirit in the Bible: after man is created from matter, God breathes life into him to make him a living being (Gen 2:7).

Human beings must therefore live in this tension between the functional unity of an 'embodied person' or an 'animated body' and the duality of material body and immaterial spirit. They are an 'ontological duality' or a 'holistic dualism', as John Cooper, Stan Wallace and others suggest.[58] Scripture takes humanity seriously in all its dimensions. However, the debate about the precise conception of the specific holism of biblical anthropology and its formulation will continue due to this evident

58 Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life*, xvi, 36–80, 160–64, 194–96; Wallace, *Have We Lost Our Minds?* 126–29.

tension. As far as spiritual formation is concerned, Scripture says that an intimate relationship with God—not neuroplasticity—promotes personal development. Spiritual exercises can work through neuroplasticity to change behaviour patterns. But it does not work the other way around, as epiphenomenalists assume. The brain remains the mediating organ, not the cause.

A third aspect of humanity is its social character. According to Scripture, humans live in community with each other and with God, expressed in the different biblical covenants and the corporate personality and identity of the people of God. Neuroscience, for its part, has discovered, especially through the experiment conducted by Held and Hein, that the brain is formed and formatted through its discovery of and active motor participation in the outside world. The brain is thus the mediating organ of the person in relation to the outside world. One can conclude with phenomenological philosophy that the human being is a 'being-in-the-world', or a relational person. The Hasidic Jewish theologian Martin Buber expressed this through his 'I-Thou' formula.[59] This corresponds to the first- and second-person perspectives, which presuppose a relationship. Buber contrasts the 'I-Thou' formula with the 'I-It' formula, which reduces human beings to objects from a third-person perspective, as the natural sciences and neurosciences do. With these two formulas, Buber expresses the aforementioned tension between the holistic-relational and the analytical approaches to human existence.

Conclusion

What can we conclude? The terms 'soul' and 'spirit' describe the immaterial aspect of humans including functions such as thinking, feeling, character, will and conscience. This aspect is in constant relationship with their body (including the brain) and the outside world. In addition, the term 'heart', which appears frequently in the Bible, also encompasses all spiritual functions. However, following the split of the SEIC in Greek culture, the term has come to be colloquially limited to emotions—in addition, of course, to the anatomical description of the pumping organ. In contrast, today all mental functions are attributed to the brain.[60]

To simplify the complexities of anthropology, medicine and psychology refer to the bio-psycho-social model, which includes the body, the soul/spirit, and the relationship to the outside world (including persons and objects).[61] As we would expect, the spiritual dimension—God's spirit (*ruach/pneuma*) who is in constant communication and in intimate relationship with the human 'spirit' (*ruach/pneuma*) and vice versa—is absent from this secular model. Bible scholars describe the individual aspect of biblical anthropology with the expressions 'functional unity' and 'holistic dualism' to express the tension between the unity and the obvious duality of body and soul/spirit. These expressions combine a holistic and an analytical approach to the human person. According to the topic discussed and the worldview of a person, one or the other approach will be more in the forefront, but both of them are

59 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

60 Cf. Bernd Janowski, 'Das hörende Herz. Zum Personenverständnis in Israel und Ägypten', *Aegyptiaca* 3 (2018): 99–120 (99).

61 George L. Engel, 'The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine', *Science* 196 (1977), 129–36.

necessary to fully describe biblical anthropology. To include the social aspect, Bible scholars add the notion of 'corporate personality'.

When Europeans and North Americans do not use the terms 'soul' or 'spirit', does this imply that the soul does not exist? Not at all. The frequency of using a term or the number of terms available in a language does not determine whether a concept is present in a culture or not. According to a person's preference, she will name this entity as the soul, spirit, psyche, person or self. Even though people might not express themselves this way in their everyday language, they can happily join the psalmist and say, 'Praise the LORD, my soul!'

ERT (2026) 50:1, 27–40

Fire and Breath: A Global Portrait of Pentecostalism's Spirit-Empowered Mission

Richard Howell

Movements that last decentralize power, so discipleship travels at the speed of trust. Pentecostalism is a classic illustration, featuring small, reproducible communities with local leadership—and a global footprint of 680–700 million.[1] This vitality is best read through *fire and breath*, Scripture's images for God's living presence: fire that is holy, guiding and purifying (Ex 3:2; 13:21; Isa 6:6–7; Acts 2:3), and breath that gives life and renews by the Spirit (Gen 2:7; Ezek 37:9–10; Jn 20:22). Held together, fire and breath bind Spirit, church and mission into one reality; separated, fire becomes harsh zeal and breath becomes thin warmth in a wounded world.

This story also belongs to the wider map of world Christianity. The centre of Christianity has shifted decisively to the Global South, where African, Asian, Latin American, Pacific and Middle Eastern voices are no longer a footnote but central to the church's present and future—a return, in many ways, to Christianity's own roots.[2] Too often, the early story is narrated as mainly European, yet patristic study corrects the record: Africa formed Christian thought through Tertullian and Cyprian in Carthage, Athanasius and Cyril in Alexandria, and Augustine in Hippo;[3] Syriac Christianity, through Ephrem the Syrian and Isaac of Nineveh, adds poetry and ascetic wisdom beyond Greek and Latin prose.[4] Mission and translation in Armenia, Ethiopia, across Arabia and into Persia show a church learning to speak many tongues without losing its centre.[5] If our hermeneutics ignore this reality, unity remains rhetoric.

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1 Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, 'Status of Global Christianity, 2024, in the Context of 1900–2050', *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 48, no. 1 (January 2024): 28–29.

2 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2–5.

3 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 2–5.

4 Sebastian P. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 11–18.

5 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 3–15.

Before the fire fell on Azusa Street, the tinder was laid—patiently and prayerfully—across continents and decades. And when the Spirit's fire burns hot, what keeps it from flashing and fading?

A soil prepared in the 19th century

Pentecostalism did not begin in 1906 and burst fully formed onto Azusa Street. Its soil was prepared in the nineteenth century. Methodist holiness teaching spoke of a 'second blessing'.[6] Keswick spirituality urged deeper surrender and holy living.[7] Healing movements preached that the risen Christ meets bodies as well as souls. Together they raised expectations for post-conversion baptism in the Spirit—and for ordinary people to live as if God were truly near.[8]

In India, Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) carried that hope into public life. A pioneering Brahmin scholar and linguist who received Christ, she founded the Mukti Mission near Pune as a refuge for widows and girls abandoned by society.[9] What began as a home for the marginalized became a centre of prayer and revival. In 1905, the Mukti Revival ignited—marked by deep confession, tears of repentance, spontaneous prayer, and speaking in tongues.[10] The flame that began at Mukti became a forerunner of India's indigenous Pentecostal awakenings in the decades that followed.[11]

On 9 April 1906, worshippers gathered at a small mission on 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles testified to 'fire from heaven'.[12] Led by William J. Seymour, an African American holiness preacher, the revival broke out in a former livery stable where men and women, Black and white, prayed side by side. From the start, it was interracial and interdenominational—tongues, prophecy and healing joined a bold unity across class and colour. As Cecil M. Robeck Jr. observes, 'the colour line was washed away in the blood of Christ.'[13] The atmosphere was humble and unstructured: testimonies, songs, and spontaneous prayer replaced formal sermons. There were no printed orders of service—only an expectancy that the Spirit would lead. The revival's emphasis on the Spirit's immediacy made it an oral, participatory faith 'flexible and able to adapt',[14] capable of taking root across cultures without dependence on hierarchy or literacy. This laid the groundwork for global Pentecostalism. As

6 Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1980), 24–25.

7 Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 30.

8 Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 115–17.

9 Pandita Ramabai, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Rodgers, 1888), 5–7.

10 H. L. Richard, *Pandita Ramabai's American Encounter: The Peoples of the United States*, trans. Meera Kosambi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 112–14.

11 Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 73–74.

12 Vinson Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 97–99.

13 Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 4–7.

14 Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 18–20.

Harvey Cox observed, this renewal became 'the most democratic and transformative force in modern Christianity'.[15]

Enduring commitments

Spirit-empowered witness is not a programme but a people—alive with God's presence and moving in many shapes.

Christ-centred unity: a symphony, not a cacophony

Christ-centred unity resists a secular ecumenism that trims truth for convenience. It hears the church as a symphony—distinct voices held in harmony before the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit (Jn 17:21–23; Eph 4:4–6). This unity is a gift and a calling, anchored in truth, repentance and mission (Eph 2:14–18), seen in communities that pray, learn and serve together because Christ—not the lowest common denominator—is the centre.[16]

Contextualized mission that rejects one-size-fits-all

Incarnational mission refuses the convenience of one-size-fits-all. The Word became flesh and 'pitched his tent' among us (Jn 1:14); the *missio Dei* therefore wears local skin. Incarnation is not a slogan but a grammar: the gospel is translated—faithfully, not thinly—into the languages, loyalties and longings of a people.[17] Thus we reject a de-contextualized proclamation that floats above culture; like Paul, we 'become' for the sake of the other without diluting the gospel's cruciform centre (1 Cor 9:19–23).[18] The Spirit remains the primary missionary, directing timing and routes (Acts 13:1–3), while Pentecost's polyphony signals that God's reign does not erase tongues but sanctifies them (Acts 2:6–11)—a grace that reverses Babel and dignifies the vernacular.[19] When the Spirit moves, the church doesn't become a stage—it becomes a body where every member breathes, speaks and serves by grace.

Empowered to edify: charisms in everyday life

The *charismata* are the risen Christ's ministries shared with his body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4–7); they confess Jesus as Lord at the centre (1 Cor 12:3) and are given 'for the common good' (1 Cor 12:7). In Volf's terms, miracles and ministries are not merely didactic symbols; they witness to the materiality of salvation—God's redeeming work that embraces bodies and creation, not just souls. 'Behind the care of bodies', Volf writes, 'lies the conviction that the rebirth of persons who live in this

15 Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 81.

16 World Council of Churches, 'Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: Unity Statement', in *Proceedings of the Eleventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Karlsruhe, Germany, 31 August–8 September 2022* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2023), 1–6.

17 Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 23–24; cf. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 5–7.

18 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniv. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 126–28.

19 Craig S. Keener, 'Power of Pentecost: Luke's Missiology in Acts 1–2', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 19–21.

material world and who with this world make up God's good creation cannot be complete without the redemption of their bodies.'[20] This is why New-Testament signs are kingdom foretastes (Lk 4:18–19; Mt 12:28; Rom 8:18–25): healings, deliverance and shared praise are embodied indicators that new creation has already begun.[21] We represent in incomplete ways what God promises in full—the reconciliation and renewal of embodied persons within a renewed creation.

Why is this practical?

We do not copy Azusa or Mukti; we walk by the same Spirit in our streets and seasons. Let the Spirit shape habits (daily prayer and Scripture: Acts 2:42), structures (plural leadership and open-handed finance: Acts 20:28, 35), and speech (truth in love: Eph 4:15), so that worship stays warm and mission stays honest.

From method to habitat

If Pentecostal vitality is steadied by Christ-centred unity, contextual mission and living gifts, we must ask: how do we read Scripture so the fire stays pure and becomes a liveable house? The answer is symphonic hermeneutics—reading that moves from method to habitat.[22]

Method serves holiness. It offers disciplined lenses—textual, historical, literary, sociological, philosophical, justice-oriented—not as rival empires but as tools under Scripture's baton. Philology clarifies meaning; history situates voices; form reveals patterns; sociology uncovers habits; philosophy tests coherence; justice keeps the poor in view. Used with epistemic humility ('we know in part'), these lenses let the text address the church with clarity and grace (1 Cor 13:9–12).[23]

Habitat is a house you can live in. Thinking of the gospel as habitat makes it not a slogan but a home where God prepares a table (Ps. 23:5; Lk 24:30–32). It is where method becomes life: prayer (Lk 11:1–13), Scripture (2 Tim 3:16–17), table fellowship (Acts 2:42–47), shared service (Gal 6:2), confession (1 Jn 1:8–9), mentoring (2 Tim 2:2), and sending (Lk 24:47; Mt 28:19–20).

In this house, sermons become practice (Jas 1:22), songs teach truth (Col 3:16), stewardship stays transparent (2 Cor 8:20–21), and hospitality makes neighbours (Heb 13:2) as we inhale the Word and exhale love (1 Jn 3:18).[24]

Two frames and a fivefold ecology

From this lived centre, two frames guide our sight and a fivefold ecology sustains our steps.

20 Miroslav Volf, 'The Spirit and the Church', *Conrad Grebel Review* 18, no. 3 (2000): 38.

21 Miroslav Volf, 'Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no. 3 (1989): 447–67.

22 Richard Howell: *Fire and Breath: Symphonic Hermeneutics for Mission: From Method to Habitat and a Five Fold Ecology* (Haryana, India: Caleb Institute Publication, 2025), 9.

23 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 100.

24 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 18–20.

Two frames: history locates, kingdom orients

'History locates' means that we ask what the text meant among real peoples, powers and places (Neh 8:8; Lk 1:1–4; Acts 17:11). Following that, 'kingdom orients' implies that we ask how the crucified-risen Lord reorders desire, duty and hope now (Lk 24:44–49; Rom 14:17; Rev 21:1–5). Together, these frames ensure that exegesis lands in discipleship and public witness, not just in papers or pulpits (Jas 1:22–25).

Fivefold ecology: reading and living the word

1. The Spirit animates (2 Tim 3:16–17; Jn 14:26; 2 Cor 3:6). The Spirit who inspired Scripture now makes it live among us—turning reading into repentance, courage and hope—and reshapes us into Christ's likeness. In this work, we also share God's own life, becoming 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet 1:4; cf. Jn 15:5).

2. The Word regulates (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 2:15; Heb 4:12; Mt 4:4). All insights, impressions and practices are tested by the text. Scripture sets the melody; the Spirit teaches us how to play it in season.

3. Love motivates (1 Tim 1:5; Lk 4:18–19; Mic 6:8). The telos of interpretation is love—moving us towards freedom, healing, justice and neighbour-care, especially for the least.

4. Community discerns (Acts 15:6–28). Reading is shared work: many voices weigh and test; leaders submit one to another; corrections are welcomed; the vulnerable are heard (Jas 2:1–5).

5. Creative disruption reshapes (Joel 2:28; Jer 1:10; Mk 2:22; Acts 17:6). The Spirit unsettles unjust habits and invites bold, practical steps towards God's new future—tearing down what harms and planting what heals.

Six missional principles

Across the global Pentecostal movement, six Scripture-rooted missional principles mirror the Nicene marks (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) in a polyphonic, contextual key.

1. Spirit-empowered experience (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 12:7–11; Mk 16:17–18). The journey begins with a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit, where gifts such as healing, tongues and deliverance testify to God's presence, especially in contexts of persecution.[25]

2. Fictive-kinship community (Acts 2:42–47; Gal 3:28; Rom 12:13). In the Spirit, all believers become family across race, caste, class and background—sharing worship, meals, and mutual care, thereby embodying the Kingdom's social reality and transcending societal divisions.[26]

3. Culturally fluent witness (1 Cor 9:22; Acts 2:6–11; Rev 7:9). Pentecostal witness speaks the heart-language of its hearers, indigenizing worship while remaining globally connected.[27]

25 Allan Heaton Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 14–15, 32.

26 Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 156–60.

27 Craig S. Keener, 'Power of Pentecost: Luke's Missiology in Acts 1–2', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 59.

4. Eschatological hope (Rom 8:18–25; 2 Cor 4:17; Rev 21:1–4). Suffering is reframed as part of God's redemptive plan, fuelling courage to plant churches and proclaim Christ amid hostility.[28]

5. Prophetic imagination and discernment (Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:17; 1 Cor 14:3, 29). Dreams, visions and prophetic words equip ordinary believers to address injustice and navigate crises with Spirit-given wisdom, by speaking God's transformative word into concrete situations.[29]

6. Holistic compassion and social uplift (Lk 4:18–19; Jas 2:15–17; Mt 25:35–40). Worship overflows into tangible acts of mercy—feeding the hungry, educating the poor, and healing the sick—and thereby makes the kingdom visible.[30]

Together, these renew the church for embodied witness of God's Kingdom in history. A Spirit-empowered church turns theology into a habitat where the Word becomes flesh again, week by week, table by table, life by life.

The honeybee model in North India: a case study

Pentecostal witness in North India often reflects the 'honeybee' model—family-rooted, relational and indigenous—as was vividly demonstrated in my own family. Daisy Howell's miraculous healing sparked a grassroots revival that birthed house fellowships and the Evangelical Church of God. Breaking caste barriers, empowering women and nurturing local leaders, the Howell home became a centre of prayer, hospitality and Spirit-led worship. Amid poverty and resistance, this network embodied John Webster's[31] view of Christianity in North-west India as locally rooted and Spirit-empowered, illustrating how Pentecostal interpretation sustains resilience, mission and transformation.

In early January 1965,[32] Daisy Howell, a respected Catholic nurse, lay gravely ill with vertigo in House 339 C, Firozpur Cantt Railway Colony. Though she was known for her good character, the Howells' faith lacked spiritual depth. Daisy often read from an Urdu New Testament, yet her walk with God remained nominal. As medical treatments failed and the parish priest administered last rites repeatedly, her room became a place of desperate intercession—foreshadowing the *Spirit-empowered experience* that was to come.

One evening, P. D. Benjamin,[33] a retired Christian *sadhu*, was sent by a Hindu station master to pray for Daisy—an unlikely interfaith encounter that hints at the *culturally fluent witness* shaping this story. As Benjamin prayed, Daisy was instantly healed, marking a decisive turning point in North Indian Pentecostal history. This

28 Wonsuk Ma, 'Pentecostal Eschatology', in *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Russell P. Spittler (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 47–48.

29 Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 203–5.

30 Eldin Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 95–97.

31 John C. B. Webster, *A Social History of Christianity in North-west India since 1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 200, 299–300.

32 Rahul Gill, 'A Study of Christian Mission and Its Impact in the Ferozepore District, Punjab' (MTh dissertation, Caleb Institute, Farrukh Nagar, Haryana, India, 2020), 25.

33 Webster, *A Social History of Christianity in North-west India*, 300.

healing did not remain a private blessing; it became the seed of public testimony. I (Daisy's youngest son) invited Benjamin to stay, and the Howell home quickly became a daily gathering place for worship, prayer and revival—embodying the *fictive-kinship community* where believers shared life across social and religious boundaries.

Benjamin's Spirit-filled preaching led all seven members of the Howell family to surrender their lives to Christ. Soon afterwards, Daisy was dramatically baptized in the Holy Spirit during a tarrying meeting. This encounter transformed House 339 C into a true Upper Room, alive with prayer, prophecy and vision—an expression of *prophetic imagination and discernment*, challenging social norms and envisioning a Spirit-shaped future.

On 31 January 1965,[34] the family, along with two others, was baptized in the Sutlej River. This public act of obedience not only declared their personal salvation but also signalled *eschatological hope*, reframing suffering in light of the coming kingdom. The ongoing life of the fellowship overflowed into acts of mercy and service—early signs of *holistic compassion and social uplift*, as worship naturally translated into caring for neighbours, feeding the hungry, and extending Christ's love in tangible ways.

Hospital as a holy place

After baptism, Daisy's first mission field was her hospital ward. She returned to duty and testified, 'I've been healed through prayer.' Her officer dismissed it as psychological, but the vertigo never returned. Healing steadied her body; the Spirit steadied her voice. The shy nurse began speaking simply of Christ's mercy, and patients started asking for prayer. As matron, she moved from bed to bed with integrity and gentle excellence, sometimes praying or singing in Hindi. Work offered to God became worship, and the hospital became a holy place where daily care turned into public witness.

Expansion and institutional roots

In 1967, Daisy began weekly walks to Bharat Nagar, a marginalized Firozpur settlement of mostly Dalit daily-wage families, with Christians, Hindus and Sikhs living side by side. She encountered poverty, caste exclusion and fragile livelihoods, yet also resilience. Her work sought to affirm dignity, awaken creativity and build solidarity among those long overlooked.

After reading a book discouraging women from preaching, Daisy searched Scripture with her family and, led by the Spirit, affirmed women's call to preach and teach. Her arguments were that creation names men and women as equally image-bearing (Gen 1:26–27); redemption offers equal salvation (Jn 3:16; 1 Cor 15:2–4); and calling gives equal Spirit-empowerment (Acts 2:17–18; 1 Cor. 12:7). The first believing household became the base for an all-female indigenous outreach across Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Her team ministered in Dalhousie, Gurdaspur and Manali.[35]

34 Webster, *A Social History of Christianity in North-west India*, 300.

35 Shakuntala John, video interview by Dorthy John, Bharat Nagar Church, 18 August 2024.

Ordained at Doon Bible College, Rev. D. J. Howell embodied the priesthood of all believers by washing members' feet before communion—shattering caste hierarchy and declaring all people equal in Christ. With Daisy and David Howell, believers built a 125-seat church. From here grew education, women's training and family enterprises. The Evangelical Church of God (registered in 1977 in Ludhiana, Punjab, as part of the Council of Evangelical Churches of India) kept honeybee ways—small neighbourhood fellowships multiplying through prayer and hospitality.

This pattern is echoed around the world in various ways. African Independent Churches, [36] Latin American base communities, [37] Korea's Yoido Full Gospel Church[38] and SaRang Community Church,[39] and Punjab's Ankur Narula Ministries (Church of Signs and Wonders)[40] exhibit a Pentecostal ecology where God's presence multiplies wherever believers gather.

Hallmarks of the Pentecostal movement: a framed analysis

Latin American Pentecostalism: Spirit, culture and community

A similar grassroots, adaptive dynamic appears in Latin American Pentecostalism, which has grown less through formal institutions than through neighbourhood congregations, lay testimony, healing practice and networks of everyday care among the urban poor and working classes. Contemporary scholarship shows that it is not merely a religious import but a local formation in which Pentecostal theology is reworked under the pressures of poverty, migration, political instability and the enduring presence of Catholicism.[41] Its public character is also significant. Recent studies indicate that Pentecostal life in Latin America often extends beyond private piety into questions of citizenship, dignity and public participation, especially in marginal urban spaces such as Brazil's favelas.[42]

At the same time, its strengths carry tensions. The ritual and affective vitality of Pentecostal worship—testimony, music, healing, prayer and embodied spirituality—have given many communities a language of hope and agency, yet scholars warn that this vitality can be compromised when spiritual warfare eclipses structural analysis, or when prosperity teaching turns poverty into a moral failure of the poor.[43] Gender remains another unresolved contradiction: women often sustain congregational life as evangelists, prayer leaders, healers and organizers, but their authority

36 Harold W. Turner, *History of an African Independent Church*, vol. 1: *The Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

37 Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 3–4.

38 David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1987), 45–47.

39 Hyejin Choi, 'Seoul's SaRang Church'. *Journal of Korean Studies* 25, no. 2 (2020): 279–309.

40 Ashwani Sharma, 'Miracle Ministries: The Story of Pastor Ankur Narula', *Outlook India*, 25 July 2024, https://outlookindia.com/national/miracle-ministries-the-story-of-pastor-ankur-narula.

41 René A. Tec-López, 'Between the Religious and the Secular: Latin American Neo-Pentecostalism in a Context of Multiple Modernities', *Religions* 15, no. 11 (2024): 1323.

42 Martijn Oosterbaan, 'Rights and Stones: Pentecostal Autoconstruction and Citizenship in Rio de Janeiro', *Space and Culture* 26, no. 2 (2023): 253–67.

43 Wladimir Muñoz-Henríquez and Josep Esquirol, 'The Spirit Is within Us! Ritual Practices of Latin American Pentecostals in Barcelona', *Religions* 13, no. 6 (2022): 501.

is not always matched by formal recognition.[44] Even so, Latin American Pentecostalism remains a clear example of how a global Christian movement can become culturally rooted.

