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About the Journal of Global Christianity

The Journal of Global Christianity seeks to promote international scholarship and discussion on topics related to global Christianity. The journal addresses key issues related to the mission of the Church in hope of helping those who labor for the gospel wrestle with and apply the biblical teaching on various challenging mission topics.

Understanding that there is a lack of trained and theologically educated leaders around the world to lead the Church and prepare future leaders, *The Journal of Global Christianity* targets an audience of pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers. The educational level of our audience ranges from those who have completed a bachelor level degree to those who have completed a master level as well as those in school preparing for ministry. We realize that there are theology students, professors, and other scholars who will read and take interest in the content of this journal, but our main focus is on those working with the global church or those who are considering work with the global church. The journal assumes a high level of education among its audience but is not strictly academic.

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ARTICLES

Articles should generally be about 4,000 to 7,000 words (including footnotes) and should be submitted to the Managing Editor of *The Journal of Global Christianity*, which is peer-reviewed. Articles should use clear, concise English, following The SBL Handbook of Style (esp. for abbreviations), supplemented by The Chicago Manual of Style. They should consistently use either UK or USA spelling and punctuation, and they should be submitted electronically as an email attachment using Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx extensions) or Rich Text Format (.rtf extension). Special characters should use a Unicode font.

REVIEWS

The book review editors generally select individuals for book reviews, but potential reviewers may contact them about reviewing specific books. As part of arranging book reviews, the book review editors will supply book review guidelines to reviewers.

Global Christianity Needs a Reformation

Aubrey Sequeira

The Puritan Richard Sibbes described the Reformation as "that fire which all the world shall never be able to quench."[1] The *Journal of Global Christianity* exists because the fire of the Reformation still burns today. As an Indian pastor and teacher serving in the 10/40 window, I write with deep concern for the brightness and longevity of this flame in the Global South.[2]

Readers of this journal hardly need an introduction to the concepts "Global South" and "Global Christianity." Nevertheless, some clarification might be helpful. The term "Global South" has been emerging and developing for the past fifty years and has generally come to refer to countries in the Southern Hemisphere – nations in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia. Philip Jenkins concluded his landmark article on the Global South in 2006 with these words: "Christianity, a religion that was born in Africa and Asia, has in our lifetimes decided to go home. Our traditional concept of the Christian world as a predominantly white and Euro-American world – of western Christianity, in fact – is no longer the norm. Christianity should enjoy a worldwide boom in the coming decades, but the vast majority of believers will be neither white nor European nor Euro-American."[3] In 2009, evangelical historian Mark Noll observed "the Christian church has experienced a larger geographical redistribution in the last fifty years than in any comparable period in its history, with the exception of the very earliest years of church history."[4] The term "Global Christianity" has therefore come to refer to this geographical redistribution of the Christian church in the Global South.

Add to this a changing global landscape with urbanization, globalization, and new technologies, and it becomes undeniable that the gospel is advancing into frontiers and to peoples in unprecedented ways. My own context testifies to this reality: the congregation I pastor meets in the flagship

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[1] Richard Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes*, 7 vols., ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh, 1862–1864; reprint ed., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973–1982), 1:100.

[2] This editorial is an edited version of a talk that I was supposed to give at the Together for the Gospel conference in 2018. Due to an unforeseen visa issue, I was denied entry into the United States. My good friend and fellow Indian pastor, Anand Samuel, delivered my talk in my stead. I am indebted to him both for delivering the talk and for his many inputs, which greatly improved the content.

[3] Philip Jenkins, "Believing in the Global South," *First Things* (December 2006), https://www.firstthings.com/article/2006/12/believing-in-the-global-south.

[4] Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity*: *How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2009), 21.

evangelical church building of the capital city of the United Arab Emirates. Our building is home to 59 other congregations, and about 15,000 people traverse our building on a *weekly* basis for worship. At the Anglican church building down the road, another 40 congregations meet for worship – the number of people in the 10,000s.

And this is *not* TEXAS! This is Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates. Most of the Christian worshippers in my city are African and Asian. Most of the 100+ churches that meet in and around my church building are evangelical / charismatic and Pentecostal. My own congregation is an international church, and a majority of the 1200 people who attend our worship services each week belong to what has been called the "Global South." Global Christianity is exploding, the face of world Christianity is changing, and in our lifetimes, we will likely see more churches and Christians in the Global South than in Europe and North America combined.

How do we respond to this phenomenon? In all of this, our first impulse must be to give praise to God for His sovereign move among the nations. We can be encouraged that over the last decades, Christ has been gathering his sheep from the nations. We can rejoice that people are indeed turning to Jesus from every tribe and tongue and giving up all to follow Him!

I frequently meet first-generation believers who are sincere, passionate, regenerate Christians, and the Lord is at work in their lives. The gospel is going forth in unprecedented ways, people are coming to know Jesus, churches are being planted, and the nations are coming to know the Lord – what we're seeing in the Global South is truly *remarkable*.

1. A Revival?

The growth of Global Christianity is remarkable, but can it be called a "revival"? If by "revival" we mean unprecedented growth, a generic spiritual fervor, and enthusiasm – then yes, the Global South is experiencing a revival of historic proportions. But if by "revival," we mean revival in the more theological and historic sense – a spiritual awakening in which the glory of God is displayed brightly through His church, the Word of God is cherished and proclaimed, and the people of God are marked by a passion for holiness and a hunger for righteousness, then we still have a long way to go. Kevin DeYoung rightly says of revival: "True revival will always be Bible saturated through and through. Revival is not simply renewed fervor for spiritual things. Buddhists have a fervor for spiritual things . . . God-wrought revival brings a fervor for the Bible, that we might live, feel, sing, pray, work, and worship according to the word of God."[5]

[5] Kevin DeYoung, "A Surprising Work of God," The Gospel Coalition, March 13, 2013, accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/a-surprising-work-of-god-2-of-2/.

If we're seeking spiritual fervor that is Bible-saturated and a renewal of Christ's church such that it stands as a pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim 3:15), then it is probably better to say that what Global Christianity needs is a reformation. If we desire true revival in the Global South, then a biblical reformation is what we must first seek.

2. Why a Reformation?

Why a reformation? Sadly, the growth of Christianity in the Global South has been accompanied by the growth of heresies and spurious doctrines of every kind. From the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel to legalistic do-it-yourself piety, to hyper-grace antinomianism, to syncretistic insider-movements and hyper-contextualized heretical Christianity, to superstitious and mystical demonology, the Global South is home to every form of unbiblical mumbo-jumbo you can imagine.

The Reformation martyr William Tyndale, in criticism of the medieval Roman Catholic Church asserted, "God gave his sheep to be pastured, not to be shaven and shorn." Tyndale's words are prophetic for Global Christianity today. What we're seeing in Global Christianity is, in many ways, a complete undermining of the very heart of the Protestant Reformation – the total antithesis of all that the Reformers hoped for. And the ones that suffer the most are Christ's "little ones," his beloved sheep for whom He bled, who are left shaven and shorn and starved. The various flavors of Christian theology and experience in the Global South are collectively the antithesis of the foundational truths of Protestantism – the five Solas of the Reformation.

Here I want to briefly illustrate how each of the Reformation Solas is undermined in Global Christianity.

2.1 Sola Scriptura

The churches and Christians of the Global South are not marked by a reliance on the authority of Scripture alone. Rather, they seek an experience of God entirely divorced from the Bible. Most African and Asian Pentecostals, indeed most Christians in the Global South, wholeheartedly affirm Scripture's inerrancy, but in practice, they deny its *sufficiency*. Scripture is affirmed as wholly true, but it is seen as irrelevant for preaching, for discipleship, for counseling, for spiritual growth, for Christian piety and experience.

If the Bible is ever used, it is used like an Ouija-board, where random verses completely ripped out of their context are used as "Rhema words" by which God commands believers to do this or that – often in contradiction to the clear teaching of Scripture.

Here is an unedited e-mail I recently received that represents the kind of thinking that is ubiquitous in my part of the world:

> Praise the Lord brother in Christ Jesus.
>
> Our God is a purposeful God. He had brought me to this country on eagle's wings. He ensured that I don't leave this country, though I tried going back to India many a times out of fear. But the Lord renewed my strength like an eagle. God came to me like a wind, a cloud, fire and electrum. During these 4 years stay in this country. I have experienced God's mighty hands. Through dreams and visions and whispers He has spoken to me.
>
> Prayers were answered. Whenever the enemy came in like the flood the Spirit of the Lord put a standard against Him. I experienced a pillar of cloud protecting me when a black car came from no where on my visit to the bookstore while I was carrying the word of God home (artifacts). For the gospel did not come to me in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance … 1Thes 1:5 My pray to the Lord is that I meet a brother who is full of grace and filled with the power of Holy Spirit. To share the burden and work together for the building up of His Body. Amen brother/ sister in Jesus.