Hallmark	Expressions	Critical Tensions
Spirit and liberation[45]	Prayer campaigns against oppression; participation in favela or neighbourhood-level civic initiatives; prophetic denunciation of injustice	Risk of focusing solely on spiritual warfare without addressing structural causes of poverty and inequality
Hybrid liturgy[46]	Use of maracas, tambourines, and *corinhos* (short choruses) in worship	Balancing creative inculturation with theological clarity, avoiding syncretism
Prosperity narratives[47]	'Seed-faith' offerings promising *vida abundante* (abundant life)	Guarding against exploitation of the poor and shifting blame onto individuals for systemic poverty
Female leadership[48]	Women as evangelists, healers and prophets in grassroots ministries	Overcoming patriarchal resistance within church structures
Community solidarity[49]	Mutual aid networks, food distribution and job support	Sustaining social action without losing evangelistic focus

African Pentecostalism: holistic faith and indigenous dynamism

African Pentecostalism shows many of the same strengths and strains seen in Latin America, but in a different historical and cultural setting. Emerging out of missionary Christianity, African revival movements and local spiritual worlds, it has developed a form of faith that is practical, communal and spiritually immediate. It does not separate salvation from healing, deliverance, family welfare, work or social belonging. For that reason, African Pentecostalism often speaks powerfully to ordinary people facing sickness, unemployment, insecurity and social fragmentation. At the same time, scholars note that its closeness to lived realities creates tensions: the line between contextualization and syncretism can become blurred, prosperity teaching can exploit economic desperation, and rapid church growth is not always matched by theological depth, accountability or gender justice.[50]

In this sense, African Pentecostalism may be described as holistic faith and indigenous dynamism: holistic because it addresses the whole of life rather than only

44 Anne M. Hallum, 'Taking Stock and Building Bridges: Feminism, Women's Movements, and Pentecostalism in Latin America', *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 1 (2003): 165–86.

45 Raúl E. Zegarra, 'The Preferential Option of the Poor: Liberation Theology, Pentecostalism, and the New Forms of Sacralization', *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 64, no. 1 (2023): 1–30.

46 Marius Nel, 'Introduction to Syncretism and Pentecostalism in the Global South', *Religions* 15, no. 6 (2024): 636.

47 Virginia Garrard-Burnett, 'Neo-Pentecostalism and Prosperity Theology in Latin America: A Religion for Late Capitalist Society', *Iberoamericana: Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 42, nos. 1–2 (2012): 21–34;

48 Hallum, 'Taking Stock and Building Bridges'.

49 Hallum, 'Taking Stock and Building Bridges'; Zegarra, 'The Preferential Option of the Poor'.

50 Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, 'An Indigenous Force of Pentecostalism in Africa: Indigenous Knowledge System Approach to Decolonization', *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 9, no. 11 (2023): 520–31.

the soul, and indigenous because it has not simply copied Western Pentecostal forms but has been reshaped through African languages, symbols, spiritual expectations and community patterns of life. Its great contribution is that it has made Christianity feel near, meaningful and spiritually alive for millions. Its continuing challenge is to preserve that vitality while strengthening biblical discernment, ethical responsibility and theological formation.[51]

Hallmark	Expressions	Critical Tensions
Spirit em–powerment[52]	Emphasis on Spirit baptism, prophecy, tongues, fervent prayer and bold preaching as marks of a living Christian experience	Balancing deep discipleship, ethical maturity and the fruit of the Spirit with the excitement of visible supernatural manifestations
Healing and deliverance[53]	Public healing crusades, deliverance from spiritual oppression, testimony-centred evangelism, and prayer for protection against evil powers	Risk of sensationalism, manipulation, weak discernment, and inadequate pastoral or psychological follow-up
Holistic mission[54]	Integration of evangelism with education, health care, poverty alleviation, rehabilitation and community development	Maintaining Christ-centred witness while engaging broad social programmes without losing theological clarity
Prosperity and hope[55]	Faith-linked teaching on blessing, dignity, mobility, breakthrough and overcoming deprivation	Avoiding exploitation, commercialization of faith, and prosperity reductionism that treats poverty as mainly personal failure
Contextual worship[56]	Indigenous music, local languages, rhythmic prayer, song, dance, testimony, oral preaching, and call-and-response forms adapted to African cultural settings	Balancing cultural authenticity and accessibility with biblical depth and theological discernment
Charismatic leadership[576]	Strong visionary founders, prophetic authority, translocal networks and highly personalized leadership structures	Guarding against authoritarianism, celebrity culture, weak succession planning and lack of accountability
Global mission vision[58]	Church planting across Africa, migrant and diaspora congregations, and 'reverse mission' into Europe and other regions	Maintaining theological coherence, cross-cultural sensitivity and adequate missionary formation in new settings

51 Ezra Chitando, 'African Scholars and African Pentecostalism: Achievements, Challenges and Possible New Directions', in *African Pentecostalism from African Perspectives*, vol. 2: *Themes*, ed. Ezra Chitando, Lovemore Togarasei and Loreen Maseno (Cham: Springer, 2024), 215–38.

52 Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, 'Spirit Baptism and the Doctrine of Initial Evidence in African Pentecostal Christianity: A Critical Analysis', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020).

53 Nicodimus Sande, 'African Diaspora Pentecostals' Deliverance Practices and Lived Tensions in the United Kingdom', *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5, no. 16 (2024): 3057–66.

54 Francis Benyah, 'Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches and the Provision of Social Services in Ghana', *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 38, no. 1 (2020): 1–15.

55 Daniel Jordan Smith, 'The Pentecostal Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria: Paradoxes of Corruption and Inequality', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 59, no. 1 (2021): 103–22.

56 Victor Ugochukwu Iheanacho, 'The Significance of African Oral Tradition in the Making of African Christianity', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 6819.

57 Daniel O. Orogun, 'Hybrid Leadership in African Neo-Pentecostalism', *Religions* 14, no. 5 (2023).

58 Phillip Musoni, 'Migrant Churches and Reverse Mission: Missiological Gaps and Missionary Trap', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 46, no. 3 (2025).

Asian Pentecostalism: revival, resilience, and contextual mission

Asian Pentecostalism, like its African counterpart, is marked by spiritual intensity joined to practical engagement with daily life, yet it has developed under very different civilizational and political pressures. Shaped by ancient religious cultures, indigenous revival currents, migration, urbanization, and in some places state restriction, it has taken root in settings as varied as South Korea's megachurch world, India's healing- and testimony-shaped ministries, and China's house-church and charismatic networks. Contemporary scholars note that its appeal lies partly in this ability to hold together fervent prayer, healing, evangelism and Spirit-led worship with education, media, charity and other forms of holistic mission. At the same time, the movement faces serious tensions: prosperity teaching can become captive to consumer culture, rapid growth can outpace theological formation, and contextual adaptation can drift into confusion if discernment is weak. In more tightly controlled settings, Pentecostal and charismatic communities also have to negotiate surveillance, legal restrictions and the limits imposed by dominant religious or political systems.[59]

For that reason, Asian Pentecostalism may be described as a form of revivalist faith under pressure: revivalist because it stresses conversion, healing, the gifts of the Spirit, and bold witness; under pressure because it must constantly respond to plural religious worlds, nationalist politics, economic change and uneven degrees of freedom. Its major strength has been its flexibility. It has shown an unusual capacity to indigenize worship, mobilize lay believers and connect spiritual experience with social need. Its continuing challenge is to preserve that vitality without surrendering theological depth, ecclesial accountability and a clearly Christ-centred public witness.[60]

Hallmark	Expressions	Critical Tensions
Indigenous revival roots[61]	Movements such as the Korean Yoido Full Gospel Church, the Indian Mukti Revival as a formative indigenous stream, and the Filipino El Shaddai movement show that Asian Pentecostalism did not simply copy Western models but took shape through local revival energies, social need and indigenous spiritual sensibilities.	Balancing indigenous spirituality and contextual resonance with biblical orthodoxy and theological discernment
Prayer and fasting[62]	Dawn prayer, all-night vigils and extended fasting practices in Korea, India and Southeast Asia have functioned as engines of revival, healing expectation and communal solidarity.	Avoiding legalism, spiritual performance or the idea that divine action can be mechanically secured through ascetic effort

59 Connie Au, 'Globalization and Asian Pentecostalism in the Twenty-First Century', *Pneuma* 42, nos. 3–4 (2020): 500–520.

60 Au, 'Globalization and Asian Pentecostalism', 503–17.

61 Dave Johnson, 'Pentecostal Spirituality and Traditional Religious Practices in the Philippines', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 28, no. 1 (2025): 55–69.

62 Julie C. Ma, "Influence of Pentecostal Spirituality to Asian Christianity," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 23, no. 2 (2020): 107–22.

Hallmark	Expressions	Critical Tensions
Healing and deliverance[63]	Miracles, exorcism, testimony and prayer for release from spiritual oppression remain central evangelistic and pastoral tools in many Asian Pentecostal settings.	The need for discernment, ethical safeguards and pastoral care so that deliverance ministries do not become manipulative, psychologically harmful or theologically shallow
Persecution resilience[64]	Pentecostal and charismatic communities have continued to grow under pressure in China, India and some Muslim-majority settings, often through flexible house-church, migrant or informal networks.	Navigating surveillance, legal restriction and social hostility while preserving mission, unity and public credibility
Holistic mission[65]	Evangelism is often linked with schools, clinics, media, disaster response, women's uplift, poverty alleviation and other forms of practical care.	Risk of NGO-ization, where development work overshadows proclamation, discipleship and the specifically Christ-centred character of mission
Megachurch growth[66]	Large congregations such as Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea, Calvary Temple in India and major Singaporean charismatic churches show the organisational reach of Asian Pentecostalism.	Risk of over-centralized authority, celebrity leadership, weak accountability and the spread of prosperity-shaped ecclesiology
Contextual worship[67]	Local music, vernacular language, testimony, rhythmic prayer, indigenous art forms and culturally resonant ritual patterns are often woven into worship and preaching.	Balancing cultural adaptation and accessibility with theological clarity, biblical depth and protection against syncretism

Western Pentecostalism: revivalist heritage in a postmodern world

Western Pentecostalism may be described as revivalist heritage in a postmodern world. Born in the industrial settings of North America and Europe, it inherited the classic Pentecostal stress on conversion, Spirit baptism, healing, testimony and evangelistic urgency. Yet in the 21st century it no longer functions within a culturally Christian environment. It now lives in societies marked by secularization, pluralism, migration, digital mediation and suspicion of inherited authority. Contemporary scholars note that this has pushed Western Pentecostalism in two directions at once: towards renewed stress on experience, embodiment, worship and community as responses to postmodern fragmentation; and towards reflection on theological education, public witness, race, politics and institutional accountability.[68]

Its strength remains what it has long been: the capacity to make Christian faith feel immediate, experiential and socially alive where formal religion often appears

63 Au, 'Globalization and Asian Pentecostalism in the Twenty-First Century'.

64 Evan Liu, 'Impacts of Pentecostalism on Modern China's Christianity', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 28, no. 2 (2025): 209–27.

65 Ma, 'Influence of Pentecostal Spirituality to Asian Christianity', 107–22.

66 'Pentecostalism in Singapore: History, Adaptation and Future', in *Asia Pacific Pentecostalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

67 Febriani, 'Cultural Contextualization in Javanese Christian Missions', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 28, no. 1 (2025): 71–87.

68 U-Wen Low, 'A Brief Survey of the Pentecostal Tradition through a Postcolonial Optic', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 24, no. 3 (2024): 297–315.

cold or exhausted. That is one reason why Pentecostal and charismatic forms continue to attract migrants, younger believers and those seeking spiritual intensity beyond inherited church structures. At the same time, the movement's weaknesses have become sharper in the West. Charismatic authority can harden into celebrity culture; anti-intellectual tendencies can weaken theological formation; prosperity rhetoric can mirror consumer capitalism; and some sectors, especially in the United States, have become entangled with nationalist politics in ways that threaten the gospel's credibility. In Europe, the challenge is different: Pentecostalism often grows through migrant and diaspora churches and must learn to witness faithfully in societies where secular public norms are strong and Christianity is treated as one option among many.[69]

For that reason, Western Pentecostalism today is not simply a survival of Azusa Street in a new century. It is a movement negotiating post-Christendom conditions. Its major opportunity lies in recovering its best inheritance—Spirit-filled worship, prayer, testimony, mission and lay participation—while deepening theological seriousness, resisting political capture and learning to speak credibly in plural democratic societies. Its central test is whether revivalist energy can mature into wise discipleship, public integrity and witness that is both Spirit-led and intellectually responsible. .[70]

Hallmark	Expressions	Critical Tensions
Revivalist heritage[71]	Emphasis on Spirit baptism, tongues, healing and evangelism rooted in holiness and revivalist theology	Maintaining historic Pentecostal distinctives while adapting to postmodern and secularized contexts
Charismatic worship[72]	Contemporary praise music, prophetic ministry, embodied participation and open, affective services	Balancing spontaneity with liturgical depth and avoiding worship shaped mainly by performance or emotional management
Denominational diversity[73]	Assemblies of God, Church of God (Cleveland), Pentecostal Holiness, Foursquare and a wide field of independent and networked churches	Maintaining unity amid theological, organizational, racial and cultural diversity
Charismatic renewal[74]	Spirit baptism, healing and charisms integrated into Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and other historic churches	Navigating tensions with inherited liturgy, sacramental theology and ecclesial order

69 Nicholas Saiya, 'The Varieties of American Christian Nationalism', *Politics and Religion* 18, no. 2 (2025): 171–89.

70 Haldun Gülalp, 'Secularism as a Human Right: Learning from the European Court of Human Rights', *Frontiers in Sociology* 9 (2024): 1–2, 8–9.

71 Mark J. Cartledge, 'Pentecostal Theological and Higher Education: From Tensions to Opportunities', *Pneuma* 46, nos. 3–4 (2024): 345–66.

72 Martina Björkander, *Worship, Ritual, and Pentecostal Spirituality-as-Theology: A Rhythm That Connects Our Hearts with God* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 37–81, 219–46.

73 David D. Daniels III, 'Future of North American Pentecostalism: Contemporary Diasporas, New Denominationalism, Inclusive Racial Politics, and Post-Secular Sensibilities', *Pneuma* 42, nos. 3–4 (2020): 395–414.

74 John Maiden, 'Potential', in *Age of the Spirit: Charismatic Renewal, the Anglo-World, and Global Christianity, 1945–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 21–49.

Hallmark	Expressions	Critical Tensions
Media and technology[75]	Christian television, livestreaming, podcasts, digital worship and music industries extending Pentecostal reach	Risk of commercialization, mediated intimacy, branded religion and celebrity culture
Social engagement[76]	Disaster relief, urban ministries, community transformation and advocacy for religious freedom and public witness	Engaging public life without losing prophetic independence or collapsing into partisan alignment

Across these diverse regions, some Pentecostal congregations continue to become megachurches, extending influence globally via scale, media and networks, yet also grappling with the tensions of visibility.

Conclusion

Pentecostal growth is not first a matter of technique, scale or headcount but of fire and breath: the holy presence of the Spirit who purifies, guides and gives life. Where that presence is received, the church becomes a habitat of the gospel, where faith is embodied table by table and week by week. Worship becomes expectancy, Scripture becomes formation, fellowship becomes shared life, and leadership becomes burden-bearing service.

From kitchens to prison cells to city gatherings, Pentecostal discipleship often moves at the speed of trust, as power is decentralized and gifts are released among ordinary believers. Here mission is not a separate programme but the outward movement of the same Spirit-shaped life: the Word proclaimed, mercy practised, justice pursued and strangers welcomed. In this way, communities become living parables of the Kingdom in their own language and place.

Pentecostalism's enduring significance lies not merely in its size or spread but in its capacity to make Christian faith lived, shared and visible in ordinary life. Across continents, it has shown unusual power to join prayer with mission, worship with witness, and spiritual experience with social need. Its growth, however, depends on whether that vitality is matched by theological depth, ethical seriousness and accountable discipleship. At its best, Pentecostalism remains a Spirit-empowered form of Christian life that brings the gospel near to people, cultures and communities in ways that are both local and global.

75 Frederich O. Lontoh and Daniel A. Wibowo, 'Digital Pentecostalism in Indonesia', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2025).

76 Ulrik Josefsson and Barry Saylor, 'Introduction', *Pentecostal Education* 6, no. 2 (2021): 95–101.

ERT (2026) 50:1, 41–52

Through the Waters: Baptism and the Eschatological Fulfilment of Scripture's Redemptive Arc

Jonathan Corrado

Water is the most elemental substance of life—coursing through rivers, saturating soil and sustaining every living organism. Its molecular simplicity belies its complexity: it dissolves, nourishes, cleanses and renews. Scientists regard it as a precondition for biological existence, while theologians and poets have long seen in it a symbol of transformation and mystery. Yet Scripture elevates water beyond metaphor or necessity. From the Spirit hovering over the primordial deep (Gen 1:2) to the sea of glass before God's throne (Rev 4:6), water functions as a theological medium through which God creates, judges, purifies and redeems.[1]

This paper argues that baptism is best understood as the believer's embodied participation in the Spirit's redemptive arc, traced through water from creation to consummation. Methodologically, I employ a canonical biblical-theological approach, reading Scripture as a unified narrative in which earlier texts are interpreted in light of later revelation. I draw particularly on typology, understood not as allegorical speculation but as historically grounded patterns of divine action that find fulfilment in Christ and the life of the church. The analysis is further shaped by a pneumatological lens, tracing the consistent association of water and Spirit across Scripture, and by sacramental theology insofar as it attends to the material means through which God acts. While historical-critical insights inform the discussion, the primary aim is theological synthesis rather than source analysis or confessional polemic. This essay does not attempt a full sacramental theology, denominational defence or exhaustive doctrinal debate; rather, it offers a biblical-theological tracing of water's role across Scripture, culminating in baptism as the moment of divine transformation.

While baptism has been widely interpreted through creation, exodus and resurrection motifs, comparatively little attention has been given to its eschatological completion within Scripture's theology of water. Studies often trace baptism back to

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1 G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 602–8. See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 66–80, on Eden's rivers as temple-waters flowing from God's presence; and J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 45–52, on creation waters as a theological frame for God's dwelling with humanity.

the flood, the Red Sea or the Jordan River, yet rarely forward to Revelation's vision of the sea of glass as the telos of redemptive water imagery. This study argues that without this eschatological horizon, baptism risks being interpreted primarily as an initiatory rite rather than as participation in a redemptive arc that culminates in cosmic stillness and peace. By situating baptism between Genesis' chaotic deep and Revelation's crystal sea, I reframe baptism not only as a beginning but as an anticipation of creation's final transformation.

Baptism is not merely a symbolic act or ecclesial rite; it is the believer's lived enactment in a redemptive arc that spans from Genesis to Revelation. In this arc, water is not incidental; it is purposeful. It carries the weight of divine action: separating chaos from order, cleansing impurity, sustaining life and bearing witness to God's covenantal promises. Baptism, then, is the moment when the Spirit who hovered over the waters of creation indwells the believer through the waters of new creation.[2]

To develop this thesis, the paper traces water's theological significance across key biblical moments—creation, the flood, the Red Sea, Jesus' baptism, and the promise of living water—culminating in the believer's baptism and its eschatological fulfilment.[3] Alongside this canonical trajectory, I draw on ecological theology and sacramental reflection to affirm the theological dignity of water as part of God's good creation. The same water that sustains ecosystems and civilizations is the water through which God enacts spiritual renewal.[4] Its physical properties—such as cohesion, surface tension and cyclical movement—echo theological themes of preservation, transformation and divine presence.[5]

This approach integrates biblical typology, pneumatology, and ecological theology to trace the theological significance of water across Scripture. The following sections develop this framework by examining key moments in the biblical narrative—creation, the flood, the Exodus, Jesus' baptism, and the promise of living water—showing how each contributes to a unified account that culminates in baptism and its eschatological fulfilment.[6]

This article is a sequel to my previous study on the Lord's Supper, 'The Missing Cup: Covenant Fulfilment and Eucharistic Transformation in the Passover Tradition', which appeared in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* last year. Together, these two essays examine the twin ordinances commonly recognized within Protestant

2 James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 23–30, and Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 857–62, both highlight baptism as the Spirit's indwelling, marking entry into new creation life. See also David F. Wright, 'Baptism: Theological and Historical Perspectives', in *Baptism: Three Views*, ed. David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 13–28.

3 Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 17–24, and N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 140–50, both emphasize typology as pattern-recognition in salvation history, linking Israel's water crossings to Christian baptism.

4 Norman Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 112–18.

5 Michael J. Bozack, 'Physics in the Theological Seminary', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 1 (1993): 65–76.

6 Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 89–95.

theology—communion and baptism—in similar fashion. Whereas my first article focused on the covenantal redefinition of wine at the Table, the present article turns to water as the medium through which the Spirit enacts creation, judgement, renewal and eschatological peace.

The Spirit and the waters of creation (Genesis 1:2)

The opening verses of Genesis present a world not yet formed, a cosmos suspended in potential. 'The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters' (Gen 1:2).[7] This image of the Spirit hovering over the chaotic deep is not one of conflict but of anticipation. This observation does not deny that the waters represent formlessness or instability; rather, it rejects the mythological notion of hostile chaos opposing God. The waters are unstructured, not adversarial—raw creation awaiting divine ordering. Unlike ancient Near Eastern creation myths—such as the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, where creation emerges from violent conquest over watery chaos—the Genesis account depicts God's Spirit as sovereign, brooding over the waters in peaceful authority.[8] Water, in this context, is not an enemy to be subdued but a canvas awaiting divine artistry.

The Hebrew verb used for 'hovering' (רָחַף, *rachaf*) evokes the image of a bird fluttering protectively over its young, suggesting intentionality, care and preparation for life.[9] This maternal imagery reappears in Deuteronomy 32:11, where God is likened to an eagle hovering over its nest. In Genesis, the Spirit's presence over the waters signals not only the beginning of creation but the pattern of divine transformation that will unfold throughout Scripture. Water is the medium through which God brings order from chaos, life from barrenness, and purpose from formlessness.

This theological pattern—Spirit over water, followed by creation—establishes the foundational arc that baptism fulfils. At the Jordan River, the Spirit again descends, this time not over primordial waters but over the incarnate Son, inaugurating a new creation (Mt 3:16–17). The same Spirit who hovered over the deep now rests upon Christ, marking the beginning of His redemptive mission. This typological link between Genesis and the Gospels reveals that baptism is the continuation of God's creative and redemptive work through water and Spirit.[10]

Moreover, the Genesis waters anticipate not only creation but eschatological peace. In Revelation 4:6, the sea is no longer chaotic or threatening—it is 'a sea of glass, like crystal', still and serene before God's throne. The unresolved turbulence of Genesis 1 has been transformed into the tranquility of Revelation, and the Spirit's work over water has reached its consummation. Baptism, situated between these two

7 All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

8 Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994), 55–57.

9 William D. Mounce, ed., *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 601.

10 Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 602–5.

poles, becomes the believer's entry into this redemptive arc: a Spirit-infused passage from chaos to order, from old creation to new, from the deep to the divine.[11]

Even creation's own rhythms, such as the water cycle, illustrate and reinforce this biblical trajectory. The hydrologic cycle of evaporation, condensation, precipitation and renewal mirrors the biblical pattern of ascent, descent and transformation. Water rises, gathers, descends and saturates the earth, much like the Spirit who descends at Pentecost, indwells the believer and brings forth fruit. In this way, creation itself bears witness to the redemptive logic of baptism. As Norman Wirzba notes, 'The world is not simply a backdrop for salvation history; it is the very medium through which God's grace is made manifest.'[12] These observations function analogically, not as sources of doctrine, offering a created echo of redemptive patterns revealed authoritatively in Scripture.

Thus, the Spirit's hovering over the waters in Genesis is not a static moment but the inaugural movement in a divine choreography that culminates in baptism. It is the first act in a drama of transformation, where water becomes the medium of creation, renewal, and peace. Baptism is the believer's participation in this movement—not as a doctrinal defence, but as a sacramental entry into the Spirit's redemptive work.

Water as judgement and renewal: flood and exodus

Throughout Scripture, water functions not only as a medium of creation but also as an instrument of divine judgement and renewal. Nowhere is this dual role more evident than in the flood of Noah and the crossing of the Red Sea. In both narratives, water brings death and deliverance, destruction and new beginning. These events are theological archetypes that foreshadow the redemptive movement of baptism as a Spirit-infused passage through judgement into new life.

In Genesis 6–9, the floodwaters are unleashed in response to human corruption. 'The earth was filled with violence' (Gen 6:11), and God declared, 'I will blot out man whom I have created' (Gen 6:7). The waters that once held the potential for life now become the means of judgement. Yet within this judgement, there is preservation. Noah, described as 'righteous in his generation', is instructed to build an ark—a vessel that carries him and his family through the waters of destruction into a renewed world. The flood, then, is not merely punitive; it is purgative. It cleanses creation and resets the covenantal order.[13]

The apostle Peter explicitly connects this event to baptism: 'Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience' (1 Pet 3:21). Just as Noah passed through the waters into a new creation, so too does the baptized believer pass through the waters of judgement into the life of Christ. The flood becomes a typological precursor to

11 Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 91–93.

12 Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, 115.

13 Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1996), 370–75.

baptism, providing a theological witness to water's dual capacity to destroy and deliver.[14]

A similar pattern unfolds in the exodus. Trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea, Israel faces annihilation. But God commands Moses to stretch out his hand, and the waters part, forming a path of deliverance. Israel walks through on dry ground while the pursuing Egyptians are engulfed and destroyed (Ex 14:21–28). Paul later interprets this event as a baptism: 'All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Cor 10:2). The Red Sea becomes the threshold between slavery and freedom, death and covenantal identity.[15]

In both the flood and the exodus, water performs a decisively theological function. It enacts judgement on the wicked and deliverance for the faithful. It separates the old from the new, the enslaved from the liberated. These narratives establish a pattern that baptism fulfils: a passage through water that marks the end of one life and the beginning of another. As G. K. Beale notes, 'The Red Sea crossing is not merely a historical event but a typological foreshadowing of the believer's passage through the waters of death into resurrection life.'[16]

By way of illustrative analogy, the physical behaviour of water under extreme conditions can help to illuminate Scripture's portrayal of preservation amid judgement. The Leidenfrost effect occurs when a droplet of water encounters a surface far hotter than its boiling point, causing a thin layer of vapour to form beneath it. This vapour layer insulates the droplet from direct contact with the surface, allowing it to hover and persist rather than immediately evaporating. Paradoxically, the very heat that would seem to destroy it instead creates the conditions for its temporary preservation. Similarly, Scripture portrays the faithful as preserved amid judgement—not by escaping it, but by being sustained through it. Noah in the ark, Israel in the sea, and the believer in baptism—all are upheld by divine grace in the midst of chaos.[17]

Ultimately, these stories point forward to Revelation's sea of glass. The turbulent waters of judgement have been stilled. The chaos of the flood and the terror of the Red Sea give way to peace before God's throne. Baptism, situated between these poles, becomes the believer's entry into this redemptive arc—a sacramental passage through judgement into the stillness of divine presence.

The Spirit descends: Jesus' baptism and the new creation

The baptism of Jesus marks a decisive moment in salvation history. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus approaches John the Baptist at the Jordan River, requesting baptism—not for repentance, but 'to fulfill all righteousness' (Mt 3:15). As He emerges from the water, the heavens open, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father declares, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' (Mt 3:17). This Trinitarian moment—Father speaking, Son submitting, Spirit descending—recalls

14 Grant Richison, '1 Peter 3:21', *Bible Exposition Commentary*, 24 October 1997, https://versebyversecommentary.com/?p=4269.

15 John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2000), 285–90.

16 Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 605–8.

17 Sergey Gavrilyuk and Henri Gouin, 'Theoretical Model of the Leidenfrost Temperature,' *Physical Review E* 106, no. 5 (2022): 055102.

the opening of Genesis, where the Spirit hovered over the waters of creation. Now, at the Jordan, the Spirit hovers over the incarnate Christ, inaugurating a new creation.[18]

Jesus' baptism is not merely a model for Christian obedience; it is a theological event that reveals the redemptive trajectory of water and Spirit. Just as the Spirit once hovered over the deep to bring forth life, so now the Spirit descends upon Jesus to initiate the renewal of all things. This moment signals the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, but more profoundly, it reveals that the same Spirit who animated creation now animates redemption.[19]

The Jordan River itself carries symbolic weight. It was the boundary Israel crossed to enter the Promised Land (Josh 3:14–17), a place of transition from wilderness to inheritance. By entering these waters, Jesus reenacts Israel's journey, but with a crucial difference. He does not merely pass through the water; He sanctifies the waters themselves. As Gregory of Nazianzus observed, 'He comes to sanctify the Jordan for our sake … to bury the old Adam in the water.'[20] In this way, Jesus' baptism becomes the prototype of Christian baptism—a Spirit-filled act of new creation.

This descent of the Spirit also anticipates Pentecost, when the Spirit will be poured out upon the church. The same Spirit who hovered in Genesis and descended at the Jordan now indwells believers through baptism. As James Dunn notes, 'Baptism in the Spirit is not a separate event from water baptism, but the fulfillment of what water baptism signifies—the entry into the new creation in Christ.'[21] Thus, baptism is not merely symbolic; it is sacramental participation in the redemptive work of the Triune God—where water and Spirit converge to initiate transformation.

Theologically, Jesus' baptism also fulfils the typology of Moses striking the rock in the wilderness. In Exodus 17:6, water flows from the rock to sustain Israel. Paul later writes, 'They drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ' (1 Cor 10:4). Just as Moses struck the rock and water flowed, so too will Christ be struck—pierced on the cross—and from Him will flow the living water of the Spirit. Jesus' baptism anticipates this moment. He enters the waters not to be cleansed but to identify with sinners and to foreshadow the outpouring of grace through His suffering.[22]

In this light, baptism is the believer's participation in the new creation inaugurated by Christ. The descent into water mirrors Christ's descent into death; the emergence from water mirrors His resurrection. And the descent of the Spirit upon the baptized mirrors the Spirit's descent upon Christ, sealing the believer as a new creation, as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17. Baptism is the moment when this new creation begins, placing the believer within the redemptive arc of water and Spirit that flows from Genesis to Revelation.

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18 Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 132–135.

19 Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 93–95.

20 Gregory of Nazianzus, 'Oration 39: On the Holy Lights', in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 351.

21 Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 45–52.

22 Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 606.

Living water and the indwelling Spirit

In the Gospel of John, Jesus expands the theological meaning of water beyond purification and judgement, revealing Himself as its ultimate fulfilment. In His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus declares, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again' (Jn 4:13–14). The woman, initially confused, assumes He is referring to literal water. But Jesus speaks of a deeper reality, the living water that becomes 'a spring of water welling up to eternal life'. This living water is later identified as the Holy Spirit, whom believers would receive after Jesus' glorification (John 7:39).[23]

These passages mark a theological shift. Water is no longer merely external—used for washing, judgement or deliverance—but becomes internal, indwelling and life-giving. The Spirit, who formerly hovered over the waters of creation and descended upon Jesus at the Jordan, now flows from within the believer. As Jesus proclaims in John 7:37–38, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me … out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' This imagery evokes Ezekiel's vision of the temple, from which water flows to renew the land (Ezek 47:1–12), and it anticipates the river of life in Revelation 22:1–2.[24]

Theologically, this movement from external to internal water deepens the sacramental meaning of baptism. Under the Mosaic law, water was used for ritual purification, washing the body to signify readiness for worship. But in Christ, the water becomes a sign of inward renewal. The Spirit does not merely cleanse from without; He indwells, transforms and sustains from within. Baptism, then, is a sacramental moment in which the believer receives the Spirit and is incorporated into the life of God.[25]

This indwelling presence also fulfils the typology of the rock in the wilderness. Just as water flowed from the struck rock to sustain Israel (Ex 17:6), so now the Spirit flows from the crucified Christ to sustain the church. Paul's declaration that 'the rock was Christ' (1 Cor 10:4) finds its fulfilment in Jesus' promise of living water. The believer, having passed through the waters of baptism, now becomes a vessel through whom the Spirit flows—echoing Jesus' words that 'out of his heart will flow rivers of living water' (John 7:38).[26]

This imagery also resonates with ecological theology. Water, in its natural form, nourishes, saturates and gives life. It moves in cycles—rising, descending and returning—mirroring the Spirit's movement in the life of the believer. As Norman Wirzba observes, 'The Spirit is not a static possession but a dynamic presence, like water that flows, renews, and gives life wherever it goes.'[27] Baptism, while indeed a once-for-all initiatory rite and necessarily doctrinal in nature, cannot be reduced to questions of mode or the precise relationship between baptism and regeneration.

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23 Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 152–55.

24 Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 614–16.

25 Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 96–98.

26 Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 53–55.

27 Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, 117.

Rather, baptism marks the beginning of a Spirit-filled life that overflows into the world.

In this way, Jesus' teaching on living water reframes baptism as the believer's union with Christ and as transformation into a source of life for others. The water that once judged and purified now indwells and overflows. This movement from external cleansing to internal renewal will culminate in the eschatological vision of Revelation, where the river of life flows from the throne of God and the sea of glass reflects the peace of redemption completed.

Baptism as the fulfilment of water's redemptive arc

Precisely because baptism is initiatory, it functions as the theological centre of Scripture's water narrative. From the Spirit hovering over the deep in Genesis to the river of life in Revelation, water has served as the medium through which God creates, judges, purifies and renews. In baptism, these movements converge. Baptism is the believer's embodied participation in the redemptive arc of water and Spirit.

Paul articulates this point most clearly in Romans 6:3–4: 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that … we too might walk in newness of life.' Baptism is therefore not reducible to metaphor alone; rather, it is best understood as sacramental participation in Christ's death and resurrection, enacted through the Spirit's work in and through the baptismal use of material water.

This account stands in contrast to purely memorialist or symbolic interpretations of baptism, which emphasize proclamation and subjective faith while downplaying the role of material mediation.[28] Such approaches rightly stress the necessity of faith and the public witness of baptism, yet they struggle to account for Scripture's consistent portrayal of water as an active instrument in God's redemptive economy—from creation and judgement to purification and new creation. The New Testament's typological appeals to the flood (1 Pet 3:21), the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:1–2), and union with Christ in death and resurrection (Rom 6:3–4) suggest that baptism participates in, rather than merely represents, divine action. This participatory framework does not negate faith but presupposes it, locating baptism within the Spirit's transformative work rather than human symbolism alone.

The descent into water mirrors burial; the emergence from water mirrors resurrection. This movement echoes the flood, the Red Sea, and Jesus' own baptism—not as isolated events but as typological passages through death into life.[29]

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28 For evangelical accounts often identified with non-sacramental or minimally sacramental readings—though in Schreiner's case one that nonetheless affirms baptism's real participatory function in union with Christ—see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 968–75. For a Baptist recovery of baptismal sacramental realism, see Stanley K. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2002). For explicitly sacramental and participatory accounts, see Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

29 Schreiner, *Believer's Baptism*, 85–88.

Theologically, baptism fulfils the pattern of transformation established throughout Scripture. In the flood, water cleanses the earth and preserves the righteous. In the exodus, water delivers Israel from bondage and forms them into a covenant people. In the temple, water purifies priests for worship. In Christ, water becomes the means by which believers are united with Him, cleansed from sin, and incorporated into the new creation. As Everett Ferguson writes, 'Baptism is the point at which the believer enters the redemptive story—not as a spectator, but as a participant in the death and resurrection of Christ.'[30]

This fulfilment is not only theological but eschatological. Revelation 4:6 describes a 'sea of glass, like crystal', before the throne of God. The turbulent waters of judgement and purification have been stilled. The sea no longer separates or threatens; it reflects the peace of redemption completed. Baptism, then, is not just a beginning, but also a foretaste of the end. It marks the believer's entrance into the redemptive journey that culminates in eternal communion with God, where water no longer divides but testifies to peace.[31]

Even the physical act of baptism reinforces this theological arc. The immersion into water dramatizes the descent into death and the emergence into new life. The water that once symbolized chaos and judgement now becomes the womb of new creation. As Thomas Schreiner notes, 'Baptism is not merely a sign of what has happened; it is the God-ordained means by which believers publicly and spiritually identify with the saving work of Christ.'[32]

Moreover, baptism affirms the goodness of creation. Water, as a created element, is not discarded in redemption; it is redeemed. The same water that sustained life in Eden, judged the world in the flood, and flowed from the rock in the wilderness now becomes the medium of grace. This sacramental use of water affirms what ecological theology has long emphasized: creation is not a backdrop to salvation but a participant in it. Baptism is a liturgical act that declares, 'The Earth is the Lord's' (Ps 24:1), and that redemption flows through creation, not around it.[33]

In this way, baptism fulfils the redemptive arc of water in Scripture. It is the believer's passage from chaos to order, from death to life, from alienation to communion. It is the moment when the Spirit who hovered over the waters of creation now indwells the believer, initiating a new creation. And it is the sign that the journey toward the sea of glass has begun, for the waters no longer threaten us but reflect the stillness of redemption fully realized.

Water as sacramental creation: an ecological theology of baptism

Water is not only theologically significant because of its role in Scripture; it is also sacramentally significant because of its role in creation. The same water that sustains ecosystems and nourishes life is used in baptism to enact spiritual renewal. This convergence of ecological necessity and theological grace affirms that creation itself is a

30 Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 127–30.
31 Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 608–10.
32 Schreiner, *Believer's Baptism*, 86.
33 Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, 118.

vessel of redemption. As Norman Wirzba writes, 'Creation is the site of God's hospitality', and baptism becomes the moment when that hospitality is extended through the most elemental substance of life—water.[34]

Ecological theology reminds us that water is a sacramental element of creation. Its physical properties—binding, cleansing, renewing—carry theological resonance.[35] As noted previously, the hydrologic cycle echoes the biblical pattern of ascent, descent and transformation. Water rises, descends and renews the earth, much like the Spirit who descends at Pentecost, indwells the believer and brings forth new life. In this way, creation becomes a parable of redemption. As Richard Bauckham observes, 'The natural world is not mute; it speaks of God's purposes and participates in His redemptive work.'[36] Recent work in ecological theology likewise underscores this sacramental vision. William P. Brown argues that creation itself narrates divine wisdom and redemption through its elemental patterns, while Jonathan Moo highlights the integral role of creation care within Christian eschatology.[37]

Baptism thus affirms both the goodness of creation and the continuity between the physical and the spiritual. The water used is not magical or abstract; it is the same water that flows through rivers and sustains bodies, now transfigured as a means of grace. As Hans Boersma notes, 'The sacramental life is one in which heaven and earth are woven together, where the visible becomes the vehicle of the invisible.'[38]

This perspective challenges dualistic tendencies that separate body from soul, nature from grace, or creation from redemption. In baptism, the body is washed, the soul is renewed and creation itself participates in divine action. The water that once symbolized chaos and judgement becomes the medium of peace and renewal—transfigured, not discarded—swept into the redemptive arc.

In Revelation, this transfiguration reaches its climax. The sea, once turbulent and threatening, becomes a sea of glass before God's throne (Rev 4:6). The waters that once carried judgement and purification now reflect the stillness of completed redemption. Baptism, as the believer's entry into this redemptive arc, affirms that the journey of water—from creation to chaos to peace—is also the journey of the soul. And in this journey, creation is not bypassed but brought to fulfilment.

The sea of glass: eschatological stillness and baptism's fulfilment

The imagery of the sea of glass, introduced earlier (Rev 4:6), now comes into full view as the culmination of Scripture's theology of water. No longer chaotic or threatening, the waters are stilled—transformed into a 'sea of glass, like crystal' before the

34 Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, 112.

35 Bozack, 'Physics in the Theological Seminary', 65–76.

36 Richard Bauckham, 'Jesus and the Wilderness Water', in *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 123–40.

37 William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Jonathan A. Moo and Richard Bauckham, *Loving the Least of These: Addressing a Changing Environment* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

38 Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 89–90.

throne of God. What once symbolized disorder, danger and divine judgement now reflects divine peace, bearing witness to redemption completed.[39]

This eschatological transformation of water is the culmination of a theological arc that runs throughout Scripture. From the Spirit hovering over the deep to the Spirit indwelling the baptized, water has always been a medium of divine movement. In the sea of glass, that movement reaches its telos. The turbulence of judgement gives way to the tranquility of communion. The waters that once divided now unite, bearing witness to the reconciliation of all things in Christ.[40]

Baptism anticipates this eschatological peace by serving as a sacramental passage into the stillness of redemption. Just as the flood led to a renewed creation and the Red Sea to covenantal freedom, baptism leads to eternal communion. It is the sacramental sign that the believer has passed through judgement and emerged into life. As G. K. Beale notes, 'The sea of glass represents the final state of God's people—secure, purified, and at rest in His presence.'[41]

This vision also affirms the continuity between creation and new creation. The sea is not abolished; it is transformed. Likewise, the believer is not discarded and replaced but renewed and glorified. Baptism, then, is not merely a rite of passage; it is a foretaste of glorification, where the waters of death become the waters of eternal life.

The sea of glass also serves as a liturgical image. In Revelation 15:2, those who have conquered stand beside the sea of glass, holding harps and singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. This scene evokes both the exodus and the eschaton, linking the deliverance at the Red Sea with the final deliverance of God's people. Baptism, situated between these two events, becomes the believer's participation in this liturgical arc, from the song of salvation to the song of consummation.[42]

In this way, the sea of glass fulfils the theological meanings water has carried throughout Scripture. It is the final witness to God's redemptive work. Baptism is the believer's entry into that witness, a Spirit-infused immersion into the story of creation made new. Through water, the journey begins. Through the Spirit, it is sustained. And before the throne, it is completed.

Conclusion: baptism, Spirit, and the waters made new

From the Spirit hovering over the deep in Genesis to the sea of glass before the throne in Revelation, water traces the contours of God's redemptive work. Across Scripture, it becomes the arena in which divine action is enacted—bringing order from chaos, judgement upon sin, purification for holiness, and renewal unto new creation. In baptism, this entire arc converges and is enacted in the life of the believer. Baptism thus embodies, in sacramental form, the canonical pattern of redemption carried by water.

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39 Richard J. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 41–43.

40 Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 95–97.

41 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 330–32.

42 Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 144–46.

Baptism marks the subduing of the old self and the inauguration of new creation by the Spirit. It is a participation in the flood that cleanses, the exodus that delivers, the temple that purifies, and the Jordan that inaugurates. It is a descent into death and an emergence into resurrection life. As Paul writes, 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ' (Gal 3:27). Baptism is thus covenantal and eschatological—the believer's embodied participation in the Spirit's redemptive arc from creation to consummation, a reality sometimes obscured in modern baptismal debates.[43]

This vision also affirms the goodness of creation. The water used in baptism is the same water that flows through rivers and sustains life, now transfigured as a means of grace. Its use proclaims that redemption does not bypass creation but fulfils it. As Stanley Hauerwas notes, 'Baptism is the way the church learns to see the world truthfully—as the arena of God's redemptive presence.'[44]

Moreover, baptism is not the end of the journey but its beginning. It marks entrance into a Spirit-filled life that flows outward like living water—renewing, reconciling and anticipating the day when all things are made new. This current of grace moves toward the sea of glass, where water no longer threatens but reflects the stillness of redemption completed.

Baptism is therefore more than a ritual threshold; it functions as a cosmic signpost. It points backward to creation, forward to consummation and inward to the Spirit's transforming presence. It is the believer's immersion into God's story, where water no longer divides but unites, no longer judges but justifies, no longer churns in chaos but rests in peace.

43 Schreiner, *Believer's Baptism*, 89–91; David F. Wright, 'What Has Infant Baptism Done to Baptism?' in *Baptism: Three Views*, ed. David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 19–45. Augustine also drew the connection between water, Spirit and new creation (*Confessions* XI.9–11), a trajectory later developed in sacramental theology as participation in God's renewing work.

44 Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 145.

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Forging a Missionary Personality: The Early Life Formation of Robert A. Jaffray

Ni Buxiao

Robert Alexander Jaffray (1873–1945), a Canadian missionary, was a significant figure in modern Chinese Christian history. As a key leader of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), he not only pioneered and organized the Alliance's work in South China but also served as a representative practitioner of Alliance theology and cross-cultural mission strategy. Amid the tensions between the large-scale influx of Western missionaries into China at the end of the 19th century and the realities of local religious and social contexts, Jaffray demonstrated a distinctive capacity for lived faith and a strong commitment to working from the margins—an influence that extended far beyond the ministries he oversaw during his lifetime.

Based in South China, Jaffray gradually extended his missionary work into French Indochina. This expansion was not merely geographical; it also involved negotiating with colonial authorities for ministry space, while promoting translation and print work that contributed to the development of a Hanoi-centered religious publishing and distribution network.

Amid upheaval in China and the constant risk of captivity, he understood crisis as a test of faith and responded to it with spiritual resolve. His enduring vision for Borneo and the Dutch East Indies led him to continue pressing for missionary deployment despite scarce resources. In this sense, his unwavering faith was closely bound up with his personal temperament and his capacity to mobilize others.[1] He was a mediating force who sought to hold together modern fundamentalist convictions and practical theology. While remaining faithful to the C&MA's 'fourfold gospel' (which describes Christ as Savior, sanctifier, healer and coming King), he worked to connect the gospel message with Chinese realities and other marginal contexts, thus embodying a clear orientation toward indigenized mission. His missionary practice also reveals a spiritual and resilient personal character.[2] Confronted over many years with physical frailty, limited resources, cross-cultural tensions and the turmoil of war, he displayed remarkable perseverance and religious commitment. Especially notable was his decision to remain in Indonesia after the outbreak of the Pacific War; he ultimately died while imprisoned by the Japanese military.

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1 Louise Green, 'Unwavering Faith: Robert, Minnie, and Margaret Jaffray', in *On Mission: Stories of Those Who Went*, vol. 2, ed. Ronald Brown (Toronto: Ronald Brown, 2021), 145–65.

2 Ni Buxiao, 'The Missionary Narrative and Faith Paradigm of the South China Alliance: A Study on R. A. Jaffray's Writings', *Ching Feng* 23 (November 2025): 29–61.

This final chapter has rendered his life story a martyrdom narrative within the missionary history of East Asian Christianity.[3]

To better understand Jaffray's significance and the internal logic of his actions, it is necessary to examine the formation of his personality and character through the lens of his early life experiences. This article analyzes how his family background, his relationship with his father, his religious conversion, his training in missionary schools, and the influence of spiritual mentors together shaped a distinctive missionary-oriented set of personal traits. These traits laid the foundation for his later leadership style in the C&MA's South China ministry and for the pragmatic direction of his theology. At the same time, by tracing key turning points in his early life and the process of his faith formation, I examine the interpersonal contexts and social relationships that shaped his development and explain the mechanisms through which his personality and missionary characteristics were formed. Drawing on perspectives from psychosocial developmental theory while attending to his faith context, the study shows how his later ministry strategies, leadership practices and theological tendencies within the South China Alliance were deeply rooted in his early experiences.

The father figure and family culture

Jaffray was born on 16 December 1873 in Toronto, Canada, as the second son among five children. His early life was deeply shaped by his family environment, its religious atmosphere, and the culture of the Scottish-Canadian middle class. His father, Robert Jaffray Sr. (1832–1914), was a respected public figure with considerable influence in both business and politics. Jaffray Sr. served for many years as a director of *The Globe* (a Toronto newspaper) and later became a member of the Ontario provincial legislature, holding a degree of political influence within the Conservative Party. His wife, Sarah B. Jaffray, a devout Presbyterian, played a leading role in the family's moral and spiritual formation. Growing up in a household that combined intellectual orientation, piety and a strong sense of social responsibility provided Jaffray with a deep cultural and value-based foundation that would later support his commitment to missionary service.[4]

The Jaffray family originated in the Scottish Lowlands. Robert Sr. lost his father at an early age, entered apprenticeship in his youth, and later migrated to Canada, where he moved from employee to business owner. His career in Toronto further reflected social mobility and public influence: in addition to his journalistic and political activities, he was deeply involved in finance, infrastructure, and corporate networks, placing him within Toronto's emerging business elite.[5]

These features suggest a family culture shaped by self-reliance, public engagement and an ability to navigate institutional complexity. Such a background offers

3 Yakob Y. Tomatala, *The Dynamic Missionary Leadership of Robert A. Jaffray* (D.Miss. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990).

4 A. W. Tozer, *Let My People Go: The Life of Robert A. Jaffray* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1947), 12–13.