The writer emphasizes experiences with God through wind, cloud, fire and *electrum*! And in the couple of places that the Bible is mentioned, it's denigrated as an "artifact."

Extra-biblical revelations, dreams, visions, and spiritual experiences take the place of Scripture and its power.

And sadly, many North Americans are also enthused by this sort of Bible-denigrating mysticism. We forget that the most supernatural work of the Holy Spirit is in bringing dead sinners to submit to His supernatural Book. Instead, even Reformed evangelical churches in the West are glad to give heaps of mission funding to those ministries that boast of supernatural encounters, dreams and visions, and so-called miracles – and get duped in the process by frauds and charlatans who fatten themselves on Jesus's sheep and on Western missions funds.

Another way that Sola Scriptura is undermined is through postmodern contextualization methods, insider movements, born out of the cradle of North American missiology. Western missionaries serving in the Global South constantly follow the maxim that they must not teach their converts what the Bible says about how churches are to be ordered, about how Christian identity is to be formed, or about what it means to be disciples; instead fledging believers from pagan backgrounds are encouraged to develop their hermeneutic and praxis from within their own cultures and worldviews. These mission methodologies undermine the sufficiency of Scripture by gutting the Bible and using indigenous and cultural forms and worldviews to form Christian identity.[6] Such missiologies

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[6] See the compelling treatments of insider movements by David B. Garner, "High Stakes: Insider Movement Hermeneutics and the Gospel," *Themelios* 37 (2012), accessed December 12, 2018, http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/high-stakes-insider-movement-hermeneutics-and-the-gospel; and Philip Mark, "Insider Movements – Gutting the Bible," Reformation21, 2013, accessed December 12, 2018, http://www.reformation21.org/articles/insider-movements-gutting-the-bible.php.

are not merely deficient; they are demonic, for they enslave people to the elemental spirits of this world (Col 2:8).

2.2 Sola Gratia

In Global Christianity, the grace of God is often perverted into a view of divine blessing that amounts to what D.A. Carson calls "mutual back-scratching" – I scratch God's back and in return, he scratches mine![7] The grace of God is diminished by a complete redefinition of biblical categories. "Faith" in God is treated as a work by which we somehow merit God's blessings. The biblical concept of "blessing" is unhitched from its salvific and covenantal moorings and used to refer primarily to physical, earthly goods that God bestows in exchange for humans doing something that makes Him happy. In other words, sufficient "faith" or favors to God will induce God to "bless" us. Those familiar with church history will recognize here that medieval Roman Catholicism's theology of indulgences has been resurrected anew.

I know of a Buddhist convert to Christianity whose child has had a major organ transplant. This person won't give the child the medication he needs because of the belief that this would somehow displease God by distrusting his promises. I also personally know a South Indian pastor who didn't teach his blind son Braille because of his belief that this would demonstrate a lack of faith in God's ability to heal the blind. I could offer multipe examples from first-hand experience.

Sola Gratia is further trampled upon by a complete loss of understanding of sin, depravity, and God's gracious redemption of sinners. Instead, the emphasis is placed on power, healings, and deliverances. I can't tell you the number of times that professing Christians, even pastors, have looked at me with blank faces when I say that the greatest blessing that God gives us is the knowledge of His Son Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of our sins through his death and resurrection.

Finally, Sola Gratia is lost because the means of grace have been lost in the Global South. Preaching, sacraments, and the local church have all been killed by either false or non-existent ecclesiologies. Sadly, again, it is Western missions funds that proliferate these problems, for massive funding is channeled into missions and ministries that do not emphasize the planting of strong healthy local churches led by qualified men who preach and teach the Word of God.

2.3 Solus Christus

Solus Christus is destroyed in Global Christianity by the "man of God" theology. Many churches and movements in Global Christianity have failed to honor Christ as the only mediator between man and God. John Calvin, commenting on the antichrists of 1 John 2:18–23 wrote: "Christ, is

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[7] D.A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 45–46.

denied, whenever those things which peculiarly belong to him, are taken away from him."[8] Calvin maintained that the corrupt priests of Medieval Rome were acting in the spirit of antichrist by illegitimately appropriating to themselves that which belongs to Christ alone. We see something very similar in Global Christianity today. The "anointed man of God" or self-appointed apostle or prophet becomes the mediator who dispenses God's blessings. Many "pastors" in the Global South operate as little popes of their own small kingdoms – kingdoms that have nothing to do with the kingdom of Christ – and their kingdoms continue in perpetuity through nepotism. They devour the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable. They use and abuse the sheep of Christ, the poor sheep who believe that the prophecies and prayers of these "anointed men of God" earn them favor before God's throne. These evil shepherds have averted the eyes of the sheep from their Advocate and Glorious High Priest.

I attended an event in my city where people thronged to be blessed by one of these self-styled apostles – Chris Oyakhilome, a Nigerian prophet who is one of the richest "pastors" in the world. The auditorium was packed (with Africans and Asians) and the event had to be stopped and re-started because of the danger of fire code violations. With no room left in the main hall, people were pressing against the glass panes of the front doors saying things like "I just want a glimpse of him, so that his anointing will fall on me." When "prophet" Chris appeared on stage there was chaotic hysteria and a deafening roar from the crowd unlike anything I've ever heard or seen (and I've been to a Deep Purple concert!). His teaching was rife with heresy, claiming that Jesus had only a human body but a divine (not human) soul; and then asserting that Christian believers today also become inwardly divine upon being born again. And because of this inwardly divine nature, Christians have the power to command blessings into existence. Such teaching is very common in Global Christianity. At another event I witnessed recently, a Kenyan "apostle" sprayed water from his water bottle upon the crowd so that his anointing would fall on them.

In the context of Global Christianity, such so-called "men of God" are revered and exalted. Moreover, they are above any kind of criticism or scrutiny, for we are told that one "must not dare to touch the Lord's anointed." Indeed, this is nothing less than the spirit of Medieval Rome – the spirit of the antichrist.

2.4 Sola Fide

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is virtually unknown in the Global South. It is instead supplanted by legalistic religion in a variety of forms. The legalistic religion of Global Christianity

[8] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. and ed. John Owen, vol. 23 of Calvin's Commentaries (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 195.

imposes upon the tender consciences of new believers the traditions of men and forms of worship borrowed from pagan religion.

Pastors in the Global South presume to tell people what they may and may not eat and whom they may or may not marry, while elevating the "prophecies" of men to the status of words spoken from the mouth of God himself!

Justification by faith alone crumbles when a person's right standing before God is measured on the basis of one's spiritual experiences – especially "baptism in the Spirit," speaking in tongues, and other mystical experiences. I recently heard of a woman from a nearby church that went to work with bruises on her hands – and she joyfully showed these bruises to a friend as her evidence of the Spirit's work upon her – through hysterical *clapping* in worship!

Justification by faith alone is further undercut by gross misapplications of the Old Testament Law to Christ's people. The concept of a right standing with God through faith alone is shattered through the teaching that believers live under fear of "generational curses" – paying for the sins of their forefathers, until a "man of God" will deliver them.

And finally, a model of missions recently employed by many Western missions organizations in the Global South attacks Sola Fide by promoting what's been called "obedience-based discipleship" – that is, centering ministry on achieving obedience – with little more than lip service towards the gospel of regeneration and saving faith that produces gospel obedience.[9]

2.5 Soli Deo Gloria

Finally, of course, Christianity in the Global South often has very little concern for the glory of God. The only time 10,000 people will gather in an auditorium in the name of Christ would be to see a faith-healer or so-called prophet perform his tricks.

The biggest and most famous theologians in the Global South are not John Piper, D.A. Carson, and R.C. Sproul, but Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, and Joyce Meyer. People are stunned when I tell them that these are false teachers.

The concern for health, wealth, and prosperity eclipses any concern for God's glory and kingdom. The heresy of prosperity theology promotes the glorification of self with wealth, victory, and earthly goods, rather than the pursuit of God's glory through sharing in Christ's sufferings.

The love of money becomes a huge detractor from God's glory – ministry becomes all about boasting big numbers and keeping the pipelines open to receive funding from the West rather than laboring faithfully for the glory of God. The very notion of living for God's glory is virtually

[9] See the devastating critique of such movements by Zane Pratt, "Obedience-Based Discipleship," *Global Missiology* (July 2015), accessed December 12, 2018, http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/viewFile/1811/4017.

non-existent. Most Global South Christians live their lives with their greatest concern being how "God is going to bless me."

3. How Did We Get Where We Are Now?

I have reflected long and hard about the roots of all this bad fruit and have ascertained three primary causes:

First, the weakness of the church in the Global South is the result of bad missiology and poor missiological methods that fail to emphasize the theological training of leaders and the planting of strong, healthy churches. Western evangelicalism, with its insatiable appetite for numbers and results, has allowed missions to become a cesspool of bad theology and pragmatism. The need for speed reduces the work of evangelism and discipleship to a bare minimum, replicating results without concern for depth and true conversion. Mission organizations emphasize speed over soundness and value the replication of "rabbit churches" that reproduce quickly instead of "elephant churches" that take a long time to establish. And now, the Global South is filled with rabbits – rabbits that are being rapidly devoured by hawks and wolves.

Second, we must acknowledge that proponents of the Prosperity Gospel have been far more rapid and strategic in spreading their content in comparison to Reformed evangelicals who have been slow to awaken to these realities. Teachers of the Prosperity heresy have been on satellite TV for decades now, reaching even remote villages in Africa and Asia, long before many of our favorite reformed websites even went online!

They've paid heaps of money to bring over African, Asian, and Latin American ministers to train in their pernicious schools of prophecy. Meanwhile, Bible-believing evangelical churches invest very little in training leaders for the Global South. A minister from Uganda told me that when a recent book authored primarily by prominent African pastors refuting Prosperity theology was launched in Uganda, *thirteen* copies were made available at the book launch.[10] Whenever I've raised questions about these issues with my North American brethren, I am told that the problem is a lack of funds to be able to better resource the global church. Yet funds are amply available to host multiple huge pastors' conferences largely attended by North American pastors, at which tens of thousands of books are given away, most of which will never even be read. Reformed evangelicalism in the West is glutted with resources – and in my opinion has been very slow to care for theological famine in the Global South.

Third, North American evangelicals, including those of a "Reformed" persuasion, are complicit in the weaknesses of Global Christianity because money from the West – not just from aberrant

[10] Kenneth Mbugua, ed., *Prosperity?: Seeking the True Gospel* (Kenya: ACTS, 2016).

churches and movements – but money from Bible-preaching evangelical churches has been poured into the worst forms of Global Christianity because of the large numbers featured by such movements.

But revival cannot be manufactured. Revival cannot be sped up. We must give ourselves instead to doing God's work, in God's ways, with God's resources, patiently laboring to strengthen his church, and wait for the Spirit to move when the truth of God is proclaimed with clarity and authority.

4. A Way Forward?

So is there a way forward? How can we work to make things better? What will it take for us to see true revival and biblical reformation in the Global South?

Praise God for faithful organizations that are trying hard. Praise God for initiatives like TGC's Theological Famine Relief and the translation of good theological content into languages that serve the global church. But this is not enough. We need to see leaders in Global Christianity who are able to wield the sword of the Spirit to bring every thought captive to Christ by addressing the particular idolatries and worldviews of their own contexts. Praise God for short-term mission teams that make frequent trips to train leaders on the field. But that's not enough either. We need to see *indigenous* teachers who are able to equip the saints with the whole counsel of God all-year round!

Put simply, a Reformation needs *reformers*. Global Christianity needs faithful men who will be trained and equipped to teach and preach the whole counsel of God. For God's Spirit blows to reform, revive, and renew only where God's Word is faithfully proclaimed, taught, defended, and cherished. We need to foster biblical Reformation by training and equipping South Asian John Calvins, African Martin Luthers, South American John Owens, and East Asian John Pipers!

I want to be clear here, however, and define what I mean by "training." By "training," I *do not* mean rapid ten-day or ten-week discipleship courses like the sort promoted by several American missiological gurus – whether CPM, T4T, DMM, or whatever the latest methodology is. Nor do I mean "training" by sending books and DVDs, or short-term teaching trips, or bringing men occasionally to North America for a conference.

Global Christianity needs more. It will take a great investment of time and energy and patience to raise up faithful men who are trained to rightly handle the Word of Truth, and who are able to teach others also (2 Tim 2:2, 15). Just like in Elijah's day, God has his faithful men in the Global South who have not bowed the knee to Ba'al. Some of the best work in the Global South is being done by faithful brothers who have received solid training in exegesis, in biblical theology, in systematic theology, in church history, and pastoral theology. They have studied diligently to show themselves approved workmen and have been equipped to contend for the truth once for all delivered to the saints.

A lot of great work is being done by men who have studied in the West with the best resources that Reformed evangelicalism has to offer and have taken that education back to their home countries to plant and lead and reform churches that are rooted in God's Word – to proclaim the gospel with the light of Scripture and the glory of God. In most instances, their education has been self-funded or providentially made possible through a few benefactors. My own MDiv education was entirely self-funded; my PhD education was made possible largely by faithful *Indian* benefactors. Not a single American church partnered with me financially for six years of my theological education.

I firmly believe that the best way forward for Global Christianity to grow in biblical health is for churches in the West to invest in giving faithful leaders in the Global South the best theological education imaginable. A faithful and godly Ethiopian pastor in my region recently said, with tears in his eyes, "People are starving here – they're starving for the word of God – they're starving for the truth." Who will feed them?

I contend that the way forward is by the Western church re-channeling its missions funds to sponsor faithful leaders like this Ethiopian brother to be trained at the best seminaries in the West in hermeneutics, theology, and exegesis in Greek and Hebrew, so that they can then write theology in their own languages, address the issues in their own contexts, and confront the idolatrous world-views of their own cultures. This suggestion, however, is often met with a fear – a well-meaning fear harbored mainly by Western leaders – that leaders from the Global South who are trained in the West never return to their own contexts. In response, we might state that this fear is misplaced for several reasons. First, such a fear overlooks the labors of several faithful men who have been trained in the West and have indeed returned to their Global South contexts where they are doing excellent work. I personally know several faithful men who have bypassed opportunities in the West in order to return home. Second, while some Global South Christians do opt to remain in the West, for every such leader, there exists an equivalent number of Western missionaries who raise huge amounts of support and then return home after only a few years on the field. The fear of Western missionaries who return home quickly (whatever their reasons) does not stop us from funding more missionaries; why should the few Global South leaders who stay in the West stop us from funding the training of others? Let's also not forget that with globalization and the growing diaspora of unreached peoples even in the West, in God's providence, there does exist a need for non-Western leaders in Western contexts as well. Third, there are good means to ensure that our funding of Global South leaders will bear fruit in their home contexts. For instance, some churches and institutions have sponsored the education of Global South leaders under a "covenant agreement," in which the leader agrees to go back to his home context after his education, following which the sponsored amount becomes a repayable loan. Finally, the sad truth is that Western seminaries and Western churches, at present at least, provide much better education in sound doctrine than any institutions in the Global South. I therefore firmly believe that training Global South leaders in the West is a preliminary

and necessary step to make it possible to foster healthy churches and faithful theological training centers in the Global South in the future.

Having invested in training indigenous leaders, we must then sponsor the establishment of theological training centers in the Global South run by indigenous leaders with faithful, biblical, Reformation theology. Moreover, we need to sponsor the planting of strong, healthy, doctrinally robust churches led by qualified men – churches that will become hubs of sound theology and pillars and buttresses of the truth – churches that will train and produce the next generation of leaders and reformers in Global Christianity.

We want to see pulpits aflame with the glory of God's Word proclaimed, which in turn creates churches under the authority of the Word, where Christ is cherished and honored as He should be. If that's what we want, we must equip and send out men who will become, Lord willing, the Augustines and Calvins of the urban hubs of the Global South who will then have a ripple effect on the Christianity of the surrounding regions.

We need to invest in training leaders, in planting sound and healthy churches, and in starting strong seminaries in the Global South. We must begin dreaming of where the Genevas and Cambridges of the Global South will be! And to do that, we need to take the long view – invest in indigenous men who will devote the time and effort necessary to study and will work hard to dig deep wells from which *many* will drink the pure water of God's Truth.