5 After Robert Sr. died in 1914, his eldest son, William Gladstone Jaffray, succeeded him as president of the newspaper. The Jaffray family retained ownership of *The Globe* until 1936. 'Done Upon the Earth', *Alliance Weekly* 83, no. 13 (27 March 1948): 199; Beeby, 'Robert Jaffray'.

an important psychosocial context for understanding Jaffray Jr.'s own character formation, especially the entrepreneurial initiative, organizational competence and practical orientation that later shaped his missionary leadership.

Robert Sr.'s success and civic-minded ethos exerted a formative influence on his son, who from an early age was exposed to the intersection of politics and commerce, public opinion shaped through the press, and the demands of moral responsibility. His father's insistence on journalistic integrity and ideals of justice, together with the calmness, loyalty and practicality he displayed amid political change, became a central template for the missionary personality Robert Jr. would later embody.

On the other hand, the younger Jaffray's early faith formation was rooted in the daily practices of his mother, who cared for her children with a disciplined piety and took firm responsibility for their spiritual nurture. In an era that emphasized paternal authority and the expectation that children would carry on the family's vocation, Sarah's guidance offered the young Jaffray a quiet path toward inward reflection and personal faith. She insisted on taking her children each week to Sunday worship and Sunday school at St. James Square Presbyterian Church. Through these regular services and family devotions, Jaffray became familiar with basic biblical teaching and gradually developed a spiritual temperament marked by reverence and self-discipline. Sarah's approach exhibited neither emotionally driven pressure nor legalistic instruction. Rather, through a lived witness in which faith and everyday life were closely woven together, she embodied a maternal spirituality that combined gentleness with firmness, awakening her children's desire to respond to faith.[6]

His mother's spiritual formation within the household nurtured the younger Robert's reverence for Scripture and his early awakening, providing an inner impetus and an ethical foundation for his subsequent wholehearted commitment to a religious vocation.[7] This family culture—combining Reform-minded ideals with a Protestant (Puritan) moral discipline—shaped a faith disposition that was both resilient and mission-oriented, and it became a crucial personal support for his long-term perseverance in missionary service in East Asia.

Adolescence and a turning point in faith

Among family members and close friends, Jaffray was affectionately called 'little Robert' (Rob). Yet his boyhood can hardly be described as genuinely happy or carefree. Compared with his peers, he suffered from heart disease and diabetes from an early age, bearing the double burden of chronic physical illness. These conditions not only restricted his daily activities but also prevented him from taking part in vigorous sports and games of any kind. He was a rather heavy-set boy, unable to run or jump, and could only trail quietly behind his playmates as they played games after school. His expression was calm and reserved, as though he had already learned, early in life, what it felt like to be left out.[8]

6 Tomatala, *Dynamic Missionary Leadership*, 58–59.
7 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 13.
8 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 17.

Even though Jaffray lost weight in adulthood and carried himself with poise, his physical condition never fully recovered.[9] Yet he rarely complained about his illness. In his own reports and correspondence, references to health were typically brief and understated. Only in a few exceptional situations did he speak more directly. One such occasion came in 1924, after he was kidnapped by bandits in Guangxi and forced to endure a long trek over mountains and rivers before being held for ransom in a remote area. He admitted that his first thought was: 'All my life I have suffered from a weak heart and have had to avoid climbing hills. Would my heart be able to stand it?' Confronted with captivity and physical frailty, he instead turned the experience into a spiritual question, asking what God might be teaching him through it. His calm composure and steady confidence were widely noted, and he even won the respect of the bandits before eventually being released. Remarkably, after the incident he found that his health had improved.[10] Although he never returned to full health, he consistently sought to live with his bodily limitations rather than be defined by them, displaying a resilience shaped by personal discipline and by the family ethos he had inherited.

Undoubtedly, the experiences and illnesses that marked his youth deprived him of some of the joys typically associated with childhood. Physicians reportedly told his family that his condition would impose long-term limits on his life; he would find it difficult to travel far and might even be unable to undertake normal work. In an era that prized strength, vitality and social ease, Jaffray's frail body seemed to predestine him to an unremarkable future. Yet it was precisely within these constraints that his life narrative began to move in a different direction. Almost imperceptibly, his limitations cultivated what would become some of his most decisive personal traits: quietness, self-reflection, patience, steadfastness and an unusual capacity to live with suffering. Unable to run, he learned to settle into reading. Unable to participate enthusiastically in social life, he learned to listen to his inner voice in solitude. His physical weakness restricted his movements, yet it also opened him to a deeper spiritual sensitivity and longing. Through recurring illness, he began to confront a persistent question: if life is so fragile, what, then, is its meaning? This question became the starting point of his inner story and a foreshadowing of the long missionary journey he would later embrace.

The sociologist of illness and psychology Arthur W. Frank argues in *The Wounded Storyteller* that those living with serious or chronic illness may move through three interwoven narrative trajectories through which they reconstruct the self and generate hope. One is the restitution narrative, in which the sufferer repeatedly asks, 'Will I return to normal?' and, relying on the medical system, projects hope onto treatment and cure. Another is the chaos narrative, in which the sufferer expresses an experience of 'everything falling apart and beyond words'. Here hope is at its lowest, and the story is often fragmented and difficult to tell. A third alternative is the quest narrative, framed by the question, 'What can illness teach me?' In this trajectory, the sufferer becomes a seeker of meaning or a moral agent who

9 John Ellenberger, *God's Field Commander in South East Asia: Robert A. Jaffray* (unpublished manuscript, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1985), 4.

10 R. A. Jaffray, 'His Loving Kindness and Tender Mercy', *Alliance Weekly* 59, no. 11 (13 September 1924): 177–78.

transforms suffering into vocation. Frank concludes that illness interrupts our previous life story, but that it can also compel us to forge new identities and meanings.[11]

Jaffray's adolescent experience can be read as a classic quest narrative. Rather than allowing illness to define him, he sought freedom within limitations and forged resilience within vulnerability. He did not live as a patient waiting to be cured; instead, his 'What can illness teach me?' orientation became especially evident when he set out, despite his frail health, on missionary journeys to Guangxi in China and to Southeast Asia. He did not conquer foreign fields through physical strength but through steadiness and empathy, formed in the crucible of sickness. Because he understood weakness from the inside, he could recognize the hidden pains within others' lives. Knowing that his time and energy were limited, he chose to invest them strategically in training local believers, writing, and building structures so that the work of the gospel might outlast his own life and continue beyond him. His pen became an instrument through which he could keep bearing witness; his illness became a channel through which he could speak with the vulnerable; and his narrative became a sustained spiritual struggle that moved towards both endurance and reconciliation.

Jaffray's defining traits were not built upon strength, vitality or social advantage but gradually took shape through perseverance in vulnerability, endurance amid illness, and transcendence within limitation. His life functioned as a countercultural witness: outside a social order that prized efficiency and visible success, he traced a markedly different trajectory through slowness, patience and a body that might appear, by conventional standards, to signify failure. In telling and inhabiting this story, he not only reconstituted his own sense of self but also became a guide for others seeking to reconstruct theirs. Despite physical frailty, Jaffray devoted his life to God with sustained intensity and pioneered a wider horizon for cross-cultural mission.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, chronic illness was understood not only physiologically but also morally, especially within a Victorian ethic that associated bodily discipline with spiritual formation. a value structure that stressed health as morality, self-restraint as virtue and suffering as calling.[12] Read in this light, Jaffray's frailty may have contributed paradoxically to the steadiness of his spiritual character and help explain his decision to serve in East Asia despite chronic illness. His experience was also shared by a number of other Western missionaries in the C&MA.[13]

One of the key turning points in Jaffray's adolescence was his conversion under the guidance of his Sunday school teacher, Annie Hamilton Gowans, while he was receiving instruction at St. James Square Presbyterian Church. This experience of

11 Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

12 The 'Victorian ethic of body and mind' refers to a moral framework that linked temperance, self-discipline, duty and bodily restraint with spiritual character in Victorian Britain. See Richard D. Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet: Murders and Manners in the Age of Victoria* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970); Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

13 A. E. Funk, 'Hongkong to Wuchow and Return', *Christian and Missionary Alliance* 33, no. 10 (4 December 1909): 145–46; 'G. Lloyd Hughts, of South China and Annam', *Alliance Weekly* 37, no. 2 (14 October 1911): 25; 'Foreign Mail Bag', *Alliance Weekly* 53, no. 19 (31 January 1920): 318–19.

spiritual awakening marked the beginning of his personal faith and laid an important foundation for his later encounter with the C&MA. Gowans came from a devout Presbyterian family, and her brother, Walter Gowans, was also an active member of the church's youth circle. By the late 1880s, the Canadian Alliance movement was entering a period of rapid emergence. Inspired by A. B. Simpson's missionary vision, the Canadian pastor John Salmon had promoted the movement from 1882 onward, and by 1889 it had begun to develop a more stable institutional form in Canada. During this period, Simpson's teachings on sanctification and divine healing were also gaining increasing acceptance within evangelical circles in Toronto.[14]

Gowans was deeply moved by Simpson's preaching during his evangelistic visits to Toronto. She carried that passion for Christ and for evangelism into her relationships with her students. Under her influence, Jaffray's faith was awakened, and he eventually responded with a commitment to gospel work. Before long, Jaffray went, drawn by Simpson's reputation, to hear him preach—an experience that became a decisive turning point. Simpson's sermons were marked by intense spiritual fervour and a strong emphasis on worldwide mission, and Jaffray was profoundly stirred. From that time onward, he became actively involved in serving within the local church.[15]

In 1887, as the Alliance movement began to expand in Toronto, Gowans and her sister Annie responded to the call and traveled to the United States to study at the New York Missionary Training Institute, along with several fellow church members.[16] They were stirred by Simpson's preaching and experienced a season of spiritual renewal and reorientation. Returning to their local church with renewed zeal for world mission, this group of young men and women—set aflame by an intense sense of vocation—played a significant role in the development of Toronto's evangelical history.[17]

At that time, Jaffray was one of Gowans's Sunday-school students. At age 16, under her personal guidance, he was led to reconsider the direction of his life. Jaffray's heart was drawn toward the unevangelized regions of East Asia, and he developed a pioneering burden for 'French Annam' (Vietnam). Yet because the political situation in Annam did not permit Western missionaries to enter, he chose instead to go to Guangxi in China, a region neighbouring Annam.[18] This convergence of change and personal awakening reflects a broader late-19th-century evangelical spiritual culture in which weakness and suffering were often understood as pathways towards a missionary calling.[19]

14 Lindsay Reynolds, *Footprints: The Beginning of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada* (Burlington: Boena Books, 1981), 110–13.

15 Wang Zhi, 'In Memory of Rev. Robert Alexander Jaffray', *The Bible Magazine* (postwar resumed publication), no. 1 (1947): 7–10.

16 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 17.

17 Reynolds, *Footprints*, 60–234.

18 Wang, 'In Memory of Rev. Robert Alexander Jaffray', 7.

19 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 18.

Missionary training within the C&MA tradition

Jaffray's early life followed a conventional trajectory. After completing secondary school, he entered the preparatory school affiliated with Upper Canada College and, after graduation, took a position at the Canadian Life Insurance Company, as his father had intended. At the time, this was a promising appointment, and Jaffray Sr. hoped that his son would rise to prominence in the insurance industry. For the younger Jaffray, however, the job was only temporary.[20] While outwardly following the path laid out for him, he was already drawn towards a deeper religious calling. During his formation at St. James Square Presbyterian Church in Toronto, he encountered a wider climate of evangelical revival in Canada and the United States, where missionary enthusiasm was stirring many young believers towards cross-cultural service.[21]

This inner tension soon came to the surface. Jaffray felt the pull of devotion to Christ's work, yet he also struggled with his father's expectations and the family's social standing. Their conflict reflected the broader Victorian pattern in which a young person's vocation could collide with patriarchal authority. When Jaffray finally told his father that he intended to leave his post, pursue missionary service and possibly go overseas, the disagreement became a clash between conviction and authority. Yet the balance of power was unequal: his father controlled resources and status while Jaffray had only faith and resolve. In the end, he followed the inner call and applied to A. B. Simpson's Missionary Training Institute in New York, a non-degree school that offered precisely what he needed most—practical preparation and missionary zeal.[22]

Confronted with his son's determination, Jaffray Sr. did not offer an open blessing, yet he was compelled to make a limited concession. He stated bluntly, 'If the Alliance is going to send you to China, they will have to pay all the expenses.' But he added, 'If you regret it and want to come home, tell me, and I will send you the money.'[23] The remark revealed both his reluctance and, at the same time, a measure of respect and emotional concern for his son.

Jaffray Jr.'s elder brother, William, later wrote an account that offers a key corrective perspective, clarifying misunderstandings about the relationship between Jaffray and their father.[24] In particular, rumors circulated that this decision to enter the mission field provoked his father's intense displeasure and even led him to exclude Jaffray from inheritance in his will. Such claims spread widely at the time and were repeated in some later memoirs or biographies, becoming a convenient narrative for portraying tensions between father and son, and between brothers.[25]

But the testimony of William, a direct participant in the management of the family estate, is highly credible. He stated that their father never disowned Rob, did not exclude him from the inheritance, and continued to love and admire him despite his

20 Ellenberger, *God's Field Commander in South East Asia*, 14.
21 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 21.
22 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 22.
23 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 22.
24 'Done Upon the Earth', 199.
25 J. S. Linn, *The Life of R. A. Jaffray* (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1981), 29–33.

reluctance to support missionary service abroad.[26] The family divide was simply a disagreement over vocational direction. Robert Jr.'s decision should therefore be understood as a departure from family expectations, not from the family bond itself.

At age 22, Jaffray headed for New York. To cover his living expenses, he supported himself by serving as pastor of the Kenwood Alliance Church. This experience met his immediate practical needs and also prepared him for his later missionary vocation. His identity likewise shifted, from an earnest young believer to a C&MA missionary who embraced the demanding road of gospel mission as a lifelong calling.[27] It was both a test of resolve and a faith journey that crossed class boundaries and cultural expectations. Here, he chose to be faithful to the inner voice of calling rather than simply following plans made by others.

Simpson's Missionary Institute was designed as a training center focused on biblical instruction rather than academic prestige or traditional denominational theology. It responded to the urgent call for global evangelization and admitted students on the basis of commitment and consecration rather than advanced credentials.[28]

The Institute also reflected the wider religious climate of the Third Great Awakening (c. 1875–1910), a period marked by evangelical renewal, social reform and missionary expansion in North America.[29] Within this revivalist context, figures such as Dwight L. Moody and R. A. Torrey helped promote lay mobilization, spiritual renewal, holiness and cross-cultural mission. The Missionary Institute was thus both a product of its time and an experimental model of missionary education, combining revival energy with practical training for evangelical work.[30]

The Institute also reflects the evangelical divergence that emerged after the Third Great Awakening, especially the debate over whether American Christianity was shifting its center of gravity from personal conversion to public ethics and social responsibility. In this sense, the awakening was not only a period of religious renewal but also a catalyst for division within evangelical thought and practice. Unlike earlier revivals, it spread beyond rural conversion meetings into cities, universities, working-class communities and middle-class public life, drawing energy not only from evangelistic campaigns but also from the social reform movements of the era. Revivalism thus began to extend beyond saving individual souls towards the moral renewal of society.[31]

At the same time, this broader social engagement produced a clearer evangelical split. Two major currents emerged: the Social Gospel and, later, conservative fundamentalism. Social Gospel leaders such as Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch argued that Christian mission should address social reform as well as personal salvation. For them, the Kingdom of God was not only a future hope but a

26 'Done Upon the Earth', 199.

27 Alfred C. Snead, 'Robert A. Jaffray at Rest', *Alliance Weekly* 80, no. 20 (6 October 1945): 309.

28 'Doctrinal Statement of 1928 for Alliance Bible Schools', *The Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance* (New York: Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1928).

29 Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).

30 William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959).

31 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 109–18.

present social task, to be expressed through justice, education, women's rights and improved conditions for the poor. In this way, their theology increasingly aligned with modernist moral reform.[32]

Other evangelical leaders, including A. B. Simpson and later Billy Sunday, opposed the Social Gospel movement. They feared that an overly socialized and politicized gospel would lose its spiritual core. Emphasizing biblical inerrancy, the divinity of Christ and the uniqueness of the atonement, they sought to defend traditional faith against modernism, evolutionary theory and liberal theology. Over time, this stream became increasingly conservative and later came to be identified with fundamentalism.[33]

These differences reshaped evangelicalism. Some churches moved towards public engagement and social reform, while others stressed separation from secular culture and focused on repentance, salvation and eschatological hope. The result was not only a change in tone but a deeper division in evangelical identity. As Joel Carpenter has noted, this was a moment when 'two evangelical paths diverged': one towards public social mission, the other towards the defense of orthodox faith.[34] The long-term effect was to transform 20th-century American Christianity and, indirectly, the strategies of later cross-cultural mission, including work in China.[35]

Simpson himself did not advocate separatism as some later fundamentalist groups did. Nevertheless, shaped profoundly by the revival movement, he emphasized core doctrines such as the authority of Scripture, the necessity of the new birth and salvation, and divine healing. In this sense, he represented a distinctly evangelical profile and stood in continuity with Moody-style revivalism.[36] It follows that the Missionary Institute founded by the C&MA adopted a pedagogical agenda and theological orientation that aligned clearly with the conservative evangelical, indeed proto-fundamentalist side of this broader spectrum.

In its early educational design, the Institute did not prioritize an intellectualist model of theological formation. It did not require students to undergo advanced classical study or formal theological training, nor did it place traditional systematic theology at the centre. Instead, it used the Bible as its primary textbook and built its program around preaching, evangelism, cross-cultural preparation, and practice-oriented learning, aiming to form 'ardent gospel workers' capable of carrying the full gospel to the world. Many who felt called came voluntarily from workplaces, farms, schools and households to receive basic missionary training. The Institute also wel-

32 William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 5.

33 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 109–18; Michael G. Yount, A. B. Simpson: *His Message and Impact on the Third Great Awakening* (New York: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 17–22.

34 Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16–31.

35 Kevin Xiyi Yao, *The Fundamentalist Movement among the Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920–1937* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003; Ni Buxiao, *Mission, Fundamentalism and Independent Practice: The Analysis on the Religious Communication and Identity Construction of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in the Central China (1889–1951)* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2022), 210–14.

36 A. B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1915).

comed older students and those with limited educational backgrounds, as long as they had a clear sense of calling and willingness to serve.

In addition to foundational biblical instruction, students participated in field-based training through placements such as the Midnight Mission on Eighth Avenue in New York and institutions connected to local churches, including the Gospel Tabernacle. In this way, biblical teaching was closely integrated with hands-on ministry experience. Although the Institute was coeducational, it maintained strict standards of daily life and preserved spiritual disciplines such as daily devotions and periods of quiet personal prayer, emphasizing ongoing intimacy with God. The school's core ethos lay in the integration of a 'life of faith', 'guidance by the Holy Spirit', and 'passionate mission'. Such a revivalist-style training institution represented an innovative response to the question of relating evangelical practice and social change, and it exerted a lasting influence on C&MA missionary formation. This model also anticipated the fundamentalist emphasis, in the early 20th century, on 'biblical fidelity and missionary praxis.'[37]

In its earliest years, the Institute was almost like a wilderness tent—moving from place to place under what was perceived as God's leading—until, in 1890, it settled at 690 Eighth Avenue in New York City, sharing premises with the Gospel Tabernacle. There it occupied a five-story brick building for more than six years. The school initially accommodated about 50 students, yet enrolment frequently exceeded capacity. By the winter of 1896–1897, the student body had surpassed 200, forcing the Institute to seek a new location. Rising urban costs encouraged a move to the suburbs. The Institute ultimately selected the scenic hillside of South Nyack. Groundbreaking took place in April 1897, and the campus opened in October. During this early pioneering period, conditions were challenging: tuition was waived, but students were responsible for their own living expenses. Students were also free to choose the church or mission field in which they would serve.[38]

During the period when the Institute was housed within the Gospel Tabernacle, Jaffray received three years of highly practical training. The program included language preparation, evangelistic methods, cultural adaptation and spiritual formation, all oriented towards a clear goal: to equip students as quickly as possible to take the gospel to regions where Christ had not yet been proclaimed. Under Simpson's leadership, Jaffray developed a distinctive set of values and theological commitments for overseas ministry.[39]

As Jaffray later reflected on the C&MA mission, he embraced Simpson's vision of reaching the unevangelized world and hastening Christ's return. For him, mission was not chiefly humanitarian work or cultural expansion but an urgent redemptive task directed toward those 'in darkness and in the shadow of death'.[40] This eschato-

37 Yount, *A. B. Simpson*, 89–90, 139; Robert L. Niklaus, John S. Sawin and Samuel J. Stoesz, *All for Jesus: God at Work in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Over One Hundred Years* (Hong Kong: Alliance Press, 2009), 103–4.

38 Van De Walle, *The Heart of the Gospel: A. B. Simpson, the Late Fourfold Gospel, and Late Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Theology*, trans. Yip Chio-man (Hong Kong: Christian & Missionary Alliance Church Union Hong Kong, 2015), 37–38.

39 Ellenberger, *God's Field Commander in South East Asia*, 19.

40 R. A. Jaffray, 'Report of the Indo-China Mission of rhe Christian and Missionary Alliance', *Alliance Weekly* 54, no. 8 (22 May 1920): 122.

logical urgency shaped his lifelong commitment to pioneer work among unreached peoples and gave his ministry a distinct end-times orientation.[41]

Jaffray also recalled how deeply Simpson's teaching at the Missionary Institute had shaped his outlook. Simpson understood the biblical 'times of the Gentiles' as a definite historical period and, drawing on Daniel's prophetic chronology, suggested that it might be nearing its end. For Jaffray, this meant that Christ's return could be near and that the church must therefore pursue world evangelization with greater urgency. Eschatology, in this framework, was not a retreat into speculation but a source of missionary motivation. Simpson translated end-times expectation into active obedience to Christ's commission, especially the call to gather the 'other sheep' still beyond the fold.[42]

This integration of end-times theology and practical action led Jaffray, while still young, to choose to go to China as an unreached field. As a missionary who understood himself to be participating in the advance toward Christ's return, he embodied a late-19th-century North American evangelical paradigm of mission practice driven by eschatological urgency. From Simpson and his institute, Jaffray inherited a theology centred on Christ's return, a deep concern for unreached peoples, and a compelling burden for the salvation of souls. [43]

If we interpret his development through the lens of modern psychology's goal-oriented personality perspective, Jaffray can be understood as a strongly transcendent goal-oriented individual. The core of this disposition is that one's life goals are not confined to personal success or social achievement but are situated within a calling perceived as sacred, ultimate and beyond the self. According to Richard Emmons's religious goal theory, when a person closely integrates religious faith with a future-oriented vision, a motivational structure akin to 'spiritual striving' is formed. This not only strengthens one's tolerance for hardship but can also be expressed in personality traits such as sustained sense of mission, high self-discipline, active emotional regulation and cross-cultural empathic capacity.[44] Jaffray's early passion to 'go where no one has gone', together with his eschatologically driven sense of mission, exemplifies the core of this kind of personality profile. As Emmons has argued, any attempt to develop a theory of personality motivation must take seriously the role of 'ultimate concerns', which in turn can shape a form of spiritual resilience within the person.[45]

On the other hand, the training Jaffray received at the Missionary Institute was also deeply shaped by the pragmatic orientation advocated by Simpson and the C&MA under his leadership. This approach did not prioritize systematic speculation or the construction of abstract eschatological systems. Rather, it held that the core of faith and doctrine should lead toward practice and should generate concrete missionary action.[46] Accordingly, the C&MA's pragmatism helped shape Jaffray's theo-

41 A. B. Simpson, *The Coming One* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1912), 201–11.
42 R. A. Jaffray, '1934', *Alliance Weekly* 64, no. 6 (9 February 1929): 85–86.
43 Tomatala, *The Dynamic Missionary Leadership of Robert A. Jaffray*, 68–71.
44 Richard M. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 115–45.
45 Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns*, 3.
46 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 24.

logical horizon, while this period of formation also cultivated his ministerial style and strengthened the action-guiding logic that characterized his work.