The Lord promised that He will bless and protect his sheep with faithful shepherds (Jer 23:4) – let's work to raise up a generation of shepherds in the Global South who will feed and nurture the sheep rather than shear and devour them.

5. Conclusion

In 2006, Philip Jenkins prophetically observed:

> The churches that have made most dramatic progress in the Global South have been either Catholic (of a traditionalist and fideistic kind) or evangelical and Pentecostal Protestant sects. Membership in Pentecostal and independent churches already runs into the hundreds of millions, and congregations are located in precisely the regions of fastest population growth. Within a few decades, such denominations will represent a far larger segment of global Christianity and just conceivably a majority. They preach messages that, to a westerner, appear simplistically charismatic, visionary, and apocalyptic. In this thought-world, prophecy is an everyday reality, while faith healing, exorcism, and dream-visions are all fundamental parts of religious sensibility. For better or worse, the dominant churches of the future could have much in common with those of medieval or early modern European times.[11]

[11] Jenkins, "Believing in the Global South."

The need for Reformation in Global Christianity is urgent and real. May we work hard to ensure that the shape of world Christianity fifty years from now is not dominated by faith-healers, so-called prophets, and false apostles, but by godly men who preach and teach the whole counsel of God. And let's pray and hope that by God's grace and our faithful efforts, the flame lit in the Reformation would blaze bright in Global Christianity, for the glory of God alone.

Overlooked Mentors: What Can Persecuted Christians Teach Us About Leadership?[1]

Brent L. Kipfer

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ABSTRACT

For one-fifth of the global church, leadership is exercised in contexts of persecution. Despite growing popular and scholarly interest in both *persecution* and *leadership*, there has been little dialogue between these fields or investigation into the experience of persecuted leaders. This article calls for intentional, sustained study of Christian leadership under persecution, considering the challenges of faithful witness to Jesus Christ under such conditions, biblical perspectives, the relevance of leadership theory, and benefits for the global church – including persecuted communities, missionaries and those who enjoy significant religious freedom. The leadership theory of Robert E. Quinn is one example of a promising research model tested in relation to the case of Meserete Kristos Church leadership in Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991.

1. Introduction

Christian leadership, in countless communities around the world, is forged in the heat of persecution.[2] Five hundred million followers of Jesus Christ in over sixty-five countries face significant restrictions on expressing their faith, including limits on worship gatherings, public identification as a Christian, evangelism and/or ownership of a Bible. While the nature and intensity of persecution

[1] This article includes reworked content from Brent L. Kipfer, "Persecuted and Thriving: Meserete Kristos Church Leadership during the Ethiopian Revolution (1974-1991)" (D.Min. diss., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2017).

[2] Charles L. Tieszen, "Redefining Persecution," in *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom* (GMS; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 47, defines the religious persecution of Christians as "any unjust action of varying levels of hostility perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion and directed at Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective." While accepting this relatively broad definition, this article focuses on leadership under more severe forms of persecution.

varies widely between regions, cultures, and nations, many risk public humiliation, ostracism, beatings, prison, torture, and even death because of their allegiance to and witness for Jesus.[3] Like the writers and original audiences of the New Testament, they understand that leadership – as an expression of discipleship – is inherently costly. Even so, many who embrace this call from God lead others with exceptional purpose, integrity, love, and creativity. Most serve in obscurity but have much to teach the global church about faithful, sacrificial, and courageous Christian leadership. Unfortunately, their voices and experiences are absent in leadership studies and literature, both popular and academic.

This article explores the pressing need for research into the experience of persecuted leaders, considering a) the challenge of leadership while under persecution; b) the absence of cross-pollination between the fields of leadership and persecution studies; c) biblical perspectives; d) the relevance of current leadership theory, with attention to the work of Robert E. Quinn; e) the case of the Meserete Kristos Church during the persecution of the Derg regime in Ethiopia; and f) potential benefits for the global church, including persecuted communities, missionaries, and those who enjoy religious freedom.

2. Impacts of Persecution on the Church and Its Leaders

Christians in Western democracies sometimes romanticize the effect of persecution on churches, assuming it inevitably leads to growth, citing Tertullian's adage that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."[4] Churches often do report positive ministry outcomes in environments of persecution, such as the following:

a. Personal spiritual growth, and heightened commitment to Christ;
b. Exceptional corporate vitality as the church more deeply relies on the Holy Spirit;
c. Miraculous answers to prayer;

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[3] Todd M. Johnson, "Persecution in the Context of Religious and Christian Demography, 1970–2020," in *Christianity and Freedom: Volume 2, Contemporary Perspectives* (ed. Allen D. Hertzke and Timothy Samuel Shah; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 13–57, calculates that 500 million Christians in 46 countries face persecution, as defined by the U.S. International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which includes arbitrary prohibitions on, restrictions of, or punishment for 1) assembling for peaceful religious activities such as worship, preaching, and prayer; 2) speaking freely about one's religious beliefs; 3) changing one's religious beliefs and affiliation; 4) possession and distribution of religious literature, including Bibles; 5) raising one's children in the religious teaching and practices of one's choice; 6) arbitrary registration requirements; 7) any of the following acts if committed on account of an individual's religious belief or practice: detention, interrogation, imposition of an onerous financial penalty, forced labor, forced mass resettlement, imprisonment, forced religious conversion, beating, torture, mutilation, rape, enslavement, murder, and execution. Open Doors, "World Watch List 2018: The 50 countries where it's most dangerous to follow Jesus," https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/, accessed April 8, 2018, reports that 215 million Christians in 65 countries experience high levels of persecution.

[4] Vernon Jay Sterk, "The Dynamics of Persecution" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1992), xiii-xiv.

d. Revelation of God's grace and power as believers show love to persecutors;
e. Interest and respect from people who would otherwise ignore Christianity as they see believers' courage and witness to Christ;
f. Reduced nominalism among believers;
g. Expressions of love and care shared between suffering believers; and/or
h. Numerical growth.[5]

Even so, persecution is intended to undermine the advance of the gospel and the well-being of Christians. Such hostility inflicts both short-term and long-term harm on individuals and churches, sometimes resulting in the following:

a. Emotional, physical, and spiritual pain for victims of persecution;
b. Believers denying their faith to escape suffering;
c. Disempowering fear;
d. Reduced integrity for Christians who hide their faith or make moral compromises to survive;
e. Privatization of faith as believers avoid attention from persecutors;
f. Evangelism stifled by disciples' discouragement and desire to avoid suffering, and potential converts' fear of persecution;
g. A climate of mistrust between individuals and groups, making churches susceptible to division;
h. Local churches isolated from other congregations;
i. Churches becoming closed subcultures marked by legalism, defensiveness, and suspicion toward change;
j. Weakened confidence in the gospel due to anti-Christian propaganda;
k. The loss of effective witness to Christ if believers respond with violence, feeding into a spiral of religious conflict; and/or

[5] Nguyen Huu Cuong, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches in Saigon under the Vietnamese Communist Government from 1975" (D.Min. diss., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1995), 92–162, 184; John Moldovan, "Lessons from Ministry in the Context of Violence in Eastern Europe" in *Missions in Contexts of Violence* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008), 351–52; Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea, eds., *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 5; Kurt Nelson, "Finishing Well: Encouraging Pastors to Persevere under Persecution" (D.Min. diss., Columbia International University, 2008), 93–95, 120–21, 127–28; Sterk, "Dynamics of Persecution," 199–201, 236–37.

l. The death of congregations or the end of Christian witness in a region.[6]

The need for committed, creative leadership is acute in contexts of persecution. At the same time, Christian leaders are often targeted for attack, as opponents of the gospel seek to weaken and eliminate their influence. While many remain faithful to Jesus Christ and those whom they serve, some:

a. Cease giving leadership due to apostasy, fear, exile, or death;
b. Are hindered by physical and emotional results of persecution, including injury, lack of sleep, debilitating fear, paranoia and post-traumatic stress disorder;
c. Compromise their faith and call, undermining their moral authority and followers' trust;
d. Conform to persecutors' demands, such as limiting preaching to "safe" topics;
e. Imitate dysfunctional leadership norms modeled by those who persecute them;
f. Experience insecurity and tension in their marriages and families due to pressures of persecution; and/or
g. Feel regret, guilt, and shame when their responses to persecution are not as loving and faith-filled as they would like them to be.[7]

Persecution does not, in and of itself, transform Christian leaders into super-saints or spiritual heroes. Even so, men and women who lead others in the mission of Jesus Christ – at potentially great personal cost – are profoundly shaped by the experience, and often exercise transformational influence in the lives of others.

3. Persecution and Leadership: Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Learning

In the past thirty years, interest in both *persecution* and *leadership* – as popular topics and fields of interdisciplinary study – has grown dramatically. While the volume of institutional resources, research, and literature devoted to *leadership* vastly overwhelms that focused on *persecution,* each

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[6] Cuong, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches," 1–4, 39–42, 45–46, 157; Mark Galli, "Is Persecution Good for the Church? Sometimes It Isn't," *Christianity Today* 41, no. 6 (1997); John Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and How it Died* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 3–34, 97–172, 207–25; Beram Kumar, "Reflections on Mission in the Context of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom," and Paul Estabrooks, "Preparing Both Church and Missionaries: Global North" in *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom* (GMS; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 15–21, 351–56; Moldovan, "Lessons from Ministry," 351; Marshall et al., *Persecuted,* 5–6; Marsh Moyle, *The Effects of Persecution on Church and Mission in Central and Eastern Europe* (Hinckley, UK: CityGate, 1989), 4–9, 12; Nelson, "Finishing Well," 134–35; Janet Keller Richards, *Unlocking our Inheritance: Spiritual Keys to Recovering the Treasures of Anabaptism* (Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2005), 109–18; Sterk, "Dynamics of Persecution," 69, 187–95.

[7] Cuong, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches," 1, 17, 25–28, 86–87, 157; Ivo Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted: Christian Life in the Roman Empire, A.D. 64–313* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 15; Moldovan, "Lessons from Ministry," 348–51; Moyle, *Effects of Persecution,* 9–10; Nelson, "Finishing Well," 1–4, 11, 41–42, 83–84; 119–25.

has captured the attention of broad audiences and academics, inside and outside the Christian church. They have remained, however, separate domains of inquiry, with little overlap or conversation between them.

3.1 Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Growing Interest

Christians have been writing about persecution since the formation of the New Testament. In the first centuries of the church, accounts of martyrs' faithful witness to Christ encouraged believers to persevere. Much later, post-Reformation martyr histories tended to reinforce denominational identities and priorities, as well as inspiring radical commitment to Jesus. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, numerous biographies of persecuted believers, country-specific accounts of the suffering church, works of biblical and theological reflection, and statistical studies on the topic of persecution have been published.[8] Advocacy organizations like Open Doors International, Voice of the Martyrs, the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and Aid to the Church in Need regularly publicize incidents of religious persecution. Within the past fifteen years, there has also been an upsurge in scholarly reflection on the persecution of Christians, with the launch of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* and other publications exploring the topic in relation to mission, biblical studies, theology, demographics and statistics, practical support, healing of trauma, the function of research, and historical case study.[9]

Much of the focus has been, understandably, on mobilizing support for the persecuted: telling their stories, encouraging prayer for them, promoting the cause of religious freedom, and relieving suffering when possible. While there is recognition that persecuted followers of Jesus Christ have

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[8] Christof Sauer, *International Bibliography on Religious Freedom and Persecution, English* (Bonn: International Institute for Religious Freedom, 2004); Thomas Schirrmacher, *The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All: Towards a Theology of Martyrdom* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2008), 24–25, 40–42; Carl A. Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 145–48.

[9] Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith That Endures: The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006); Eitel, *Missions in Contexts of Violence*; Allen D. Hertzke and Timothy Samuel Shah, eds., *Christianity and Freedom: Volume 2, Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, eds., *The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006); Hans Aage Gravaas et al., eds., *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* (RECS 28; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015); Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, eds., *Under Caesar's Sword: How Christians Respond to Persecution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Christof Sauer and Richard Howell, eds., *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Theological Reflections* (RFS 2; Johannesburg: AcadSA Publishing, 2010); Taylor et al., *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom* (GMS; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012).

much to teach each other and Christians in freer, more comfortable settings,[10] most attention to their experience highlights their needs rather than their strengths and gifts.

3.2 The Bad Urach Call: A Challenge to the Global Church

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization has identified the importance of solidarity and partnership between Christians who are persecuted and those with religious freedom. Highlighting the need for strong leadership when churches are persecuted, a 2004 Occasional Paper urges the global church to prioritize:

- **Capacity building within and for the persecuted church,** equipping believers and leaders for effective ministry, economic self-sufficiency, and Christian witness.
- **Networking and partnership between persecuted and non-persecuted believers, and between persecuted Christians in different countries** to strengthen the body of Christ. Recommendations include encouraging suffering believers, giving the global church access to the spiritual insights and example of the persecuted, facilitating practical help, counseling, engaging in theological reflection, helping Christians prepare for increases or reductions in freedom, and learning from the experience of others.
- **Developing a theology of persecution**, drawing on lessons learned from churches under persecution, especially regarding missiology.[11]

Building on this work, in preparation for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Cape Town 2010, scholars from eighteen countries gathered in Bad Urach, Germany, to develop "an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission."[12] While focused on theology, their *Bad Urach Statement* also fleshes out strategy for building capacity within and for the persecuted church, including:

- Creating worldwide awareness of how certain parts of the church are functioning under varied types of restriction;

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[10] Noteworthy efforts to share lessons from persecuted Christians for Western audiences include Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith That Endures,* 301–41; Paul Estabrooks and Jim Cunningham, *Standing Strong through the Storm* (Santa Ana: Open Doors International, 2004); Nik Ripken and Gregg Lewis, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015); The Voice of the Martyrs, *I am N: Inspiring Stories of Christians Facing Islamic Extremists* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2016).

[11] Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Persecuted Church, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 32* (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005). Other recommendations address advocacy, legal issues, prayer, and practical assistance.

[12] Christof Sauer, ed., "Bad Urach Statement: Towards an Evangelical Theology of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom for the Global Church in Mission," in *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Theological Reflections* (RFS 2; Johannesburg: AcadSA Publishing, 2010), 31. The Bad Urach Consultation was organized by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission, Theological Commission and Mission Commission, and the Lausanne Theological Working Group.

- Learning from churches suffering under repressive regimes how they remain steadfast in faith and in growth despite restrictions;
- Encouraging local churches experiencing difficulties through prayer support and other practical forms of help;
- Equipping local churches to convert times of trouble into occasions for testimony to Jesus Christ; and
- Preparing churches to face possible adversity in years ahead by affirming the oneness of the body of Christ, cultivating a deeper measure of active global cooperation, and creating avenues of contact and communication directly or indirectly with churches suffering persecution.

The *Bad Urach Statement* urges that biblical teaching on suffering, persecution, and martyrdom be integrated into theological education and leadership training, with attention to both theoretical reflection and practical application. Such knowledge is necessary not only for those facing severe persecution. Christians under less pressure, the writers argue, need to hear truths about God learned by persecuted Christians, whose spiritual insights "are vital to the transformation of the lives of the rest of the body of Christ."[13]

3.3 Leadership under Persecution: Unexplored Territory

Despite growing interest in the persecuted church, *leadership* in this context has received scant attention. Biographies and other accounts of persecution tell stories of leaders and offer glimpses into their leadership, of course.[14] Still, there have been few attempts to explore the nature and challenge of leadership itself amid pressures of persecution. A notable exception is Nguyen Huu Cuong, whose dissertation credits the robust, courageous faith of pastors, lay leaders, and other believers for the thriving ministry of three persecuted Vietnamese churches. Cuong shows how leaders – relying on the Holy Spirit – practiced evangelism, freedom in Christ, and fervent prayer; made shrewd assessments of the political and cultural context; loved persecutors; and were ready to suffer for the

[13] Ibid., 30.