As Alliance leader A. W. Tozer put it, theological doctrines 'must lead to practical activity that fits God's purpose for this age'.[47] Simpson's basic stance toward missionary formation was a kind of teleological pragmatism; for him, the value of Christian doctrine lay not only in its internal coherence but also in whether it advances the kingdom of God and moves believers to respond to God's call. This orientation is also visible in the 'Fourfold Gospel', where sanctification and mission are intertwined. Growth in personal spiritual life is ultimately expected to take the form of outward action and concrete contribution to world evangelization.[48] Accordingly, this mission-directed practical theology functioned as a core value in C&MA theological training, and this pragmatic ethos profoundly shaped Jaffray.

The term 'pragmatism' (or 'practical realism') in theological and missiological discourse is not uniformly evaluated. Although in some discussions pragmatism carries a negative connotation, suggesting shallow theological reflection or an excessive preoccupation with outcomes, in the evangelical missionary movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries it often functioned as a positive descriptor. Simpson and his followers did not reject orthodoxy, but they placed particular emphasis on orthopraxis, that is, the practical force of doctrine. For them, if faith could not generate action or a lived response to calling, it would lose its redemptive and missionary function. Many revivalists in the era of the Third Great Awakening believed that the world was rapidly approaching the end times; they therefore promoted mission and soul-winning with a strong sense of urgency. Their pragmatism, accordingly, was not a secular utilitarianism but the practical outworking of an eschatologically charged missionary ethic. Faced with what they perceived as the church's high walls and its indifferent bureaucracy, new mission movements such as the C&MA turned towards models like 'service without degrees' and 'not dependent on denominational structures but on calling'. They appealed to faith expressed in practice, recovering a sense of simplicity and spiritual fervor.[49]

Jaffray's 1894 graduation address at the Missionary Institute in New York, titled 'Give Them to Eat', may be read as a programmatic text that crystallizes the worldview he had formed during his training. In the address, he treats the miracle of feeding the five thousand in John 6 as offering both spiritual depth and practical instruction for Christian life and ministry. He develops three interlocking propositions. First, he articulates a missional logic of diffusion. Rather than repeatedly feeding only a small number immediately at hand, the disciples are to 'distribute to each one, whether near or far'; diffusion rather than concentration, he argues, represents the true spirit of mission. Second, he highlights a triad of action virtues: 'complete consecration, absolute faith, and selfless sacrifice'. Third, he stresses an order of gospel priority: the Lord sees that they need 'bread—give them to eat', placing the proclamation of the Bread of Life ahead of projects of education or civilizational uplift.

47 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 24.

48 A. B. Simpson, *The Challenge of Missions* (New York: Christian Publishing Co., 1926), 42–56.

49 A. E. Thompson, *A. B. Simpson: His Life and Work* (Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, Inc., 1960).

In this way, his eschatologically charged mobilizing language and his practical theology converge into an actionable framework for missionary practice.[50]

These emphases were shaped by Jaffray's formation at the Institute and reflect a missionary vision governed by an eschatological sense of urgency, in which the gospel held absolute priority. He consistently insisted that the church's primary task was to bring salvation to those in spiritual need.[51] In this view, missionary work meant full surrender, absolute faith and selfless sacrifice in service of the lost world.

In his message, Jaffray sketches an explicit hierarchy of priorities in which 'redemption comes first.' He names the gospel 'the Bread of Life' and sets it in sharp contrast to 'education, civilizing programs, and moral reform'. This ordering translates an eschatological horizon into a practical criterion: if the destiny of the soul is not addressed first, then even extensive institutional construction amounts to little more than surface repair. Coupled with his catastrophic portrayal of the present, with 'tens of thousands every day' perishing amid 'spiritual famine', the address defines mission as urgent rescue rather than a slow project of civilization-building. In doing so, it marks a clear departure from the Social Gospel trajectory that was gaining momentum in the late 19th century. [52]

Jaffray was not anti-education, but he practiced a downgrading and instrumentalizing of education. His extensive work in publishing, establishing schools and training workers was consistently directed towards the aims of direct evangelism and the self-supporting development of the church, rather than treating educational projects as ends in themselves. His rhetoric was not a rejection of social concern but an attempt, within an eschatological horizon, to reorder the place of various means. Once that order is reversed, mission, in his view, departs from its centre, the Bread of Life. For this reason, the address tightly binds together eschatological urgency and the primacy of redemption. It is both a statement of theological position and a blueprint for the long-term pattern of action that would characterize his ministry.[53]

It can be argued that Jaffray's early pragmatism was embodied in his commitment to self-support and his down-to-earth posture in ministry. His daily life as a student may not have appeared remarkable, yet during these unassuming years he formed a pioneering missionary character, quietly loyal, hands-on and oriented towards practical implementation. His three years of pastoral experience at the Kenwood church left such a mark that decades later, believers still remembered having been shepherded by Jaffray.[54] The persistence of this memory suggests that even in resource-poor and out-of-the-way congregations, Jaffray won respect through zeal and a servant attitude. It points both to the depth of his steady temperament and to the tangible fruit of his ministry. In this sense, he exemplified the kind of pragmatic missionary the C&MA sought to form. This blend of pragmatism without utilitarianism, and resilience without rigidity, made him a model Western missionary in East Asia in the modern period.

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50 Robert A. Jaffray, 'Give Them to Eat', *Alliance Witness* (5 December 1973), 14–15.

51 Jaffray, 'Give Them to Eat', 15.

52 Jaffray, 'Give Them to Eat', 15.

53 Wang, 'In Memory of Rev. Robert Alexander Jaffray', 7–9; Willian C. Newbern, *The Cross and the Crown* (Hong Kong: Alliance Press, 1979), 48–49.

54 Tozer, *Let My People Go*, 24.

The 'missionary statesman' and personality typology

With regard to Jaffray's life achievements, many have offered him remarkably high praise, stating for example that 'Jaffray was one of the world's ten most outstanding missionary statesmen.'[55] This description reflects his far-reaching influence within international missionary networks and his capacity for cross-cultural leadership.[56] The term 'missionary statesman' is relatively common in English-language missionary literature. It refers to missionary leaders who not only engage in frontline evangelistic work but also possess a broad vision, strategic thinking, and cross-cultural leadership competence. Such figures can mobilize personnel and resources, formulate long-term plans, facilitate cooperation across different localities, and decisively shape the direction of missionary movements.[57]

The combination of pioneering spirit, tireless zeal, practical judgement and a devout spiritual life made Jaffray one of the most respected missionaries of his time.[58] The outlines of these qualities were already visible in his youth. By choosing to undergo disciplined training at the Missionary Institute in New York, and by committing himself to active participation in community-based evangelistic work, he laid both a personal and a ministerial foundation for becoming a missionary statesman.[59]

During his time at the Institute, Jaffray was formed within a holistic ministry paradigm. At the school, he observed at close range how Simpson planned and led the C&MA's transnational missionary enterprise, edited mission periodicals, built networks of mobilization, and carried out strategic communication and leadership training. Simpson's approach to education was mission-centred and oriented towards real-world responsiveness, precisely in line with a core thrust of late-19th-century North American evangelicalism: ministry should be effective, capable of mobilizing people, and able to produce tangible impact on the global evangelization movement. Accordingly, this mentor–apprentice relationship equipped Jaffray with a broad strategic horizon and a practical capacity for institution-building.[60]

These missional ways of thinking had a clear impact on Jaffray. He was concerned not only with the salvation of individual souls but also with how the gospel could be embedded within organized communities, and how local groups of believers could be equipped to function sustainably and autonomously over the long term. From his youth, Jaffray had already absorbed the kind of missionary qualities Simpson embodied: the gospel would not be carried only through spoken proclamation but also extended through institutions, media and the training of personnel. This capacity to be both 'deeply personal' and 'structurally formative', to reach hearts

55 'Pioneer and Statesman', *Alliance Weekly* 72, no. 34 (20 August 1938): 531; Snead, 'Robert A. Jaffray at Rest', 308–9; Wang, 'In Memory of Rev. Robert Alexander Jaffray', 10.

56 Wang, 'In Memory of Rev. Robert Alexander Jaffray', 10.

57 Evanston Ives Hart, *Virgil C. Hart: Missionary Statesman, Founder of the American and Canadian Missions in Central and West China* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton and G. H. Doran Co., 1918); B. Reeve, *Timothy Richard, D. D.: China Missionary, Statesman and Reformer* (New York: Legare Street Press, 2021).

58 Newbern, *The Cross and the Crown*, 45–55.

59 Yount, *A. B. Simpson*, 120–53.

60 Tomatala, *The Dynamic Missionary Leadership of Robert A. Jaffray*, 69–70.

while also building enduring frameworks of influence, is a hallmark of the missionary statesman who leads cross-cultural movements.[61]

What, then, does it mean to speak of a mission-centred evangelical faith? Jaffray suggested that the training he received at the Missionary Institute remained one of the most profound and decisive experiences in his memory. He recalled, 'Many years ago, when we were first called to the missionary field, this was one of the chief reasons for the missionary appeal. We are well aware that such an approach is now considered outdated.'[62] He observed that many missionaries in his own day increasingly emphasized education and cultural uplift, and that some even believed that direct evangelism and the saving of souls were no longer the sole definition of mission. By contrast, Jaffray maintained that the formation he had received at the Institute was driven by a sacred anxiety over 'millions of souls perishing'. This intense sense of redemptive urgency embodied an evangelical conviction reflected by the school: the salvation of souls outweighs social progress.

In later recollections, Jaffray added that 'the missionary booklets and addresses that stirred our hearts were all about the "perishing condition of the heathen", and the like.' He also noted how deeply impressed he was by Simpson's poem, 'A Hundred Thousand Souls a Day', a line of thought he could never forget: 'A hundred thousand souls a day, one by one, are passing away in guilt and despair without Christ. Not a ray of hope or light; the future dark as endless night; they are going down to ruin. They are going down to ruin.'[63]

Simpson's poems, missionary pamphlets and hymns were written in a deliberately affective style. They functioned as strategic mobilizing rhetoric—a craft of translating missionary conviction into collective action. This points to capacities often associated with a missionary statesman: emotional mobilization and public speaking, as well as the ability to construct shared narratives and issue calls that generate communal resonance.[64] Moreover, Simpson's striking mobilizing line from 1890 that 'a hundred thousand souls a day are passing away in guilt and despair without Christ' became a classic template of late-19th-century evangelical missionary rhetoric. It summoned a global 'army of intercessors' through eschatological urgency and then urged believers, through spiritual warfare and worldwide prayer, to 'break the dark powers by which Satan has long held souls in bondage'. Jaffray heard such rhetoric firsthand during his training, was deeply moved by it, and carried it

61 Ellenberger, *God's Field Commander in South East Asia*, 19.

62 Robert A. Jaffray, 'The Missionary Message', *Alliance Weekly* 53, no. 12 (13 December 1919): 187.

63 Jaffray, 'The Missionary Message', 188–89.

64 According to mobilizing rhetoric theory, evangelical mission is not merely the proclamation of faith; it is also a process of symbol-making—a chain that moves from emotional arousal to organizational mobilization and then to cross-cultural action. Within this process, believers are no longer only individually 'moved' but systematically mobilized to go, evangelize and build churches, becoming part of a global missionary enterprise. See Ralph R. Smith and Russel R. Windes, 'The Rhetoric of Mobilization: Implications for the Study of Movements', *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 42, no. 1 (1976): 1–19; Christopher Chapp, 'Resource Mobilization among Religious Activists', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

with him thereafter, translating this language of mobilization into a concrete, operational set of convictions that would shape his cross-cultural ministry.[65]

There is little doubt that in his training, Simpson used preaching, missionary pamphlets and hymns to awaken students' burden for unreached peoples. This intense sense of responsibility for souls and spiritual urgency propelled Jaffray into missionary service and also shaped in him an evangelical theological conviction that the gospel is the only way of salvation. In Jaffray's view, the heart of the C&MA missionary movement lay in the process of mobilizing people from conviction to action: by generating motivational exigency—through narratives such as 'millions of unreached people are heading toward ruin'—the movement sought to evoke a moral urgency within the community of faith.[66] Likewise, during his years in South China and Southeast Asia, Jaffray followed Simpson's pattern in promoting collective action. He translated 'calls', 'pamphlets' and 'sermons' into concrete practices of church sending, cultural training and international cooperation.[67]

Moreover, this kind of rhetoric functioned as a catalyst that drew many young people into missionary service, and it helps to explain Jaffray's historical perspective, one that linked personal calling with the destiny of peoples and nations. He was keenly aware of what he regarded as theological slippage and spiritual apathy emerging within contemporary missionary education, and he voiced both concern and a sense of responsibility in his writings.[68] This consciousness of historical vocation suggests that he was no longer simply a messenger who preached the gospel. Rather, he had become a missionary statesman, able to discern the direction of his times and to offer a leadership response. In this light, Jaffray's memories of missionary school, both classroom learning and field-based practicum, marked a decisive threshold in his life. His character, horizon of vision and ministerial style were gradually cultivated within Simpson's transregional training framework and the movement's evangelical fervour.

According to Mark L. Savickas's career construction theory, a person's vocation does not develop in a strictly linear way. Rather, it is formed through ongoing narrative construction, as individuals continually make meaning of their experiences.[69] Jaffray's ability to narrativize his work and calling not only gave his own life a coherent sense of purpose but also enabled others to resonate with, and even locate their own life stories within, his larger narrative frame. Like Simpson, he was both a mis-

65 R. A. Jaffray, 'A Pioneer Missionary Policy', *Alliance Weekly* 62, no. 17 (23 April 1927): 265; R. A. Jaffray, 'Editorial', *The Pioneer* 6, no. 24 (August 1935): 2–3; A. B. Simpson, 'Founder's Hymns', *The Pioneer* 7, no. 29 (December 1936): 7–8; A. B. Simpson, 'Founder's Hymns: What Shall the Answer Be?' *The Pioneer* 8, no. 30 (March 1937): 8; A. B. Simpson, 'Founder's Hymns', *The Pioneer* 9, no. 33 (January 1938): 10–13; A. B. Simpson, 'Founder's Hymns', *The Pioneer* 10, no. 36 (May 1939): 10–11; A. B. Simpson, 'Oh, the Glad Home-Coming', *The Pioneer* 10, no. 38 (November 1939): 3–5.

66 Robert A. Jaffray, 'The Missionary Message', 187–89.

67 Newbern, *The Cross and the Crown*, 45–55; Ka-lun Leung, *A Centenary History of the Chinese C&MA (*Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1998), 28–29.

68 Jaffray, 'The Missionary Message', 188–89.

69 Mark L. Savickas, 'Career Construction Theory and Practice', in S. D. Brown and R. W. Lent, *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 147–83.

sionary storyteller and a practitioner. This narrative coherence strengthened the stability and motivational force of his personality traits.

In the eyes of some younger missionaries, Jaffray's character remained remarkably consistent over the decades, and he and his wife, Minnie Doner Jaffray, displayed an enduring vitality and personal charm.[70] These testimonies convey deep affection and respect for the Jaffrays while also offering a vivid portrait of several core traits in their character. The first is an enduring passion and sense of mission: regardless of changing circumstances, their commitment to the gospel never seemed to fade. Second is a disposition of optimism and joy. Long years in difficult fields did not make them heavy or withdrawn; instead, they carried themselves with hope and buoyancy that lifted those around them. Third is their remarkable communicative and leadership charisma: with simple and natural language, they could articulate a vision clearly, encourage fellow workers and foster strong team cohesion.

In 1987, the American psychologists Paul Costa and Robert McCrae developed a personality assessment framework known as the Big Five Personality Traits, which summarizes personality into five broad and widely used factors. In this model, personality is commonly understood through five dimensions: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Openness is defined as including curiosity towards new experiences, imagination, aesthetic sensitivity and emotional depth.[71] Aligned with this concept, Jaffray, from his youth onward, consistently displayed qualities described as 'joyful, wise, energetic, and hopeful'. Such descriptions suggest a high level of responsiveness and sensitivity to people and circumstances. This tendency towards openness enabled him to keep adapting, innovating and maintaining a youthful vitality of spirit—an especially crucial trait for sustaining long-term missionary work.

Even in his early years, Jaffray exhibited a personality pattern that combined an open mind, a strong inner sense of calling and an ability to transmit emotion to others. He possessed both warm passion and a clear, structured, action-oriented disposition. This portrait corresponds closely to the kind of spiritual life, competence and mobilizing capacity that characterized many C&MA missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Jaffray's early experience offers three important insights for cross-cultural leadership. Adversity may deepen rather than diminish agency; a compelling missionary narrative can sustain long-term commitment and collective action; and practical theology need not stand in tension with theological conviction, since eschatological vision and missionary effectiveness can reinforce one another. In this sense, Jaffray's enduring vitality and leadership are best understood through the mobilizing ethic he embodied within an eschatological horizon, making his personality a key to explaining his distinctive pattern of action in East Asian mission history.

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70 Annette M. Holsted, 'Just a Line or So', *Alliance Weekly* 50, no. 15 (13 July 1918): 232.

71 Changjie Lin et al., *Environmental Education: Theory, Practice, and Cases* (Taipei: Higher Education Publishing, 2019), 151–53; Meizhi Li, Fangyu Lai, Shuling Lin and Huiping Chen, *An Introduction to Development and Adaptive Guidance* (Taipei: Psychological Publishing, 2019), 98–99。

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Atonement in Global Theology

Jeremy Treat

The disciple who stood at the foot of the cross outside Jerusalem would later have a breath-taking vision of how the Messiah's death would reach the ends of the earth. John saw a vision of a slain Lamb being praised by a multitude who sang, 'You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation' (Rev 5:9).

The heavenly scene stretches the imagination. Myriads of people from every nation have come together to worship Christ the king. The voices resound in countless languages, dialects and accents, coming from people with different skin colour, facial features and hair texture—all equally and yet uniquely imaging God. Of course, the diversity goes beyond physical appearance. These 'nations' are *ethnoi*, people groups who bring to the throne of the crucified one their cultural differences in music, food, dance and worship. And yet, amidst the diversity, there is a harmony and single-mindedness, because it is all directed in worship to the Jewish Messiah, the one who died to ransom sinners into a multicultural kingdom.

Since the atoning death of Jesus is a global accomplishment, it is most fittingly understood from a global perspective. In this essay, I bring together two fields of study—global theology and the doctrine of atonement—for the purpose of further understanding God's revelation in Christ.[1] In particular, I believe that the rise of global theology (or more appropriately, the rising recognition in the West of global theology) presents an unprecedented opportunity to discover new and richer perspectives on Christ's atoning work.

The global significance of the atonement

The atoning work of Christ is a *global* accomplishment. At one level, this claim refers to the scope of Christ's atoning work. Jesus died for the sins of 'the whole world' (1 Jn 2:2). As Gregory Nazianzen once said, 'A few drops of blood renew the whole world.'[2] On the other hand, the global significance of the atonement entails three more specific features: (1) the renewal of the material earth, (2) the redemption of

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1 I understand the doctrine of atonement as covering the way in which Christ, through all of his work but primarily his death, has dealt with sin and its effects in order to reconcile sinners to God and renew creation. For a more thorough understanding of my approach to the doctrine of atonement, see Jeremy Treat, *The Atonement: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Crossway, 2023); Jeremy Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 2014).

2 Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 45, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Hendrickson, 2012).

the nations, and (3) the unity of God's diverse people. We will briefly look at each in turn.

First, Christ's atoning work is not only for the salvation of souls but the renewal of creation. To understand this point, one must zoom out to make sure that the atonement is understood within the right story. The story of Scripture is not about God saving souls and tossing out creation, but rather saving souls within the renewal of creation.[3] God's plan from before the foundation of the earth was 'to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross' (Col 1:20). The atoning death of Jesus is God's way of reversing the curse and renewing his creation (Gal 6:14–16). This explains why, in the Old Testament, atonement is not only for the people but also for the land (Num 35:33). This promise is ultimately fulfilled in the messianic Lamb's cleansing of heaven and earth.[4]

Second, the global significance of the atonement means that Christ's work is not only for Israel but for all the nations of the earth. Although much of the Old Testament focuses on Israel, it was always God's plan to reach the nations. He promised Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to 'all the families of the earth' (Gen 12:3). For this reason, while God chose Israel to be his people, they were also meant to be his vehicle for reaching the nations. God had a plan not only for Israel but also through Israel for the world. Isaiah 49:6 captures God's heart for the nations and his plan for Israel:

> It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
> to raise up the tribes of Jacob
> and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
>
> I will make you as a light for the nations,
> that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Of course, Israel failed in their vocation as a light to the nations. Therefore, God sent his own Son. Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah and was perfectly faithful where Israel had been faithless. Jesus is the true Israel, sent by God to bring light to the nations and salvation to the end of the earth. When he went to the cross to offer himself as a sacrifice, he did so for Jews and Gentiles, for Israel and the nations.

Third, Christ's atonement is not only for the salvation of different ethnic groups but also for their unification into one kingdom. It would not be enough for Jesus to make atonement for different ethnic groups and leave them still separated by cultural differences. Christ died to tear down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles 'that he might create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility' (Eph 2:14–16 NIV). The atonement brings vertical and horizontal reconciliation. The African church father Athanasius argued that the unity of the nations was even intrinsic to the mode of Christ's

3 The renewal of creation does not entail universal salvation; rather, it signifies that Christ's atoning work brings cosmic reconciliation in which all things are set right under his reign, as the redeemed people share in his life while all who persist in rebellion, along with the powers behind them, are judged.

4 For an introduction to the significance of the land in the Old Testament and how it is fulfilled in Christ and the new creation, see Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais, *Holy People, Holy Land: A Theological Introduction to the Bible* (Brazos, 2005).

death—crucifixion: 'It is only on the cross that a man dies with arms outstretched … that He might draw His ancient people with the one and the Gentiles with the other, and join both together in himself.'[5]

There will be no segregation in the new creation. Rather, the cross creates a multicultural kingdom of people who embrace their differences and unite in their Saviour. While Jesus reconciles Jews and Gentiles, this entails more than two cultures coming together. There are over 10,000 people groups in the world today.[6] The eternal kingdom of God will bring out the best in those cultures. God's grace purifies but does not nullify the different cultures of the world. God is glorified through a multi-ethnic people united in Christ. This is made a reality through the blood of Christ that creates a kingdom (Rev 1:5–6).

The atonement of Christ is a global accomplishment and therefore is best understood from a global perspective. But to rightly grasp the global nature of the atonement, we must also acknowledge the global nature of Christianity.

Global Christianity

Christianity was started by a Jewish carpenter who did not speak English and never travelled far from his hometown in the Middle East. While Jesus did not have a global impact during his earthly ministry, he certainly had a global vision, which is why he sent his followers to make disciples of every ethnic group in the world (Mt 28:18–20). The book of Acts tells how the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples in Jerusalem to reach people 'from every nation under heaven' (Acts 2:5), which included that day people from modern-day Iraq, Iran, Egypt and Turkey (Acts 2:8–11). Contrary to popular opinion that Christianity first came to Africa through white missionaries, Acts 8 tells of a eunuch from Ethiopia becoming a follower of Jesus (Acts 8:26–40). The church in Antioch included Jews and Gentiles and had multicultural leadership (Acts 13:1). The church in Philippi began with an upper-class Asian woman, a lower-class Greek girl, and a middle-class Roman man (Acts 16:11–40). Christianity has been a multicultural movement from the beginning.[7]

Over the last two thousand years, the gospel has done more to tear down cultural barriers and bring people together than any movement this world has ever seen. As Richard Bauckham says, 'Christianity exhibits more cultural diversity than any other religion.'[8] Most religions are closely tied to the culture of their origin. For example, 98 percent of Hindus and Buddhists live in the Asia-Pacific region. The movement of Jesus, however, has truly become a worldwide, multicultural phenomenon. Here are recent estimates of the number of self-identified Christians in each part of the world:[9]

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5 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: The Good News of Jesus for the Renewal of the World*, ed. Jeremy Treat, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics (Samuel Morris Publications, 2025), §25.

6 Joshua Project, 'Global Dashboard', https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/statistics (accessed March 2026).