[14] See Ken Anderson, *Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lamb and the Underground Church of China* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 1991); Barnabas Mam and Kitty Murray, *Church Behind the Wire: A Story of Faith in the Killing Fields* (Chicago: Moody, 2012); Greg Musselman and Trevor Lund, *Closer to the Fire: Lessons from the Persecuted Church* (Bartlesville, OK: Genesis, 2012); Oscar Romero, *A Shepherd's Diary* (trans. Irene B. Hodgson; Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1993); Herbert Schossberg, *Called to Suffer, Called to Triumph* (Portland: Multnomah, 1990); Liao Yiwu, *God Is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China* (trans. Wenguang Huang; New York: Harper One, 2011); Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun* (Grand Rapids: Monarch, 2002).

sake of Jesus and the gospel. His case studies testify to remarkable leadership among persecuted yet joyful missional churches. Still, Cuong's work is not a study of *leadership* per se.[15]

Similarly, other studies explore the experience of persecuted pastors without analyzing leadership dynamics or interacting with leadership theory. Kurt Nelson's research identifies impacts of persecution on Cuban pastors and factors that enable them to persist under persecution.[16] Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson analyze interviews with nine Chinese pastors imprisoned between 1949 and 1980 because of their evangelical activities, considering their suffering and losses, ways of responding and coping, and personal transformation as a result of their experiences.[17] These and other studies have yielded rich insight into dimensions of leadership experience in the persecuted church, yet many questions remain unexplored.

3.4 Why Has This Field Been Neglected?

Why has leadership under persecution received so little scholarly attention? At least three factors are likely at play:

- *Leadership studies have been heavily centered in North America.* Although the world is awash in theory, teaching, and literature on leadership, the bulk of research and publishing reflects North American contexts, assumptions, and concerns, as H.H. Drake Williams, III, recently observed.[18] Severe persecution of Christians mostly happens elsewhere.
- *An underdeveloped awareness that persecuted Christian leaders have spiritual resources – uniquely shaped by their suffering – to contribute to the thriving of the global church.* This

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[15] Cuong, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches."

[16] Nelson, "Finishing Well."

[17] Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson, "Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study on the Religious Persecution among Chinese Pastors," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 3 (2007): 202–10. Additionally, three doctoral theses on leadership development in persecuted Chinese house churches are less concerned with describing and understanding local experience than testing leadership formation strategies: Esther X. Yang, "A Call to Lead: A Study on Communicating the Core Values of the China Ministry to the Leadership of the Full Life Christian Fellowship in China" (D.Min. diss., Ashland Theological Seminary, 2002); Jong Keol Yoo, "Training Chinese House Church Leaders: Factors Influencing Leadership Development Strategies" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005); Kai-Yum Cheung-Teng, "An Analysis of the Current Needs of House Churches in China to Improve the Effectiveness of Leadership Development" (D.Min. diss., Trinity International University, 2006).

[18] H. H. Drake Williams, III, "A Perspective on Christian Leadership Theory: Supporting More Voices from Europe, Africa, and Asia for a Change," *Journal of Global Christianity* 4, no. 1 (2018): 4–9. Robert J. House et al., eds., *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 56; also note the North American character of most leadership theory and research, a reality confirmed by Alan Bryman, "Qualitative Research on leadership: A Critical but Appreciative Review," *The Leadership Quarterly* 15, no. 6 (2004): 729–69.

overlooking of gifts is common both among Christians with religious freedom as well as the persecuted.[19]

- *Severe persecution creates practical barriers to studying leadership experience.* Lack of religious, political, journalistic, and academic freedom hinders persecuted leaders from reflecting on and telling their stories – and makes it challenging for researchers to gain access to their experience without adding to their suffering. Leaders in persecuted churches typically survive through discretion – even secrecy – and avoid leaving evidence for persecutors (or researchers!) to discover.

4. Biblical Perspectives: Martyriological Leadership

The proclamation of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, overturns normal human assessments of leadership and persecution – entwining together themes integral to the narrative and theology of the Bible, the saving grace of God, and the vocation of those who are "being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor 3:18) as they follow and give witness to the suffering yet triumphant Messiah.

God has woven a need for leadership into the fabric of creation, and already in the opening chapter of Genesis calls men and women to "rule" earth's creatures. This delegation of responsibility displays what Timothy Laniak describes as God's "preference for human agency" for accomplishing his purposes, anticipating a growing role for human leadership in the unfolding story.[20] At their best, human leaders are *followers* who faithfully respond to the creative, redemptive, sustaining initiative of God and influence others to do the same. Scripture, however, gives far more attention to leadership *failures* than *successes*, as Arthur Boers notes.[21] Sin pervades human experiences of leadership. Individuals and communities suffer when those called to lead seek personal comfort above their assigned mission, prioritize self over others, choose popularity over integrity, and "are wise in their own eyes."[22]

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[19] Ripken and Lewis, *Insanity of God,* 160–61, for example, recall an attempt to convince a group of persecuted leaders to share their stories with the global church. The audience expressed confusion, explaining that they saw persecution as commonplace – "like the sun coming up in the east" – and hardly worthy of mention.

[20] Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 22.

[21] Arthur Boers, *Servants and Fools: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 35.

[22] See Isaiah 3:1–26; 5:21; Jeremiah 23:1–40; Ezekiel 34:1–31.

It is common in both Old and New Testaments for people to be persecuted because of their allegiance and faithfulness to the living God.[23] Although persecution is a tragic expression of sin, God often uses it as a crucible for refining and revealing genuine faith, and a means for accomplishing his purposes.

The leadership of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is revealed to humanity most clearly and profoundly through the persecution of Jesus Christ, climaxing in his unjust (yet freely embraced) death and resurrection. God thus provides for the salvation of sinful human beings entrenched in their opposition toward him, using their very rebellion and violence as the ground for reconciling and restoring his broken creation. The cross of Jesus shows the extent to which God will suffer – with purpose, holiness, love and creativity – to save sinners.

The suffering and death of Jesus is uniquely salvific. Salvation is in Christ alone. Still, Jesus tells his disciples, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). By God's grace, their experience of persecution enables the gospel to reach others and results in the growth of the kingdom of God. "A cross-centered gospel requires cross-carrying messengers," Glenn Penner observed.[24]

Faithful Christian leaders are necessarily at the forefront of the church's God-ordained mission and often bear the brunt of persecution. Those who oppose the gospel typically adopt the strategy prophesied by Zechariah: "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Zech 13:7b; Matt 26:31). Because persecution is not exceptional but biblically normative for followers of Jesus, Christian leaders can expect some measure of mistreatment because of their vocation. This is not a matter for shame, but joy, as they participate in the sufferings of Christ and anticipate sharing his triumph in the consummation of the kingdom of God.

Biblical leadership needs to be understood in relation to the New Testament concept of *martyria* and its cognates, as Jack Niewold argues. Signifying the act of public, intentional proclamation of Jesus Christ to the world, *martyria* a) issues not only from those who physically walked with Jesus, but also others who later join the church; b) reflects personal testimony to the saving work of Christ; c) is intended to lead hearers to conversion; d) is public; and e) entails identification with and participation in the suffering and glory of Christ, although not necessarily death.[25] Niewold notes a

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[23] For biblical theologies of persecution, see Scott Cunningham, *'Through Many Tribulations': The Theology of Persecution in Luke–Acts* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Glenn M. Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross: A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship (*Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 2004; Sauer, "Bad Urach Statement"; Schirrmacher, *Persecution of Christians*; Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Wheaton: The Romanian Missionary Society, 1997); Taylor et al., *Sorrow and Blood*.

[24] Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 260.

[25] Jack W. Niewold, "Beyond Servant Leadership," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 1, no. 2 (2007): 118–34, Jack W. Niewold, "Incarnational Leadership: Towards a Distinctly Christian Theory of Leadership" (Ph.D. diss., Regent University, 2006), 219–46.

shift in the use of the word *martyria* through the New Testament. While in early cases it refers to "a discrete act of witnessing," it later portrays "a lifestyle of habitual witnessing (and suffering)."[26] Martyriological leadership, then, emerges from an unreserved commitment to give public witness to Jesus Christ, regardless of personal cost – and influences others to do the same.

Contemporary followers of Jesus who suffer for the sake of the gospel and lead others to pursue the purposes of God amid persecution have much in common with the first generations of Christian leaders. What could they teach the global church about faithful, cruciform, mission-focused leadership? Are we ready to listen to this "great cloud of witnesses" encouraging us to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus," who "for the joy set before him … endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:1–2)?

5. Leadership Theory and Research

How might insights from leadership studies inform research into the realities of persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ? Both *leadership* and *persecution* are complex phenomena, always embedded in a multifaceted web of historical, cultural, political, environmental, and social dynamics. Current leadership theory and research overwhelmingly reflect democratic, entrepreneurial, and relatively secure contexts – quite unlike that of most persecuted churches. Researchers, then, cannot uncritically apply assumptions and methodologies from this literature to studies of their experience. Still, it is an expansive field, with scholars continuing to press into new spheres of interest, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. What insights and questions emerge from their work that could spur fresh learning from those who suffer for their faith in Jesus? Within each subfield of leadership studies – such as *transformational*, *servant, team, adaptive, trait, followership* and others – various models have potential to make valuable contributions.[27]

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[26] Niewold, "Beyond Servant Leadership," 128.