7 For a survey of the global growth of the church throughout history, see Vince L. Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity* (IVP Academic, 2020).

8 Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Baker, 2003), 9.

9 Gina A. Zurlo and Todd M. Johnson, 'World Christianity 2026: Anticipating the Future', *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 50, no. 1 (2026): 14–25.

North America: 275 million
Latin America: 619 million
Africa: 779 million
Europe: 553 million
Asia: 415 million
Oceania: 30 million

Christianity is a global movement born from a Jewish Messiah whose kingdom spans languages, cultures and generations. Although the number of self-identified Christians is declining in the West, the global church is growing faster than ever before. An estimated 80,000 people become Christians every day throughout the world.[10] Jesus said, 'I will build my church' (Mt 16:18), and he is doing so across the earth.

In 1910, there were only 8.7 million Christians in all of Africa. Today there are 779 million Christians in Africa. In fact, more than one of every four Christians in the world is presently in Africa, and that number is projected to grow to 47 percent by 2075.[11] The explosive growth of the church in China has been compared to the early church in Rome. In 1949, there were fewer than one million Christians in China; today there may be 100 million.[12] And these Chinese believers take their faith in Christ seriously; it is believed that more Christian believers are found worshipping in China on any given Sunday than in the United States.[13] The staggering numbers could go on and on. Nigeria has more Protestants than Germany (the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation), and Brazil has twice as many Catholics as Italy.[14] The biblical vision of a multiethnic kingdom is being realized. The name of Jesus is being praised in 4,765 languages throughout the world.[15]

The church has been multiethnic since the first century, but something new is happening in our generation. The universal church has always been multi-ethnic by nature, but the impact of globalization, digital technology and missionary work has put the diversity of the church on display as never before. According to Timothy Tennent, 'We are now in the midst of one of the most dramatic shifts in Christianity since the Reformation.'[16] People who associate Christianity with white, Western culture need to open their eyes to the new reality. 'The typical Christian is no longer an affluent, white, British, Anglican male about forty-five years old, but a poor, black,

10 Daniel Meyer, *Witness Essentials: Evangelism That Makes Disciples* (InterVarsity, 2012), 33.
11 Zurlo and Johnson, 'World Christianity 2026', 17.
12 Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Brill; Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), country profile for China, accessed March 2026.
13 Wes Granberg-Michaelson, 'Think Christianity Is Dying? No, Christianity Is Shifting Dramatically', *Washington Post*, 20 May 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/05/20/think-christianity-is-dying-no-christianity-is-shifting-dramatically/.
14 'Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population', Pew Research Center, December 2011, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2011/12/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf.
15 '2025 Global Scripture Access', https://wycliffe.net/global-scripture-access/, accessed 10 May, 2026.
16 Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Zondervan, 2007), 2.

African, Pentecostal woman about twenty-five years old.'[17] Philip Jenkins boldly describes the emerging Majority World church as the 'the next Christendom'.[18]

The rise of global theology

Global Christianity warrants global theology. Unfortunately, theological scholarship has been traditionally relegated to the West. Recent times, however, have seen an awakening to the existence and importance of global theology. And this awakening has the potential to open new doorways of possibility for the theology of the church. Andrew Walls says, 'The deepening penetration of Christian thinking of the cultures of Africa and Asia could open the most active and creative period of Christian theology since the deepening penetration of Greco-Roman thought brought about by the great creeds.'[19]

This movement of global theology is not merely beneficial for the Majority World. It is even better for the West. Advocating for global theology is not an attempt to do a favour for cultures that have been overlooked; rather, Western Christians need to hear the voices of brothers and sisters across the world. Walls says, 'Shared reading of the Scriptures and shared theological reflection will be to the benefit of all, but the oxygen-starved Christianity of the West will have the most to gain.'[20] Lesslie Newbigin spent decades as a missionary in India and, upon returning to Great Britain, concluded, 'We need the witness of Christians of other cultures to correct our culturally conditioned understanding of Scripture. Only together with the whole church of all ages and nations can we rightly understand the meaning of the gospel.'[21]

As the contemporary church grows in cultural diversity through mission and becomes more connected through digital technology, it has an historic opportunity to embrace its catholicity. This is the heart of God. As Kevin Vanhoozer says, 'The Spirit guides the church into the unity of truth precisely by guiding it into greater diversity.'[22] Through travel, translation and technology, the church can do theology in communion with the saints more than ever before.

Having discussed the global significance of the atonement and the rise of global theology, we now turn to the key question: what does one have to do with the other?

Global theology and the atonement

Global theology has the potential to enrich all doctrine, but it provides an especially timely and fitting opportunity with regard to the doctrine of atonement. Since Christ's atoning work is multifaceted, global theology can explore its fulness from a

17 Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 17.

18 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011).

19 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Orbis, 1996), 50.

20 Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 9.

21 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989), 189.

22 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Christology in the West: Conversations in Europe and North America', in *Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World*, ed. Gene L. Green et al. (Eerdmans, 2014), 12.

variety of perspectives, each with unique insight on the biblical witness to Christ. A fuller answer, especially acknowledging the timeliness of this opportunity, requires looking back over the history of methodology in the doctrine of atonement.

The Bible speaks of the death of Christ as a multidimensional accomplishment within the narrative of God bringing his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Like a diamond refracting different colours as light shines through it, the cross should be appreciated as a many-splendoured accomplishment. The various images presented in Scripture, along with nearly two thousand years of the church's reflection on their significance, make clear that one can never exhaust the fulness of this multifaceted work. Anything less than an expansive account of the atonement falls short of Scripture's presentation of the glory of God in the cross of Christ.

The early church embraced the multifaceted nature of the atonement. Whereas clear doctrinal boundaries were set for the person of Christ through councils and creeds, the work of Christ received no such formalization, encouraging believers to explore a variety of motifs for the atonement, while not presenting them as mutually exclusive theories. Athanasius saw the cross in light of creation and therefore tied together many themes of atonement (e.g. sacrifice, victory and theosis). Augustine preached the cross as both a demonstration of God's love and a display of his wrath. Anselm argued for satisfaction but also appealed strongly to recapitulation. Luther saw Christ as the conquering king and the humble servant. Calvin sought to portray Christ's work holistically as prophet, priest and king. Not until the Enlightenment were complementary images of the cross turned into competing theories of atonement, creating pressure to choose between theories such as penal substitution, *Christus Victor* or moral exemplar.

To reduce Christ's atoning work to one aspect is to truncate the gospel and diminish God's glory in salvation. Thankfully, there has been a recent resurgence among theologians of a multifaceted and integrated understanding of the atonement.[23]

This is where global theology comes in. Just as the church is rediscovering the never-ending fulness of Christ's atoning accomplishment, we now have a treasure trove of resources to draw from all over the world. We have an opportunity today through global theology to discover more of the multifaceted meaning of the cross than at any previous time in the history of the church. In particular, the West has much to learn from the rest of the world, particularly Majority World theologians.

Learning from global theologians

Thus far, we have laid the conceptual groundwork for how global theology can shed light on the doctrine of atonement so as to uncover more of its fulness and glory. We will now mine the riches of the atonement by learning from Majority World theologians. We will look at three examples, each representing a different category of a way in which the West can benefit from a global theology of atonement.

23 See, for example, Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Paternoster, 1965); Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Baker Academic, 2004); Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Abingdon, 2007); Joshua M. McNall, *The Mosaic of Atonement: An Integrated Approach to Christ's Work* (Zondervan, 2019).

We will see how global theology can (1) teach the West about a neglected biblical theme, (2) correct the West regarding a misunderstood biblical theme, and (3) help the West to explore an extrabiblical theme.

Shame: Learning a neglected theme

The theme of shame is pervasive in Scripture and is particularly significant for understanding sin and salvation. Nevertheless, despite its prominence in Scripture, this theme has been vastly neglected by theologians in the West.[24] Furthermore, the neglect of shame by theologians is especially evident when compared to their engagement with guilt. In the Bible, the term *guilt* and its various derivatives occur 155 times, whereas the term *shame* and its derivatives occur 345 times.[25] Yet theologians in the West give far greater attention to guilt than shame. Timothy Tennent notes that the word *shame* does not even appear in the systematic theologies of Louis Berkhof, Wayne Grudem, W. G. T. Shedd, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Millard Erickson, and Helmut Thielicke.[26]

Since Western theologians have neglected shame, we should begin by clarifying its basic meaning. Jackson Wu offers a helpful definition: 'Shame is the fear, pain, or state of being regarded unworthy of acceptance in social relationships.'[27] Wu explains further by contrasting shame with guilt. 'Guilt focuses on a person's actions or behavior … Shame is more general and holistic. It focuses on a person's worth. Whereas guilt says, "my actions were bad", shame instead says, "I am bad."'[28] Another important aspect of Wu's definition is that shame concerns one's standing 'in social relationships'. Shame is inherently communal and focuses primarily on one's reputation or standing within the community.

Ruth Benedict wrote a seminal work on how Western cultures are more guilt-based while Eastern cultures are more shame-based.[29] According to Benedict, 'shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior' while guilt cultures rely on 'an internalized conviction of sin'. Anthropologists generally agree that every culture contains elements of both guilt and shame.[30] The contrast is especially evident, as Timothy Tennent argues, as 'the social dynamics that produce shame-based culture are in contrast to the Western emphasis on individual autonomy.'[31] This explains why Western cultures often don't understand shame: it's hard to grasp an inherently communal idea within a highly individualized framework.

Of course, the world of Scripture, far from an individualistic western framework, was very much an honour/shame culture. In the New Testament, to shame (*katai-*

24 For an overview of the neglect of shame in theology, see Jackson Wu, 'Have Theologians No Sense of Shame? How the Bible Reconciles Objective and Subjective Shame', *Themelios* 43, no. 2 (2018): 205–19.

25 Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 92.

26 Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 92.

27 Wu, 'Have Theologians No Sense of Shame?' 206.

28 Wu, 'Have Theologians No Sense of Shame?' 206. Wu also corrects a common misconception, arguing that shame has both objective and subjective expressions.

29 Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Riverside, 1946), 223.

30 See, for example, Zuk-Nae Lee, 'Korean Culture and the Sense of Shame', *Transcultural Psychiatry* 36, no. 2 (1999), referenced in Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 80 fn 12.

31 Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 81.

schunō) means to publicly humiliate or disgrace, whereas to honour (*timaō*) someone means to publicly acknowledge their value. Consider the pregnancy of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When Joseph learns that Mary is with child, his primary concern is the social shame that will be placed on Mary. Matthew says, 'And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly' (Mt 1:19).

The themes of honour and shame are at the heart of the biblical narrative as a whole, particularly in relation to sin and salvation. Adam and Eve were originally naked and yet 'without shame' (Gen 2:25), but their sin led to shame, shown in the narrative through the realization of their nakedness and their attempt to hide from God.

Throughout Scripture, sin is defined (at least in part) as dishonouring God (Rom 1:18–21), which results in a state of shame brought about by God's judgement (Dan 12:2). As the Lord says to Israel in response to their sin, 'I will change their glory into shame' (Hos 4:7). But the Lord's salvation brings about a complete reversal of the effects of sin: 'I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth' (Zeph 3:19).

The great reversal from shame to honour ultimately comes about through the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God. Jesus himself spoke of his ensuing death in terms of shame (Lk 18:32–33), with the ultimate goal of honour and glorification (Jn 17:1–5). The crucifixion account is told in the Gospels in a way that places shame at the centre of the narrative. While Western Christians often focus on the physical pain of the cross, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John put the emphasis on its public shame. In fact, crucifixion was a form of execution invented primarily for the purpose of publicly humiliating those who opposed the existing powers. The crucifixion was not just punishment for a guilty verdict; it was public humiliation meant to devalue the personhood of Jesus and destroy his reputation.[32] Jesus was stripped naked, an indicator of bearing Adam's shame from the garden of Eden, and mocked as a pretender king. Yet in the course of being lifted up in mockery, he was truly enthroned as king.[33] His humiliation was at the same time an exaltation.

The author of Hebrews beautifully displays the honour-and-shame framework of the cross. While Jesus was willing to bear the shame of the cross, he was truly being 'crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of his death' (Heb 2:9). Furthermore, his death was for the purpose of 'bringing many sons to glory' (Heb 2:10). In a wondrous exchange, Jesus bore our shame so that we could receive his honour.

The apostle Paul proclaims not only that Jesus bore our shame but that his death put his ancient foe to shame. Through the cross, Jesus 'disarmed the powers and authorities' and 'made a public spectacle of them' (Col 2:15). This imagery builds on Roman triumphal processions where the victor would lead his defeated enemy through the streets. The actions of the spiritual forces of evil were ultimately self-

32 For the background of Roman crucifixion and the role of shame, see Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Fortress, 1977).

33 For a study of how the gospel of Mark shows Christ's glory and kingship through the cross, see Treat, *The Crucified King,* 87–110.

destructive, for the wisdom of God turned their seeming victory into an irreversible defeat (1 Cor 2:6–8). The cross is the wisdom and power of God.

People often think of the resurrection as a last-minute triumph that unexpectedly saved the day after Christ was crushed on the cross. But this conception misunderstands the atonement. The cross is not a defeat made right by the resurrection but a victory revealed in the resurrection. Christ's resurrection is the *vindication* of his mission, a declaration that Jesus truly is the royal son of God (Rom 1:4), and a *public* vindication showing that the one mocked as a criminal is truly the divine Son. The ascension and enthronement of Christ mark the restoration of his honour and glory, when the Father 'bestowed on him the name that is above every name' (Phil 2:9). As the book of Revelation declares, Jesus alone is worthy to open the scroll and receive the following adoration: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!' (Rev 5:12).

Including the aspect of shame in the doctrine of atonement not only fills a gap in theology but reshapes theology altogether. For example, an emphasis on honour and shame contributes to the doctrine of atonement by highlighting the atonement's public and communal nature. These two aspects merit further exploration.

The public nature of the atonement is especially important for the Western world, where religion is privatized and abolished from the public sphere. This privatization does not square with biblical Christianity. Jesus was not crucified in private. As Timothy Tennent says, 'As sinners we have dishonored God and brought shame on ourselves by publicly spurning his gracious call for us to live in intimate communion with him. God's holiness requires that his honor be publicly defended and that our corresponding shame be publicly exposed.'[34] Christ's atoning work does not merely speak to the divine–human relationship but is God's definite word for all of creation.

The communal nature of the atonement is also significant for a Western world deeply shaped by individualism. Christ's work of bearing shame and bestowing honour applies to the church collectively. As Wu says, 'The gospel does not merely change one's legal status; it transforms our social identity as well.'[35] The church is given a collective identity by grace: 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people for his own possession' (1 Pet 2:9). According to Simon Chan, 'Modern discussions of the atonement have tended to be restricted to the question of guilt, whereas in the Scripture it clearly involves the question of shame. The idea of sin as shame implies that sin is not against an impersonal law but against a community of which the sinner is a member. It breaks the harmony of the community.'[36]

Lastly, recovering the theme of shame by no means diminishes the theme of guilt. Guilt and shame are both part of the problem from which Christ came to save us, and his atoning work is the sufficient remedy for both. The goal of theology is to

34 Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 94. In contrast to contemporary theologians' neglect of shame, particularly in the doctrine of atonement, Anselm, often merely pigeonholed for his view of the atonement as 'satisfaction', emphasized honour as a key element of his understanding.

35 Wu, 'Have Theologians No Sense of Shame?' 217.

36 Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (InterVarsity Press, 2014), 44.

uphold the 'whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27), and the voices of global scholars can especially help Western theologians in regard to the biblical theme of shame.

Victory: Correcting a misunderstood theme

Gustaf Aulén has had an immeasurable impact on atonement studies. Not only did the Swedish theologian provide the common framework of three primary atonement theories (a regrettable categorization in my mind) but he also popularized the *Christus Victor* view. Aulén's theory is summarized as follows: 'Christ—*Christus Victor*—fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.'[37]

Aulén should be commended for recovering a theme that is prevalent in the Scriptures and has been present throughout church history but had become neglected leading up to his own time in the twentieth century. The victory of Christ is an essential biblical theme and is crucial for the doctrine of the atonement. Yet one element of Aulén's *Christus Victor* view is often overlooked. While Aulén emphasized Christ's victory over 'the powers', he did not understand these powers to be actual personal evil beings.

When Aulén speaks of Christ triumphing over 'the evil powers', he is referring to what Michael Ovey calls 'the powers generated by human collective sinfulness'.[38] The 'tyrants' that Aulén refers to are not evil beings rebelling against God; rather, they are societal patterns and structures that originate from human rebellion. Aulén does not clarify his view of 'evil powers' in his book *Christus Victor*, but he does so in *The Faith of the Christian Church* and his later works. For example, Aulén interprets the New Testament's references of demonization as merely speaking of being possessed by ideals: 'Even Peter could run errands for "Satan", "possessed" as he was by the "ideal of the Messiah" and its expectations.'[39]

Aulén's tendency to demythologize the powers is evident in how he addressed the societal issues of his day: 'This world would not be what it is today if money and status did not function as demonic powers. Hitler's Nazism spread like a demonic pestilence. Racial discrimination is a demonic power with enormously damaging results.'[40] Ovey's conclusion is clear and devastating: 'Despite the terminology, Aulén has a demythologized view of Christ's victory.'[41]

Aulén's approach has influenced contemporary theologians not only in its emphasis on Christ's victory but also in their understanding of Christ's enemy.[42] J. Denny Weaver similarly presents a 'narrative *Christus Victor*' view, arguing that the

37 Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, with Arthur Gabriel Hebert (Macmillan, 1969), 20.

38 Michael Ovey, 'Appropriating Aulén? Employing *Christus Victor* Models of the Atonement', *Churchman* 124 (2010): 307.

39 Quoted in Ovey, 'Appropriating Aulén?' 307.

40 Quoted in Ovey, 'Appropriating Aulén?' 307. Ovey also notes that Aulén's demythologizing of the powers comes from his rejection of Genesis 3 as history.

41 Ovey, 'Appropriating Aulén?' 307.

42 Walter Wink has also been quite influential in redefining 'the powers'. According to Wink, the devil is 'the archetypal representation of the collective weight of human fallenness'. Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Fortress, 1986), 24.

demonic realities that Christ overcomes (and that we overcome as imitators) are societal structures rather than personal beings.[43]

Even Western thinkers who affirm the existence of personal evil spirits still tend to live in what Charles Taylor calls a 'disenchanted world', where the spirit realm is considered primeval and tolerated as long as it is relegated to private spirituality.[44] In other words, while many Western Christians may intellectually ascribe to the existence of evil powers, it often does not shape their day-to-day life, nor their theology.

Where can Western theologians, with their demythologized theology and disenchanted culture, turn? This is precisely where global theology can be especially helpful for Western Christians. African scholars have equally emphasized Christ's victory on the cross, but they do so from a perspective much closer to the biblical understanding of evil powers.

African theologians live in a world less affected by the sharp Enlightenment distinction between the spiritual and physical realms. Bolaji Idowu describes African cosmology as a three-tiered system, which entails (1) a supreme being; (2) a pantheon of good and evil spirits, including divinized ancestors; and (3) earthly mediators such as healers, priests and chiefs.[45] While these distinctions are helpful for the sake of analysis, the African worldview holds them all together in thought and practice. John Mbiti says that 'ontological balance must be maintained between God and man, the spirits and man, the departed and the living.'[46]As Tokunboh Adeyemo notes, the cosmology of the African people is much closer to the ancient biblical world than Western cosmology is.[47] Khathide puts it simply: 'Spirits and spirit possession are part and parcel of African socio-spiritual life.'[48]

How does this cosmology help African theologians in grasping the doctrine of atonement? According to Mbiti, 'The greatest need among African peoples is to see, to know, and to experience Jesus Christ as the victor over the powers and forces from which Africa knows no means of deliverance.'[49] For Mbiti and other African theologians, if the victory is not over real spiritual powers, it is no victory at all.

According to J. Healey and D. Sybertz, Jesus is the conqueror of evil powers: 'In the African cultural context, Jesus overcomes the malevolent powers of the evil spirits and witches. Being concerned with the whole person, he frees the fearful, heals the sick, feeds the hungry, and helps the poor.'[50] And Christ's victory shapes not only the lives of individual believers but the church as a whole. As Kwame Bediako says, 'The Church must manifest the victory of the Cross in the concrete realities of her

43 Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, 306–13.

44 According to a recent survey, around 40 percent of American Christians believe that the devil is not a 'living being' but is merely a 'symbol of evil'. 'Most American Christians Do Not Believe That Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist', Barna Group, December 11, 2015, https://barna.com/?p=1897.

45 E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Orbis, 1973), 139.

46 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Heinemann, 1989), 59.

47 Tokunboh Adeyemo, *African Traditional Concept of Salvation in the Light of Biblical Teaching* (MA thesis, Talbot Theological Seminary, 1976), 24.

48 A. G. Khathide, *Hidden Powers: Spirits in the First-Century Jewish World, Luke–Acts and in the African Context*, 2nd ed. (AcadSA Publishing, 2007), 370.

49 Quoted in Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 115.

50 J. Healey and D. Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Orbis, 2004), 300.

existence in society, and demonstrate that she has begun to be liberated from bondage to the "powers" that rule existence and the cosmic order in that context.'[51]

Theologians in the West have much to learn from African theologians with regard to having a fuller, more biblical account of Christ's victory over the powers.

Ancestors: Exploring a new theme

We have seen thus far how the West can learn from global theologians in a neglected theme (shame) and be corrected in a misguided theme (victory). Both of these themes come from Scripture, and various cultural contexts can help the universal church further understand their depths. A question remains, however, concerning how to engage extrabiblical themes that come from various cultural contexts. Can these themes help us plumb the depths of Christ's atoning work, and if so, how do they relate to the biblical themes? One particular example is the African understanding of ancestors as mediators to God. Is this a helpful theme guiding us to more clearly and deeply comprehend Christ?

Joel Green and Mark Baker address the question of extrabiblical metaphors for the doctrine of atonement, arguing that theologians ought not be bound by the metaphors of the biblical world and should focus instead on contemporary images. According to Green and Baker, metaphors from the ancient world, such as sacrifice, 'belong to another age and … are dead to us'.[52] Rather than dwelling on what they consider outdated metaphors, they offer a different way forward: 'Our reflection on the atonement would have more of a creative quality about it, as we, following in the footsteps of Peter or Paul, cast about for metaphors and models that speak of this mystery to the people around us.'[53] Green and Baker suggest that 'we must move beyond the temptation simply to read their words and metaphors into our contemporary world.'[54]

I agree with Green and Baker that extrabiblical images and language can be useful. David Yeago provides helpful categories here. According to Yeago, 'It is essential … to distinguish between *judgements* and the *conceptual terms* in which those judgements are rendered.'[55] A biblical judgement, therefore, can rightly be communicated in different conceptual terms from those used by the Bible itself. For example, according to Yeago, as Christianity grew in the Greco-Roman world, the conceptual term *homoousios* faithfully expressed the biblical judgement about Christ's person in Philippians 2:6. In a similar way, extrabiblical metaphors can use culturally bound conceptual terms to express biblical judgements.

However, Green and Baker do not differentiate sufficiently between biblical and extrabiblical images and how they should inform one's theology. While an extrabiblical image can be helpful in understanding the atonement, it cannot be placed on the same level of a biblical image. Peter and Paul are not merely examples to be

51 Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Orbis, 2004), 106.

52 Joel Green and Mark Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (InterVarsity, 2000), 20. Cf. also page 111.

53 Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 114.

54 Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 111.

55 David Yeago, 'The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis', *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 93.

followed; they are apostles whose words are the very words of God and are meant to function as a standard of truth for all other words. Furthermore, Green and Baker risk downplaying the way metaphors are used in the New Testament. They write, 'We should not be tempted to confuse the various metaphors … with the actuality of the atonement.'[56] But the metaphorical nature of the New Testament's atonement language does not make it any less authoritative, and therefore less meaningful and binding.[57] The fact that contemporary Western society does not practice animal sacrifice does not mean we cannot genuinely understand the meaning of Jesus as our sacrificial lamb.

While biblical metaphors maintain a canonical and authoritative place, what is one to make of extrabiblical metaphors? They can certainly be helpful, but they must be measured by the authority of Scripture and the witness of the church's tradition, especially as seen in the creeds of the early church.[58] Let us consider, for example, the African understanding of the role of an ancestor. The Bible never directly refers to Jesus as an ancestor, but the idea is present in African traditional religions and many Africans consider it a helpful category for understanding Jesus.

As discussed above, the second tier of African cosmology includes a pantheon of divine or spiritual beings. The realm includes good and evil spirits, as well as divinized ancestors who are considered the 'living dead'. The primary role of these second-tier beings is mediatorial. Charles Nyamiti, from Tanzania, defines such a brother-ancestor as 'a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of whom he is the mediator to God, the archetype of behavior and with whom—thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death—he is entitled to have regular sacred communication.'[59]

It is not difficult to see why many Africans would use the role of ancestor as a helpful way of understanding Jesus. The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ make him, according to Kwame Bediako, the 'Supreme Ancestor'.[60] However, African Christians remain divided on whether this image is helpful or hurtful for rightly understanding Jesus. According to Diane Stinton, negative responses to Jesus as supreme ancestor range between 44 and 63 percent among African Christians, depending on the region.[61]

Timothy Tennent offers a helpful way forward, arguing that the ancestor imagery can be helpful for understanding Jesus but must be qualified because of potential theological pitfalls. The role of ancestor can be helpful because 'the controlling

56 Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 65.

57 See Henri Blocher, 'Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004): 629–45.

58 For further discussion on global theology and the early church creeds, see Vanhoozer, 'Christology in the West', 29–30. I concur with Vanhoozer when he says, 'I believe the global church can still and ought to confess that Chalcedon, while not the whole truth, is nevertheless, "the truth and nothing by the truth", stated in the conceptual terms of the Greco-Roman culture.'

59 Quoted in Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 123 fn 57.

60 Quoted in Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 124 fn 62.

61 Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 123. Stinton's percentages regarding the image of Jesus as Ancestor are drawn from a limited number of qualitative interviews conducted in specific contexts and should not be interpreted as quantitative data representative of the wider population of African Christians.

idea of all ancestor veneration in Africa is that of exalted mediators between heaven and earth.'[62] Jesus is, as Scripture declares, 'the mediator between God and man' (1 Tim 2:5), and African culture can certainly shed light on the significance of Christ's mediatorial role. However, African Christians must also be aware of the potential dangers. As Tennent says, 'An ascending Christology such as "Ancestor Christ" is likely to be vulnerable to Arian tendencies, since the basic natural paradigm of the ancestors is that they were not eternally pre-existent ancestors but *became* ancestors through their virtuous life and the dedication of the descendants.'[63]

In conclusion, extrabiblical images can be helpful in understanding the person and work of Christ, but they must be used cautiously and in submission to God's revelation in Scripture. These extrabiblical images are likely to be most useful in local contexts, and particularly in missiology, rather than universally for all Christians.

The King of the world

Let us end where we began: at the foot of the cross. John and the other disciples would later understand the glory of the cross after the resurrection, but at least one person grasped what was happening in the moment. A Roman centurion looked up at the crucified Messiah and proclaimed, 'Truly this man was the son of God' (Mk 15:39). A Gentile recognized that the one being mocked as king truly was a king, but unlike any other that this world has ever seen. Even the sign above his head, declaring 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews', was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek (Jn 19:19–20), a multilingual proclamation that foreshadowed his global reign. The irony is striking: the one crucified as king of the Jews was in truth the King of the world, building a kingdom of people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. Mark shows, in the way in which he tells the crucifixion story, that Jesus established his multicultural kingdom through the self-giving love of the cross.

We have seen that the cross is a global achievement, and that to understand its depths we need global perspectives. What a special opportunity we have in our generation to learn from the global church and to behold, with greater clarity and wonder, the glory of Christ's atoning work!

62 Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 126.
63 Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 127.

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Theological Sanity during the Insanity of War

Thomas K. Johnson

This article contains an introduction, by World Evangelical Alliance senior theological adviser Thomas K. Johnson, to an essay on a Christian approach to war that was composed by US pastor E. J. Tanis in 1917. The topic seems pertinent today in view of the multiple ongoing and unresolved wars currently taking place, regarding which Christians globally have widely diverging stances.

World War I was absurd. On 22 August 1914, 27,000 French soldiers died. This was day 19 of a war that lasted 4.5 years. Thousands of soldiers from other countries also died that day. The death toll of the first month of war surpassed the total death toll of many previous wars combined; for example, only about 4,500 American soldiers died during the entire eight years of the US Revolutionary War.

Twentieth-century weapons, especially explosive artillery shells, were more effective than was generally expected. But what seems insanely surprising about the war was not the effectiveness of the weapons nor the unthinkable death toll of some 10 million soldiers and 6 to 10 million civilians. What is absurd is how the countries fighting the war—France, Britain, Russia and the US versus the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire—suddenly became very religious. These powerful countries all claimed to be defending God by killing God's enemies; from a distance, it looks like a massive religious mutual suicide pact.

In August 1914, during the first days of war, H. G. Wells (author of the 1898 classic *The War of the Worlds*) wrote several editorials for London newspapers, then published them in September as a booklet entitled *The War That Will End War*. With slight variations, his book title became a slogan of hope. To end war, he claimed, was the proper purpose of the British army: 'We are fighting Germany. But we are fighting without any hatred of the German people. We do not intend to destroy either their freedom or their unity. But we have to destroy an evil system of government and the mental and material corruption that has got hold of the German imagination and taken possession of German life.'[1]

Though Wells rejected theologically defined religion, he seemed dismayed that Pope Pius X had died (on 20 August 1914) precisely when Christian Europe needed moral rationality, not religious insanity. Wells quoted some of the last words of Pius:

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1 H. G. Wells, *The War That Will End War* (Musaicum Books, Kindle edition), 1.

'Once the Church could have stopped this thing.'[2] Wells commented, '*Faith without intellect* is a negligent angel with rusty weapons. This European catastrophe is the tragedy of the weak though righteous Christian will.'[3] (Emphasis added.)

Historians usually say the war to end all wars was caused by militarism, nationalism, imperialism and foolish alliances. Philip Jenkins adds, 'The First World War was a thoroughly religious event, in the sense that overwhelmingly Christian nations fought each other in what many viewed as a holy war, a spiritual conflict.'[4] The causes were Christian militarism, Christian imperialism and Christian nationalism, though the Ottoman Turks fought for Muslim nationalism. Available evidence indicates that the soldiers who died by entire battalions at a time generally embraced the religious/political message they received from their religious and political leaders.

The horrendous irony must be noted: in many battles, the soldiers on both sides could have used the same scriptures, prayers and creeds in church, but they killed each other because government propaganda convinced many they had to protect their Christian countries by killing God's enemies. 'All the main combatants deployed such [holy war ideological] language, particularly the monarchies with long traditions of state establishment—the Russians, Germans, British, Austro-Hungarians, and Ottoman Turks—but also those notionally secular republics: France, Italy, and the United States. More specifically, with the obvious exception of the Turks, it was a Christian war.'[5] This was religious nationalism at its worst.

The US did not enter the war until it was two-thirds finished, but when the US did enter the war, American religious propaganda was particularly extreme. The American Congregationalist spokesman Newell Dwight Hillis took holy war teaching to its logical conclusion, declaring that Satan's earthly servants must be annihilated; that meant the German race should be exterminated. In 1918, he urged the international community 'to consider the sterilization of ten million German soldiers, and the segregation of their women, that when this generation of German goes, civilized cities, states and races may be rid of this awful cancer that must be cut clean out of the body of society.' America's Liberty Loan Committee distributed a million and a half extracts from Hillis's book.[6]

In other words, to gain popular support for US involvement in World War I, a prominent Protestant minister advocated genocide, and this open Christian endorsement of genocide then became part of the official US government propaganda supporting participation in the war. The German soldiers Hillis wanted to exterminate wore belt buckles with 'Gott mit uns' (God with us) printed on them, while their understanding of God was shaped by German Protestantism. Therefore, in the supposedly enlightened 20th century, two groups of Christian countries were seeking to destroy each other, all purportedly seeking to defend Christianity with the force of arms.

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2 Wells, *The War That Will End War*, 41.

3 Wells, *The War That Will End War*, 41.

4 Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (HarperCollins, Kindle edition, 2014), 4–5.

5 Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War,* 7.

6 Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War*, 11. Jenkins was quoting Newell Dwight Hillis, *The Blot on the Kaiser's Scutcheon* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918), 59.

In this historical context, an essay by the Dutch-American theologian E. J. Tanis stands out as a truly serious alternative. On the basis of his understanding of church-state relations he rejected German Christian nationalism, British Christian nationalism and American Christian nationalism. He stated:

> Because the Church knows no national boundaries, she cannot participate in a war of one nation against another nation. If the Church were a German institution, then the Church could give her strength and support to Germany and fight the enemies of Germany. Or, if the Church were an English institution, then the Church could fight the enemies of England. The Church, as a cosmopolitan, universal, catholic, world-wide institution, cannot fight for any one division of the human race or any government representing a section of humanity. … The great task of the Church is to preach the Word of God.

Tanis's insights on the war

However, this understanding of the church did not force Tanis to keep silent regarding the war. Among his key points, he stated the following:

1. World War I was 'the most stupendous event since the dawn of the Protestant Reformation'. He was aware of the French Revolution, the American Revolution and airplanes and thought World War I exceeded all of them in significance.

2. 'The Church, as an institution, and in her official capacity, can take no part in the hostilities of war. She cannot preach sermons in which the wrongs of other nations are emphasized and the people wronged are aroused to retaliate. The German and English clergymen have been guilty of this sin, and it behooves the Church of Christ in America to guard against this error. Likewise, the Church has no right to raise money in an official way, through ecclesiastical channels, for the prosecution of the war.' He thought that in matters as great as a large war, every government is heavily dependent on the consent of their population. If a large portion of the population is strongly opposed to a war, the citizens will simply refuse to fight.

3. Tanis criticized the extreme German Christian militarism, inspired by Nietzsche's ideals, which claimed that war is usually good for the health of a nation. A semi-official summary of this principle came from Graf von Moltke, who had been chief of staff for the Prussian Army in the 19th century: 'War is a part of God's world order. War develops man's noblest virtues, which otherwise would slumber and die out: courage, self-denial, devotion to duty, and willingness to make sacrifices.'[7]

4. 'The lamentable apostasy of Christendom is the *fundamental cause of this terrible conflagration.* Secondary causes are tyranny, greed, oppression, international jealousy and hatred, an Imperialistic England and a militaristic Germany. … While these are secondary causes, the fundamental cause is the apostasy of the so-called Christian nations. This great war is a scourge [literally a whip, metaphorically a means of punishment] with which a holy and righteous God is scourging Europe and America.'

5. Rather than militarism or pacifism, Tanis drew on just-war theory. Though he did not explain it at length, Tanis claimed that a government has a duty to defend its

7 Helmut von Moltke, *On the Art of War: Selected Writings* (Random House Publishing Group, Kindle edition), 22.

citizens when attacked. In 1917, this duty required the US government to declare war, and citizens had a duty to do their part in the war. 'The Christian who expects the government to protect his bank account, his home, his dear ones, and all that he holds precious in this world, but does not believe in supporting that government when its existence is menaced, should not believe in his right to live under that government.' Just-war theory assumes that many or most decisions to go to war are mistaken and wrong, but it asserts that certain carefully defined circumstances can properly lead individuals and states to conclude that participating in a particular war is morally justified. The classical version of just-war theory does not give an easy answer regarding what to do if your government calls you to participate in a war that you assess as unjust. It is not clear what Tanis would have said to young German men called to serve in the Prussian army, since, it seems, Prussia's participation in the war was unjust.

6. Within the perspective articulated by Tanis, the young men in his American Christian communities had a duty to go to war if they were called by the government, even though the war was a way in which God was punishing the West and the US for their many sins. This is a complex point of view. No soldier or army should have claimed that 'God is with us' or that 'God is against our enemies.' All soldiers and armies should have been aware that they, and their countries, deserved the wrath of God for their sins (many of which were not directly tied to the war), but this awareness should not have kept people from their duty to serve in a just war. An estimated 116,500 Americans died in World War I, less than 1 percent of the total death toll; though Tanis would have honored the dead and wounded for doing their duty to their country, the losses were, he claimed, a way in which God chastised the country as a whole.

E. J. Tanis versus H. G. Wells

Wells's hope that World War I would end all wars was in vain. Absurdity continued to reign via the decisions of American, British and French diplomats whose decisions regarding the end of the war set the stage for World War II and a century of conflict in the Middle East. The death toll from World War II, which began only 20 years after the end of World War I, surpassed the death toll of all previous wars combined. Wells's cryptic observation about the threats from 'faith without intellect' during the first month of war seems prophetic. If the religious, intellectual and political leaders of the countries in the war had insisted that faith and intellect must never be separated, they would not have claimed that God was on their side, or that their enemies were also God's enemies. Such claims are irrational.

Though Tanis's views about the wrath of God being unleashed because of the apostasy of Christendom are difficult to verify, Tanis embodied a kind of theological rationality. I take his approach to be far more rational than the claims made by each of seven great nations that God was on their side in a war that killed millions without regard to their religion. It would be better for all if all political and religious leaders hesitated to kill people because they were afraid of the wrath of God, rather than being eager to kill other people because they want to kill God's enemies. Read the essay by E. J. Tanis in that light.

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The Church, the Christian and the War

E. J. Tanis[1]

Should a Christian fight? Should a Christian go to war?

Literature is being circulated at the present time in Christian circles in which the above questions are answered most emphatically in the negative. The 'non-resistant' writers argue that it is contrary to the teachings of Christ and the apostles for a Christian to participate in war. We believe that the logical error in the reasoning of these Christian pacifists lies in their failure to distinguish between the relation of the Church of Christ to the State, and the relation of the Christian citizen to the State. The Church, as a divine institution, occupies a peculiar position here upon earth, which forbids her, as an institution, to engage in the active support of war, but this is not true of the individual member of the Church. The individual member of the Church is a citizen of the State, has sworn allegiance to the government under which he lives and whose protection he enjoys, and has faithfully promised to uphold that government against those who menace its existence.

Many people at the present time are losing sight of this distinction, namely, the distinction between the attitude of the Church of Christ and the attitude of the Christian citizen towards the war. Hence, on the one hand, there are those who believe and advocate that the Church should lend her most active support to the war as war, a position which is decidedly un-Biblical. And, on the other hand, there are those (Christian pacifists, 'non-resistants') who maintain that a Christian should never fight as a soldier of a civil government, and this position is equally un-Scriptural.

In the following pages we shall attempt to give an answer to the twofold question: What should be the attitude of the Church, and what should be the attitude of the Christian citizen towards the present war?

Edward J. Tanis (1887–1958) was born in the US, the son of immigrants from the Netherlands. After five years of study at Calvin College and Seminary, he was ordained in 1911 as a Christian Reformed minister. He was serving Broadway Avenue Church in Grand Rapids in 1917 when he wrote this essay, one of many that he published.

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1 E. J. Tanis, *The Church, the Christian, and the War* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1917; now in the public domain). Tanis published this essay shortly after the US declared war against Germany and Austria. Older spelling and punctuation have been modernized only when difficult for today's readers. Some references to the Bible have been added.

The Church and the war

The Church of Jesus Christ, as a heavenly institution, with a heavenly mission and a heavenly destiny, can take no part in the hostilities and animosities of war. The attitude of the Church, as a church, must be a purely spiritual attitude.

The Church is not of this world, does not originate here upon earth, was not conceived by the world, nor the men of the world, but is the *creation of God*. Jesus said to Pilate: 'My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered unto the Jews' (Jn 18:36). Christ's kingdom is His rule, His reign, over the hearts and lives of those who are born again by the Holy Spirit, a kingdom which will include the whole redeemed creation after the second coming of Christ. The very heart of this kingdom, the center, the core, as it were, is the Church, the body of Christ. When Christ therefore says: 'My kingdom is not of this world', then it is evident that the heart of this kingdom, the redeemed body of Christ, is not of this world.

And therefore Christ says to Pilate: 'My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered unto the Jews.' My disciples have not resisted the officers and soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane when they arrested me. 'If my kingdom were of this world, I would use the same weapons that the world uses, but since my kingdom is not of this world, we do not fight as the world fights.' Now if the Church may not even fight with worldly weapons, swords, slaves, or guns, gunpowder, submarines and Zeppelins, in defence of herself, then it is just as clear as can be, that the Church may not participate in the wars which the civil governments wage.

And just as the origin of the Church is heavenly ('not of this world', said Jesus), so also the character of the Church is heavenly. The Church is an abnormal institution in this world as it is today. It is a gathering of men and women who are chosen *out of the world, separated from the world*, born again by the Holy Spirit, sanctified in Christ. To the heavenly character of the Church belongs her internationalism or catholicism. The Church knows no national boundaries. God so loved the world, the Jews, the Gentiles, the Germans, the English, the French, the Americans, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever, Americans or Germans, believeth in Him, should not perish. God loved the *world*! The boundaries of the Church are worldwide. Hence, the Church has no national flag. You can't fly the Stars and Stripes from your church steeple and call that the flag of the Church. The only banner of the Church is the truth, and her glorious ensign is the cross of Christ.

And just because the Church knows no national boundaries, she cannot participate in a war of one nation against another nation. If the Church were a German institution, then the Church could give her strength and support to Germany and fight the enemies of Germany. Or, if the Church were an English institution, then the Church could fight the enemies of England. The Church, as a cosmopolitan, universal, catholic, worldwide institution, cannot fight for any one division of the human race or any government representing a section of humanity.

The mission, or task, of the Church is spiritual. It is not commercial, to buy and sell goods; it is not industrial, to manufacture goods for the purpose of clothing and housing men; it is not political, to rule men and nations; it is not military, to wage war. The great task of the Church is to preach the Word of God; to preach the

glorious gospel of peace between God and man in the blood of Jesus Christ; the gospel of peace between man and man and nation and nation. This is the supreme task of the Church, *even in the time of war*; hence, to urge men to lay aside their differences, or rather to adjust them in the interest of humanity; to urge men to approach one another in the Spirit of the Gospel, seeking one another's good, not one another's destruction; to promote a true Christian brotherhood, such a brotherhood as is the fruit of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and of faith in the Christ of Calvary. This is the task of the Church and this task she can never perform save as she refuses to support war. The Church as an institution, the Church in her official capacity, the Church speaking through her representatives, must refuse to choose sides so that she is unhampered in the performance of her task.

And in the same sense that the origin and character and task of the Church are heavenly, so also the destiny of the Church is heavenly. Her citizenship is heavenly (Phil 3:20), and she looks for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet 3:13). The ideal of the Church is not a brotherhood of nations with Christ left out, nor a world-democracy which refuses to recognize the sovereign God as the only source of all authority. The glorious ideal of the Church is the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ in a world made free from the curse of sin by Christ Himself at His second coming.

In view of all this, the Church, as an institution, and in her official capacity, can take no part in the hostilities of war. She cannot preach sermons in which the wrongs of other nations are emphasized and the people wronged are aroused to retaliate. The German and English clergymen have been guilty of this sin, and it behooves the Church of Christ in America to guard against this error. Likewise, the Church has no right to raise money in an official way, through ecclesiastical channels, for the prosecution of the war. No more than the Church may raise money for the purpose of launching commercial or industrial enterprises, may she raise money wherewith to strengthen the sinews of war. Moreover, it is not only unscriptural for the Church of Christ to raise money for the prosecution of the war, hut it is also a violation of a fundamental principle of the republic, the complete separation of Church and State.

If it be legitimate for the Church to support the State, will it not be legitimate for the State to support the Church? And will not this be a menace both to the State and to the Church? Let us hold fast to fundamental principles!

But while the Church cannot give her active support to the war as war, she may not for one moment assume an indifferent attitude towards the war. She should recognize this great war as the most stupendous event since the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, an event of far-reaching significance for the Church of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God, an event which represents a most important stage in the fulfillment of prophecy, and which should form the subject of careful and cautious, but none the less diligent study.

Above all, the Church should emphasize the solemn fact that the lamentable apostasy of Christendom is the fundamental cause of this terrible conflagration. Secondary causes are tyranny, greed, oppression, international jealousy and hatred, an Imperialistic England and a militaristic Germany with ideals born of Nietzsche's doctrine of the 'Superman'. But while these are secondary causes, the fundamental cause is the apostasy of the so-called Christian nations. This great war is a scourge

with which a holy and righteous God is scourging Europe and America. We read in Isaiah 24:5–6: 'The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. *Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth,* and they that dwell therein are desolate; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned and few men left.' This solemn word of Isaiah can be applied literally to present-day conditions in Christendom.[2]

We have defiled the earth with our idolatry and accompanying immorality. We have worshipped the idols of Money, and Pleasure, and Fashion, and Science, and Progress, and Enlightenment. And this blatant idolatry has been accompanied with an immorality and vice which has reached such huge proportions that our modern cities are nothing less than Sodoms and Gomorrahs. (See Reports of Chicago, Baltimore, New York, and even Grand Rapids Vice Commissions.)

We have 'transgressed the laws'. Profanity, Sabbath-desecration, disrespect for parents, murder, suicide, adultery, fornication and divorce are the outstanding and glaring sins of this generation.

We 'have changed the ordinance'. Men are tampering with those fundamental laws which God has written in the constitution of things. Think of your 'birth control', the murder of unborn children, sex perversion, the attempt to wipe out sex distinctions, etc.

Is it any wonder that the rest of that text in Isaiah is also literally true? 'The curse' (this great war) 'hath devoured the earth; and they that dwell therein are desolate' (the millions of widows and orphans in Europe and Canada); 'therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned' (the tens of thousands of soldiers burned by the fire of cannon and bombs and burning gases); 'and few men are left' (few able-bodied men are left in London, Paris or Berlin). War, no matter how justifiable, is in itself a scourge, and the Christian sees in the present war, confined to the nations of Christendom, the righteous scourge of a just and holy God because of the terrible apostasy of the present generation.

Let the Church of God, called to denounce the sins of individuals and of nations, emphasize this solemn and tremendous truth, and arouse the Christian peoples to repentance and conversion unto the living God. Let her again and again preach such texts as these: 'If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land' (2 Chron 7:14).

This attitude of the Church of Christ, though offensive to vast numbers, will prove to be a far greater blessing to a war-torn world than any attempt on the part of the Church to propagate war.

Furthermore, the Church may and should most heartily support the Red Cross work, the YMCA work in the army and navy, and all forms of relief, organized for the humane purpose of alleviating the suffering and distress accompanying war.

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2 In the theological circles that Rev. Tanis inhabited, Isaiah 24 was seen as describing the judgement of God on nations in history, of which the destruction of Israel and Samaria was an example that Isaiah may have personally observed. This was distinguished from the eschatological, final judgement of God. Tanis does not see World War I as the only time the words of Isaiah 24 were fulfilled in history. John Calvin's commentary on Isaiah contains similar observations.

Neither should the Church hesitate to denounce all disobedience to the divinely instituted authorities. Without entering into an extended discussion of the war, which is better suited to the platform than the pulpit, the Church can emphasize the teaching of God's Word that all men should respect the authority vested in the divinely instituted government. 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power [the authority of the government] resists the ordinance of God' (Rom 13:1–2). 'Honor the king' (1 Pet 2:17).

The Christian citizen and the war

In the above paragraphs we have made it clear, we think, that the Church, as a divine institution, with a spiritual character and spiritual task, cannot lend her active support to the war. Does this position of the Church justify us in drawing the conclusion that the Christian may not go to war? We think not.

Those who teach that a Christian should not go to war confuse the sphere of the Church with that of the State. The Church has no right to prosecute criminals but should rather bring to those criminals the gospel of repentance and faith in Christ for the remission of sins.

Is it therefore wrong for the State to arrest criminals, try them in courts of justice and punish their crimes? Of course not! This is one of the functions of the State. See Romans 13. And in the exercise of this function the State has the right, when the crime committed justifies it, to put the criminal to death. Genesis 9:6: 'Whosoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man.' Romans 13:3–4: 'For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. … If you do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that does evil.' God has given to the State the 'sword', and when the occasion justifies it, the State may wield the sword. (Those humanitarians, who before the war argued against capital punishment, ought to be consistent and hold that the Slate has no right to prosecute war, but we notice that the majority of these humanitarians are enthusiastically supporting the war. O, consistency, thou art a jewel!)