[27] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice,* 8th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018), offers a comprehensive historical and contemporary overview of leadership studies.

5.1 Robert E. Quinn's Fundamental State of Leadership

For example, Robert E. Quinn emphasizes the personal cost of effective leadership.[28] To thrive in the rapidly shifting conditions of a complex world, he argues, organizations often need to undergo *deep change* that disrupts established patterns of behavior, entails risk and requires leaders to relinquish significant control. Individuals and groups, however, typically resist such transformation. Instead, by making self-survival their highest priority, people get stuck in patterns of behavior that diminish themselves and their organizations. Quinn observes that human beings are normally:

a. **Comfort-centred**. When something disrupts our comfort, we see it as a problem to be solved, which keeps us in a state of reactivity toward our circumstances.

b. **Externally directed.** We let outside pressures shape us. We do what we think is necessary to please others to get what we want.

c. **Self-focused.** We put our own interests ahead of others.

d. **Internally closed.** We ignore information or feedback that suggests we should make changes.

This impulse toward self-preservation reduces a person's capacity to make positive changes and leads to increasing gaps in personal integrity. So, for example, one may publicly champion a corporate goal while really trying to get through each day with as little hassle as possible. The result is *slow death* – for the person and group. Quinn insists, however, that all people – regardless of position in an organization – are potential leaders with the capacity to transform the larger system of which they are a part. Genuine leadership, according to Quinn, is anchored in a fundamental decision (often triggered by a crisis) to fully commit to pursuing a purpose greater than one's own survival. Only one who is ready to "go forth to die" has the moral authority to lead.[29] In moments of such unreserved commitment one may shift into a transformational mode of leadership in which one becomes more:

a. **Purpose-centered**. As we clarify the result we want to create, we become engaged, energetic, and focused on an unwavering, meaningful goal.

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[28] Robert E. Quinn is professor emeritus at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. His leadership theory can be described as *authentic transformational,* conversant with *complexity* science, and situated within the emergent discipline of *positive organizational scholarship.* Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It: A Guide for Leading Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); Robert E. Quinn, "Moments of Greatness: Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership," *Harvard Business Review* 83, no. 7/8 (2005): 74–83; Ryan W. Quinn and Robert E. Quinn, *Lift: The Fundamental State of Leadership,* 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2015), introduce his theory of "The Fundamental State of Leadership."

[29] Robert E. Quinn, *Change the World: How Ordinary People Can Accomplish Extraordinary Results* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 179. Authentically Christian leadership does not, of course, spring from self-defined purpose or confidence in human potential but responds to the call of Jesus Christ. It is a relational process, offered in the Spirit of Jesus under his authority, influencing others to pursue a goal aligned with God's priorities and mission. Although there is not space here for a thorough theological analysis of Quinn's theory, note how it (in part) echoes the summons of Jesus for his disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him (Matt 16:24–25; Mark 8:34–35; Luke 9:23–24; John 12:24–26).

b. **Internally directed.** We examine our own hypocrisy, close gaps between our deepest values and our behavior, and act with higher levels of integrity and confidence.

c. **Other-focused.** We place the good of others above our own, increasing trust and enriching connections in our relational networks.

d. **Externally open**. Knowing we have much to learn, we experiment, seek honest feedback, adapt, and function with greater awareness, competence, and creativity.

Quinn designates this "the Fundamental State of Leadership" – a temporary psychological orientation that positions one to lead self and others with extraordinary effectiveness. Although leadership cannot be reduced to a psychological state, his theory raises compelling questions about Christian leadership under persecution. As a frame for research into the historical experience of Ethiopian church leaders, Quinn's theory generated rich primary data and helpful categories for interpretation and reflection.

5.2 Case Study: The Meserete Kristos Church, 1974–1991

The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) is an evangelical, charismatic, Anabaptist denomination in Ethiopia whose Amharic name means "Christ is the Foundation." In 1974, a revolutionary government known as *the Derg* took power and led the country toward hardline communism. Amid the persecution of a regime bent on stamping out evangelical Christianity, MKC experienced profound transformation. Over the next seventeen years, the church grew from 800 to 34,000 baptized members, adopted a radically different ministry structure, called and equipped many new leaders, extended its geographic spread, became financially self-supporting, and cultivated a contagious spiritual vitality among its members.

Many factors contribute to the long-term impact of persecution on a church, including healthy leadership. In what ways did the leadership of the Meserete Kristos Church – given its remarkable flourishing under opposition – reflect the transformational qualities identified by Robert Quinn? Analysis of interviews and other first-person testimony revealed that persecution forced church leaders to clarify the priority of their devotion to Jesus and involvement in his mission.[30] Research participants acknowledged pain, struggle, failure, and disappointment in their experience. Still, ready to die for the sake of the gospel, their leadership was marked by the following:

a. **Transformational commitment**, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

b. **Highly effective pursuit of purpose**, focused on a personal desire to be faithful to Jesus Christ, passion for evangelism, strengthening the church, multiplying and equipping leaders, the expansion and growth of the kingdom of God, and seeking the glory of God.

[30] Interviews with 24 MKC leaders were conducted March–May 2014, using a semi-structured format with open-ended questions inviting reflection on leadership experience under persecution in Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991.

c. **Compelling integrity under external pressures**, closely connected with personally and publicly identifying with Jesus, nurtured by spiritual disciplines, and commitment to lead by example. While testing leaders' integrity and faith, persecution became a crucible for spiritual formation and character development.

d. **Attractive love**, dependent on the Holy Spirit, expressed in team relationships and work, support for others in the church, care for non-believing neighbors and love for persecutors.

e. **Remarkable creativity**, with leaders valuing wisdom as a gift from God, engaging in study, keen to understand their changing political, cultural, and social context, ready to receive feedback and correction, innovating in ministry, alert to their surroundings, astute in relation to authorities, eager to hear from God through the Bible and the Holy Spirit.[31]

MKC leaders do not view their leadership performance or the prospering of the church as a human accomplishment, but readily give credit and glory to God. During persecution, one congregational elder testified, the church "came to realize the faithfulness and the power of God.… We understood that we couldn't really stand on … our own strength." An evangelist explained, "When you have challenges from outside, you draw near to God: 'God, help me. Deliver me.'" Another leader marveled how, "The power of the Holy Spirit led us. We don't know how we were led, but sometimes it was in a unique way … it was not our work. It was his work." Church elder Teketel Chakiso rejoices in the result:

> The Communists tried to eradicate Christianity from Ethiopian soil. They closed the churches and took all their property. They imprisoned our leaders. Still, amazingly, they could not blockade God's love that flowed into the heart of the believers. The Spirit of God was burning with a fire for evangelism, convincing and empowering true believers to witness to Christ in words and actions.[32]

5.3 Diverse Research Contexts and Tools

Quinn's leadership model is especially appropriate for learning from thriving communities. Like all theoretical lenses, it leaves some dimensions of reality out-of-focus while bringing clarity to others. What might we learn if researchers, drawing from the breadth of perspectives in leadership studies, sought to learn from the vastly different experiences of persecuted Christian leaders around the world?

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[31] For a detailed summary of this research, see Brent L. Kipfer, "Thriving under Persecution: Meserete Kristos Church Leadership during the Ethiopian Revolution (1974-1991)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91 (July 2017): 297–369.

[32] Gemechu Gebre Telila, "History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa, Ethiopia, during the Derg, 1974–1991: 'God Works for Good'" (M.A. thesis, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, 2002), 72.