The Bible teaches, then, that under certain circumstances the State (not the Church, nor any other institution, much less any individual) has the right to take human life. This teaching justifies capital punishment and likewise justifies war.

This is, indeed, a tremendous power which the Sovereign God has vested in the State, and it behooves the State to exercise this power with great discretion and only for the most justifiable reasons, but it cannot be denied that the Bible gives the State the right to go to war.

If the State has the right to go to war, then the citizen, even the Christian citizen, has the right to support the government in the war it is waging. This is the right of the Christian citizen as well as of the worldling. There is not one law of God for a Christian and another law of God for a non-Christian. What is wrong in the one case is also wrong in the other case. Some of the non-resistants argue that it is alright for a worldling to fight, for 'he belongs to this world', but it is not right for a Christian to fight, because he belongs 'to the kingdom of heaven'. Here again we meet with that hopeless confusion of spheres and duties for which the non-resistants are noted.

We repeat, if it be wrong for the Christian to fight, it is also wrong for the non-Christian to fight. We believe that the Christian has the right to fight, because the State has the right to fight and the State can wage war only when supported by its citizenship, and that citizenship is made up of Christians and non-Christians.

If a Christian believes that the State has no right at any time to wage war, or that he, as a Christian, may not go to war, he has no right to be a citizen. Citizenship involves the duty of going to war when called by the government. From time immemorial every government has expected its citizens to fight in time of war. This is not something new. It has always been thus. One cannot hold citizenship in any country in the whole wide world without that very citizenship involving the duty of going to war. If a Christian does not believe in going to war and actually refuses to obey the government when called into war service, he should refuse to be a citizen. And he should refuse to be a citizen, not merely in time of actual war but in time of peace. He cannot conscientiously and consistently support any government which believes in its right to wage war, when he does not believe in that right.

But this thing does not end here. If a man cannot be a citizen of a country because he cannot take the full oath of allegiance to the government, then he has no right to live under that government. The Christian who expects the government to protect his bank account, his home, his dear ones and all that he holds precious in this world, but does not believe in supporting that government when its existence is menaced, should not believe in his right to live under that government. We do not advocate expelling him from the country, if in all other respects he is a loyal citizen, but he himself ought to realize the inconsistency of his attitude. And all this is in full harmony with the teaching of the Holy Bible that the authority vested in the State is a divine authority, which every citizen should respect and obey. Jesus said to Pilate (a heathen governor): 'You could have no power at all against me, except it were given from above.' The power exercised by Pilate, the power to crucify a man or save him from the cross, and hence the right to take human life, was given him from above. In this one majestic sentence of the Christ, the State is declared to be clothed with the power to take human life when the occasion justifies it.

We read in 1 Peter 2:13–14: 'Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto those that are sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers.' In God's providence we are allowed the right today to choose our own form of government, but the power and authority vested in that government is divine, God-given, and therefore it is the duty of every citizen, and also of the man who refuses to be a citizen, to obey that government. If the government of the United States of America believes it to be its solemn duty to wage war against Germany, because of her deliberate and persistent invasion of our national rights, then it is the duty of every man and woman to support the government.

Personally we may abhor war and heartily deplore the entrance of our peaceful and peace-loving land into this colossal conflict; we have no right to obstruct the government in carrying out what the government sincerely believes to be the solemn duty of the hour. No one can accuse the President of hasty action. He has bent every effort in the direction of maintaining peace, and is it not probable that it was this very policy which almost cost him his re-election last fall? The campaign slogan, 'He

has kept us out of war', did not receive the hearty and overwhelming endorsement of the American people. It was evident from the tremendous support given the Republican candidate that a large portion of the American people believed that the time had come for the nation to vindicate its rights.

During the winter following this election, the President steadfastly continued to labor in the interest of maintaining peace with Germany, and even put forth a brilliant effort in the month of January to reconcile the belligerents, but all in vain. In the meantime, the German government persisted in sinking American vessels and destroying American lives. The overt act, which forced the nation into war, came in March. Three American vessels, flying the American flag, two of which were without a cargo and bound for this country, and hence could in no wise be regarded as lending aid to the enemies of Germany, were sunk without a warning. This was the final act in a long series in violation of our national rights which forced this country into war with Germany. Let it be remembered also, that not only merchant vessels were sunk, but the same fate was meted out to our hospital ships and boats carrying relief to stricken Belgium, and that these ships bore unmistakable marks of identity.

No doubt the government was also in the possession of information by which it was influenced in adopting the course pursued in April. Since our entrance into the war, a flood of light has been thrown upon a long series of plots and intrigues against the government and people of the United States by the German government, even while this government was bending every effort to preserve peace.

If, as Christians, we believe that the Sovereign Ruler of the world, the Almighty God, has instituted government for the purpose of maintaining justice on earth, then it is our duty to support the government in its effort to maintain this justice for ourselves and for humanity at large. We have the writing of God's hand in history, teaching us that there are times when nations must fight to preserve that which is precious. If the Christian armies of Europe had not resisted the advance of the Mohammedan hordes in 732 at the battle of Tours, we would all be Mohammedans today. If war is always wrong, then brave little Holland should not have resisted the tyranny and despotism of Spain in the Eighty Years' War. If it is always wrong to fight, then Napoleon should not have been blocked in his efforts to create for himself a world empire in which the will of the despotic Napoleon was to be the highest law.

We thank God that all men and all Christians have not been 'non-resistants'. We thank God that He gave our sturdy and noble ancestors a glorious victory in their long battle for freedom and justice! We thank God that He raised up a great Christian general, the Duke of Wellington, to bring the despotic career of Napoleon to an ignominious end in the famous battle of Waterloo! And we pray the same Almighty God that He bless our beloved country as she fights today, not for conquest nor material gain, but in vindication of justice and righteousness!

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Book Reviews

Christology and the Logic of Grace in Fifth-Century Gaul
Donald Fairbairn

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025
Hardback, 206pp., bibliography, indices

Reviewed by Andrew Messmer, Rector, Seville Theological Seminary (Spain); Associated Professor, Facultad Internacional de Teología IBSTE (Spain); Affiliated Researcher, Evangelical Theological Faculty (Belgium); Editor, Revista Evangélica de Teología (World Evangelical Alliance).

Donald Fairbairn presents a well-researched and insightful study on grace (charitology) and Christ (Christology) in the early church, focusing on fifth-century Gaul. Across six chapters, he deals with Augustine's foundational influence and then five Gallic theologians: Leporius (who changed his views after being corrected by Augustine), John Cassian, Vincent of Lérins, Prosper of Aquitaine, and Faustus of Riez.

His study has yielded some important conclusions, three of which stand out. First, as even fifth-century authors recognized, Fairbairn argues that Christology and charitology are inherently linked. A Nestorian Christology aligns with a Pelagian charitology, since both emphasize the human's upward movement in achieving salvation. In contrast, a Chalcedonian or Cyrillian Christology corresponds with Augustinian or Gallic charitology, both emphasizing God's initiative in offering salvation. Second, Fairbairn contends that the Gallic theologians did not directly oppose Augustine in their charitology. Instead, they followed a different logical path: while Augustine moved from the Fall to predestination to grace—thus limiting grace to the elect—the Gallic authors moved from the Fall to the Incarnation to both general and particular grace, thereby extending grace universally. Third, Fairbairn challenges the view according to which Gallic authors have often been placed on a spectrum between Augustine and Pelagius, often being labelled as semi-Pelagians or semi-Augustinians. This is not accurate, since their difference with Augustine on the doctrine of predestination (or what they understood his doctrine to imply) was not based on Pelagian arguments but, rather, was the result of a different outworking from the Fall to grace.

This book significantly challenges the prevailing scholarly view that has treated fifth-century Gaul as semi-Pelagian. Fairbairn thoroughly synthesizes all the material the Gallic authors wrote on Christology, and he presents a convincing case for their alignment with Augustine and Chalcedon regarding Christology, while highlighting where they differed with Augustine on the logical progression from the Fall to grace. Fairbairn challenges the scholarly consensus—often alongside Augustine Casiday—and thus further reflection is needed before consensus views are overturned, but the quality, caution and evenhandedness of his arguments make his book a formidable foe to said consensus.

This book will be of great interest to patristic scholars and those interested in Christology and soteriology, and it would be a great resource for advanced academic

seminars. It is written in a manner that is accessible to non-specialists, thanks to Fairbairn's clear explanations of the central theological issues.

If there are any limitations to be mentioned, they are the two that Fairbairn himself mentions at the end of his book. He does not address fifth-century Christology and charitology outside of Gaul, and he remains silent on the relationship between the Christology and charitology of the fifth-century Gallic authors and that of their sixth-century successors, especially with respect to the important Second Council of Orange (536). If Fairbairn does publish a second volume in the future, it is hoped that he will extend his research both geographically and chronologically to include these topics. Additionally, other scholars might apply this book to intra-Protestant debates between, for example, Calvinists/Reformed and Arminians/Methodists, to see if the Augustinian–Gallic differences on charitology might advance modern debate on the topic.

Although the book contains a few typographical errors, they do not significantly detract from the reading experience.

Feasting with Demons or with Christ? An African Spiritual Reading of Ritual Meals in 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 and 11:17–34

Samantha Chambo

Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Academic, 2025
Pb., xiii + 238 pp., bibliog.

Reviewed by Mulatua Yohannes, PhD candidate,
Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Samantha Chambo holds a PhD from the University of Manchester, UK, and currently serves as the USA/Canada regional education coordinator for the Church of the Nazarene. In this book, she offers a compelling, interdisciplinary framework for understanding the Lord's Supper in contemporary African church contexts and beyond. Chambo primarily utilizes Victor Turner's ritual theory (particularly the concepts of liminality and *communitas*) paired with inculturation hermeneutics informed by the African cultural worldview.

The first of the book's four parts lays the methodological groundwork, exploring Turner's ritual theory and the African cultural context. Chambo effectively demonstrates that the African worldview is inherently spiritual and communal. When discussing the concepts of liminality and *communitas*, she provides a comprehensive illustration of how ritual meals serve to maintain harmonious relationships with the spiritual world and shape community life.

Part two establishes the theological and socio-historical context for understanding ritual meals in the church of Corinth. Chambo posits that Paul viewed early Christians as living in the period between the 'old age' (characterized by sin and death) and the 'new age of the Spirit' inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection, which will culminate at his second coming (*parousia*). This in-between state gives urgency to Paul's admonitions regarding the ethical issues he addresses in Corinth. This approach avoids the common scholarly tendency of treating Paul's ethics as

mere social rules; instead, Chambo presents the eschatological tensions as essential preparations for the *parousia*.

Part three embarks on a crucial theological and exegetical analysis of ritual meals within the Corinthian church, specifically focusing on 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1, which focuses on the issue of food offered to idols (*eidōlothyta*), and 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, which deals with the misuse of the Lord's Supper. Part three highlights the significance of shared ritual meals and their impact on holiness and the transformation of the church. This transformation aims to lead believers to separate from the prevailing Graeco-Roman value system and its associated religious practices in Corinth. Conversely, Chambo asserts that idolatrous participation in *eidōlothyta* can have severe negative consequences, which include the destruction of union with Christ and the holy community of believers, and eventually falling away from faith.

The study's final part examines the process of inculturating the Pauline theology of ritual meals (drawn from 1 Cor. 8:1–11:1 and 11:17–34) into the framework of an African cultural context. It explores elements of continuity and discontinuity between traditional African ritual meals honouring ancestors and the Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper. While acknowledging ancestors as 'fellow worshippers' in the liturgy might be permissible, Chambo concludes that ritual meals honouring ancestors often constitute idolatry because ancestors are treated as mediators or objects of worship, a role exclusively reserved for Christ.

Chambo's major contribution to theological conversation lies in her attempt to restore the ancient unity of theology and spirituality by arguing that while traditional Western scholarship often views the Lord's Supper as a ceremony that merely confirms social status, Paul saw it as a transformative ritual. Chambo achieved this by utilizing an interdisciplinary approach that bridges Pauline theology, Turner's ritual theory and African spirituality with case studies from contexts across Africa.

However, while Chambo acknowledges that Turner's ritual theory is often criticized for overlooking the role of political power in liminality, her analysis of communitas sometimes overemphasizes internalized spiritual transformation in a way that might risk delegitimizing the real political demands for structural justice within the church. The study would have benefitted from a more explicit examination of how these political power dynamics manifest themselves within the specific landscapes of modern African church contexts.

Overall, the book offers a crucial model for contextualizing Christian faith by integrating biblical teachings with indigenous worldviews, without compromising core doctrines. It engages directly with the complex and sensitive issue of ancestral veneration in modern Africa, providing biblical and theological clarity for African Christians and church leaders. Chambo provides distinct case studies from South, West, and East African contexts. By doing so, her analysis provides invaluable guidance for the African church and challenges broader Protestant traditions to reconsider the life-changing power of the Lord's table. Anyone interested in the sacramental dimensions of Christian worship, the transformative power of rituals, or the intersection of faith and culture will find this book enriching and fascinating.

Who Are You, and Who Am I? Biblical and Anthropological Models for Cross-Cultural Understanding

Hannes Wiher

Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2024
Pb., 227 pp., index

Reviewed by Trésor Khonde Ndele, professor of missiology, Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, Shalom University of Bunia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

This book is designed to assist individuals engaged in cross-cultural ministry in enhancing their relationships with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, with a view to facilitating more effective communication of the gospel. It is intended as a tool for Christians living in cross-cultural contexts, as well as for missionaries, students of theology and missiology, theologians, and missiologists interested in an in-depth approach to life and ministry.

Wiher focuses on the study of the concepts of personality, culture and religion in the Bible and in different contexts around the world. Theorizing from the humanities and social sciences, the author integrates these theories through a critical realism lens.

In the first of the book's four chapters, Wiher introduces the basic concepts of his study. He first analyzes them from a biblical-theological perspective, then in light of modern and postmodern socio-anthropological theories (functionalism, structuralism, essentialism and constructivism). He emphasizes that each of these theories has its limitations. This is why his socio-anthropological study of the basic concepts is based on a combined structuralist and poststructuralist approach to reality.

In the second chapter, Wiher analyzes the deep structures of humans based on the concept of worldview. He justifies this approach by arguing that worldview is linked to human identity. From a practical standpoint, he proposes five models to examine the basic concepts of his in-depth study: the layers model of creation (holistic, Hebrew, two-tiered or secular), the five soteriological concepts (God, humans, evil, sin, salvation), the time orientation (past or future), mana (extraordinary effects), and the conscience orientation (rules-based or relational).

In the third chapter, Wiher applies the five models presented in the previous chapter to the analysis of biblical texts and the critical examination of theological production. This approach allows him to draw implications regarding the influence of a people's worldview on church life, discipleship, Bible translation, counselling and gospel communication.

In the fourth chapter, Wiher develops a personality typology based on the conscience orientation model, distinguishing between rules-based and relational personalities. His approach draws on Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers' *Ministering Cross-Culturally*. He observes that the majority of the world's population has a holistic worldview, which is linked to the relational conscience orientation. On the other hand, globalization has resulted in a situation where the educational, scientific and economic systems of numerous countries in the Majority World are now governed by a rules-based logic, characteristic of the Western world. The result of this process is a blend of worldviews that engenders cultural hybridity (182).

This book has an accessible style. It skillfully integrates the author's personal experiences in the field of intercultural relations with an in-depth reflection on literature. At the conclusion of each chapter, the author recommends seminal books and articles for readers who wish to develop and deepen their reflection. As Martin Heisswolf has observed, the cyclical nature of Wiher's book can serve as an educational paradigm for teachers, demonstrating that cultures, religions and worldviews should be described as living, complete entities. The in-depth approach developed here in studying the basic concepts of his book can help readers avoid oversimplification and generalization when approaching these concepts. The presentation and application of five models for analyzing biblical narratives and concepts in the second and third chapters is a notable contribution. Moreover, the operationalization of worldview through these models is innovative, as it offers a practical framework for examining the deep structure of human beings in order to reach them more profoundly. The personality typology developed in the fourth chapter is also pertinent because it enables those working in an intercultural context to understand a person based on the conscience orientation model, thereby improving their intercultural relationships and facilitating effective communication of the gospel. However, Wiher could have devoted more space in the first chapter to his examination of the concept of personality from a biblical-theological perspective, as he did for the other two basic concepts.

More than Conquerors: The Churches and the Early Christians in the Roman Empire from Jerusalem to Chalcedon
Nigel Scotland

Durham, UK: Sacristy, 2026
Pb., v + 265 pp., bibliography, Index

Reviewed by S. Blair Waddell, adjunct professor of church history, Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, and senior pastor, Providence Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama

For the last two decades, the gold standard of an introduction to Christian history from an evangelical perspective has been Justo Gonzalez's *The Story of Christianity*, a two-volume work covering the early church, the medieval period, the Reformation and modern times. In addition to the historical information, these two volumes are written in lively style and full of illustrations. They appeal greatly to students in the classroom who are unfamiliar with the subject. Many authors, however, have sought to produce a history that would be more concise than Gonzalez's.

In this work, Nigel Scotland makes such an attempt regarding the first 500 years of Christianity. He served as a lecturer in church history at the University of Gloucester and most recently at Trinity College in Bristol. In the preface, Scotland claims that his book 'is important for anyone who is serious about their Christian faith' (p. v).

The book is both historical and theological. Not only does Scotland trace the history of the Christian faith beginning with the early church, but he demonstrates what was at stake between divergent viewpoints, concisely in fewer than 250 pages.

It provides adequate quotations from the primary sources as the church faced challenges from persecution, Gnosticism, monarchism and Arianism. It also addresses issues that were controversial within the church (and still have relevance today), such as the Trinity, monasticism and episcopacy. The appendix contains a timeline of Roman emperors, controversies, theologians and church councils. This feature alone is a wonderful resource for any student of the period.

However, the book contains some flaws. It makes major assumptions within its first chapter, which covers the time period of the New Testament. Many would disagree with Scotland's interpretation that the spiritual gift of tongues was both known and unknown languages (p. 1). There would also be disagreement that the early church had a 'minimal organizational structure', particularly in light of the sixth and fifteenth chapters of Acts, which show a clear development (2). It seems dubious to include female leadership, in the section on the synagogue, as a prototype for the local church when no synagogue had a woman serving as an elder, nor is there ever a woman in the New Testament identified as serving in that role (4–5). And while no one would say that the house churches operated like our modern worship services, many scholars would disagree with the implication that there was no homily in the early gatherings (16).

The author makes several statements that are neither explained nor defended. He merely cites a biblical reference in the footnotes as though that would settle the matter on such controversial points. This contrasts with the rest of the content, as he does an excellent job of providing the relevant quotations from historical works that attest to the development of orthodoxy.

Sadly, the book also fails to deal with recent scholarship on the early church. Of the 59 works acknowledged, only 11 were written within the last 25 years (and three of those 11 were the author's own titles). Some of the biographical material on the theologians is 100 years old! Despite the text's clarity, the material comes across more as readings from his lectures rather than a comprehensive history. I have no doubt that hearing Dr. Scotland lecture on the material would be entertaining and informative, but a written work demands more.

While such writing has the advantage of addressing short episodes of early doctrinal development, it runs the risk of breaking up the cohesion of the progress of the church overall. If one desired a book that could adequately address some of the major issues from 120 AD to the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, this book would suffice as a quick, accessible reference. But for a more comprehensive view, one should look elsewhere.

Vulnerable Mission for Practitioners: A Simple—yet Challenging—Guide to Cross cultural Service without Dominance
Deborah Bernhard and Marcus Grohmann (eds.)

Alliance for Vulnerable Mission, 2025 (ebook)

Reviewed by Jan Wessels, Faith2Share (UK)

This compact volume offers a lucid, field-tested proposal for cross cultural ministry that deliberately divests Western workers of their two most common forms of

power: global languages and foreign funds. The editors define vulnerable mission as ministry carried out exclusively in indigenous languages and with local resources (at least in one's key ministry contexts). The aim is not technique but discipline—a self-limitation that invites local ownership of the gospel and guards against dependency.

The book grounds this approach theologically (in the incarnation, the sending of the disciples, and the concept of power made perfect in weakness), draws contrasts with prevalent Western models such as project-driven aid, and supplies concrete case studies from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas to show what long-term, language deep, resource frugal ministry actually looks like.

The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission's (AVM) twin commitments to using vernacular speech and indigenous means are stated without equivocation, yet with pastoral realism about how families, partner structures and safety concerns can constrain their implementation. The theologically deep, jargon-free argument that mission should align with Jesus's voluntary weakness rather than managerial strength reads as a summons to conversion rather than a strategy manual. The chapters repeatedly return to Scripture's pattern of costly, non-dominating witness, reframing success in terms of faithfulness, reproducibility and local agency.

The case studies add to the book's credibility, showing how refusing outside money, learning the local language, and embracing unglamorous presence often feel slow and difficult yet bear durable fruit.

The presentation resonated with me because of my personal experience. In my 18 years among the Naro people in the Ghanzi District of Botswana, I encountered the very dynamics this book names. The Naro were not unreached, but they were largely unchurched—present in Setswana-speaking congregations but linguistically and culturally marginal. Our priorities were to learn the Naro's own language, to facilitate Bible translation by Naro speakers, and to shape worship in Naro idioms rather than folding people into dominant lingua franca models. This process proved slow and costly, and it was often misunderstood—by some Naro (for whom Setswana and English carried social advantage), by Setswana-language churches, and by crusade-oriented missions that prized numbers and visibility. But we were able, through this form of vulnerable mission, to enable local believers to increasingly take over ministry.

More generally, the growth and success of AICs—African Instituted (or Initiated, or Indigenous) Churches—illustrates the value of vulnerable mission well. Scholarly syntheses (e.g. by Allan Heaton Anderson) have shown that AICs, which constitute a significant share of sub-Saharan Christianity, embody an enduring missionary impulse of their own. Their growth has not depended on donor funding or imported ecclesial models but on deep cultural resonance and local ownership—precisely the dynamic this book encourages.

Missions historian Andrew F. Walls helps articulate why the AVM's proposal matters. First, his oft-cited caution that 'the past … has to be converted, turned toward Christ' captures the task of redeeming cultures rather than suppressing them—a direct challenge to models that install external forms as normative. Second, Walls's vernacular/translation principle—that Christianity possesses no sacred language and must be rendered in the mother tongues and conceptual worlds of every people—supplies the theological engine for the AVM's two disciplines. Read through

this lens, vulnerable mission is not a tactic but a commitment to the nature of the gospel itself as a translated (and endlessly translatable) Word.

The authors press hard in two areas that deserve continued debate. First, with regard to English-dominant or 'multicultural' spaces, the book argues that using global languages can conceal asymmetries and mute indigenous meanings, and that 'inclusive' teams may still privilege Western habits. That critique will sting, but the case studies and theology give it bite. This raises an important practical question: how might institutions (seminaries, agencies, networks) restructure to prioritize vernacular theologizing without defaulting to English for efficiency?

A second issue is holism without patronage. The AVM is rightly cautious about material generosity that signals a prosperity message or creates clientelism. Yet practitioners need workable patterns for diaconal care that avoid paternalism but do not withhold mercy. The book gestures toward giving 'outside' one's key contexts; further examples would serve readers well.

Regardless of the presence of some unresolved issues, the book's key point stands: if we do not change our language and resource posture, we should not be surprised when the results look like us.

This book is a courageous call to downwardly mobile mission—linguistically, financially and institutionally. Its thesis tracks with both micro-level practice (as I experienced among the Naro) and macro-level history (as seen in the AICs), as well as aligning with Walls's central insights about how to facilitate mission that is received and owned locally rather than managed from abroad.

Not every reader will—or can—adopt the AVM's disciplines fully. But anyone serious about post-colonial, non-dominating witness should grapple with this book's central conviction that the gospel can best become deeply rooted in a culture when it is spoken in people's own tongues and sustained by their own gifts. That method is slower, costlier and less photogenic, but it is also, more often than not, more authentic and lasting.