Persecution not only occurs in diverse cultural and political contexts but varies widely: a) in nature, intensity and severity; b) according to its ideological driver (such as radical Islam, communism, religious nationalism or secularism); and c) depending on the locus of opposition within a society (such as government, family, culture, religious authorities, and/or corrupt individuals).[33] To better understand leadership under persecution, the global church will require scholarly contributions from multiple disciplines including anthropology, history, theology, missiology, political science, psychology, sociology, and philosophy.[34]

6. Leadership Mentors for the Global Church

Writing to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul emphasizes the cost of bearing witness to a crucified Messiah: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Although messengers of Jesus are among the "foolish," "weak," "lowly," and "despised" things of the world – sometimes hungry, thirsty, brutally treated, slandered and persecuted – they paradoxically reveal the resurrection promises and power of their Lord.[35] While followers of Jesus ought never seek out suffering, many in the global church nevertheless need to rediscover and reclaim the intimate connection between persecution and gospel witness.[36] Reflecting on how God's purposes can be advanced through the church's painful experiences of persecution, one Meserete Kristos Church leader explained that:

> Persecution is a means by which God reveals himself to the ones who are persecuted and the ones who need his salvation. He guides his children in a way that they would glorify him. Sometimes he works in mysterious ways. When God dispossesses his children of their belongings, he would fill them with his love and strength: dispossess, fill with love and strength. So, God dispossessed MKC and he filled us with love and strength to do the ministry that he has called us to do. That's what God did. He put us to zero level: nothing that we can glory in. Our bank account was frozen. All buildings were taken, and possessions confiscated. We were cornered, like Pharaoh following the Israelites and they were facing the Red Sea. They didn't have any choice but to run away. And they couldn't do that because the Egyptians had chariots and warriors. So, they had only one choice: look up.

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[33] Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith That Endures,* 65–81, 123–42.

[34] Christof Sauer and Thomas Schirrmacher, "The Place and Function of Academics," in *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom* (GMS; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 461–66, more broadly call for academic study of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom, identifying these and other disciplines as relevant.

[35] 1 Cor 1:18, 26–28; 4:11–13.

[36] Jan A.B. Jongeneel, "Do Christian Witness and Mission Provoke Persecution," in *Freedom of Belief and Chrsitian Mission* (ed. Hans Aage Gravaas et al.; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 430–43; Tite Tiénou, "The Missionary Witness of the Persecuted and the Martyrs," in *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* (ed. Hans Aage Gravaas et al.; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 444–51.

> As the church is partaker of the divine nature, so also it is a partaker of Christ's suffering (1 Peter 4:13). When persecution comes upon the church, [it has the] … privilege of being partakers of Christ's suffering. So, during persecution God is going to do a new thing. Sometimes it is hard to understand. He can use unexpected ways, means and people.

There are rich, largely untapped, spiritual resources embedded in the testimonies of brothers and sisters in Christ who pursue the purposes of God with passion, integrity, love, and creativity amid great personal suffering. Even stories of failure and weakness may reveal essential truth about the mission of Jesus in our time. How might the global church be strengthened by giving intentional, sustained attention to Christian leadership under persecution?

6.1 Encouraging and Equipping Persecuted Christian Leaders

More than one-fifth of the world's professing Christians live in contexts that highly restrict their expressions of faith.[37] Leaders among them often struggle with considerable pain, trauma, fear, temptation, and isolation. While leadership literature and training developed in settings of religious freedom offer valuable perspectives, there is a wealth of biblically grounded, relevant wisdom anchored in the experience of persecuted leaders themselves.

How might insights from house church leaders in China encourage Vietnamese believers? What helpful knowledge could Pakistani pastors offer suffering disciples of Jesus in Nigeria? Are there ministry strategies that work well in hostile communities in Myanmar that might also bear fruit in Sri Lanka?

Although conditions of persecution, culture, economics, and politics vary considerably across the global church, persecuted leaders could surely learn much from each other's experiences.[38] Specific methods for protecting, structuring, and strengthening the church, for equipping leaders or evangelism may be bound to local context, of course. Even so, models of faithful, courageous, transformational leadership will often transcend barriers to inspire and instruct others in vastly different circumstances.

6.2 Preparation for Missionaries

Christian missionaries are often confronted with discrimination, harassment, and persecution against themselves and local believers with whom they partner. How can they be better equipped to face opposition in ways that advance the gospel and glorify God? Various scholars have called

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[37] Johnson, "Persecution in the Context of Religious and Christian Demography."

[38] Some MKC leaders were encouraged by written accounts of persecuted Christians steadfast in their commitment to Christ. In 1979, a three-week visit to the Soviet Union allowed a delegation of six MKC leaders to learn about the functioning of underground churches, evangelism in a communist system, and strategies for adapting to the challenges of atheism from Russian church leaders.

for more intentional preparation and training for this, including helping missionaries a) cultivate a robust biblical theology of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom; b) understand the risks and realities of persecution in their ministry context; c) willingly embrace the personal cost of participating in the mission of Jesus; d) practice spiritual disciplines that will enable them to draw on God's resources when they are under pressure; e) embrace their identity in Christ; f) benefit from the example and testimonies of other persecuted Christians; and g) become aware of practical options for responding to persecution in their context.[39] Better comprehending how persecution affects leadership dynamics may enrich their capacity to function when faced with opposition and support local Christian leaders in their call to be faithful shepherds and gospel witnesses.

6.3 Challenge for Comfortable Christians

In general, followers of Jesus in secular Western, post-Christendom societies benefit from legal protection of private religious practice, while facing increasing restrictions on public expressions of faith. Some have found it challenging to cope with the loss of historic privileges given to Christianity, even mislabeling some of these changes as "persecution." At the same time, others are complacent about religious freedom, concerned only about the right to gather for worship, as cultural forces undermine the legitimacy of faith-based perspectives in the public sphere and pressures opposing gospel witness intensify. Although incidents of ridicule and discrimination against Christians in Western democracies are relatively minor compared to the severe persecution suffered by many of their brothers and sisters, all believers face social and cultural pressures to compromise their allegiance and witness to Jesus Christ.[40]

The "Bad Urach Statement" identifies a challenge to relatively comfortable Christians in the experience of the persecuted:

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[39] See Wolfgang Häde, "Preparing for Intentional Discrimination, Harassment, and Persecution" in *Spirituality in Mission: Embracing the Lifelong Journey* (GMS; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2017): 287–94; contributions by Antonia van der Meer, Rob Brynjolfson, Stephen Panya Baba, Paul Estabrooks, Paulo Moreira Filho, S. Kent Parks, Laura Mae Gardner, Dave Thompson, Voice of the Martyrs Canada, National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, Global Connections, and the Religious Liberty Partnership in Taylor et al., *Sorrow and Blood*, 325-411; Sauer, "Bad Urach Statement," 99.

[40] J. Keith Bateman, "Symposium on Persecution: Don't Call It Persecution When It's Not," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2013): 54–62; Iain T. Benson, "The Attack on Western Religions by Western Law: Re-framing Pluralism, Liberalism and Diversity," *International Journal of Religious Freedom* 6, no. 1/2 (2013): 111–25; Lars Dahle, "Western Europe – Marginalization of Christians through Secularisation?" in *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* (ed. Hans Aage Gravaas et al.; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 382–94; Janet Epp Buckingham, "The Modern Secular West: Making Room for God" in *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom* (GMS; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 221–28; Paul Marshall, "Patterns and Purposes of Contemporary Anti-Christian Persecution" in *Christianity and Freedom: Volume 2, Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 58–86; Roger Trigg, "Religious Freedom in a Secular Society," *International Journal of Religious Freedom* 5, no. 1 (2012): 45–57.

> Persecuted Christians have learned truths about God that Christians under less pressure need to hear in order to experience the fullness of God. The spiritual insights of the persecuted are vital to the transformation of the lives of the rest of the body of Christ. One of these essential insights is that we will all be – if witnessing for Christ – in some sense persecuted. There is a grander, greater narrative of God's action underneath the stories of individual pain, suffering, deliverance, and endurance.[41]

Among other gifts, our persecuted brothers and sisters may offer us transformational perspectives on Christian leadership – spurring us toward greater faithfulness to our crucified and risen Saviour. Are we ready to receive their modeling and mentoring?

[41] Sauer, "Bad Urach Statement," 30.

The Ministerial Legacy of Pastor Le Van Thai (1890–1985)

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ABSTRACT

As the global Christian movement grows, Christians around the world will be enriched by learning about the leaders who have contributed to the growth of the church in the non-western world. Among those leaders, Rev. Le Van Thai (1890–1985) stands out as a pastor who contributed substantially to the growth of the evangelical church in Vietnam. This paper examines his life and work. His autobiography (*Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm Chức Vụ* [Saigon, 1971]) and two of his books, *Người Truyền Đạo Của Đức Chúa Trời (God's Preacher)* and *Châu Ngọc của Thi Thiên (The Pearl of the Psalms)* illustrate his thinking. They reveal an evangelist who imagined himself as acting out the biblical story in his own time.

1. Introduction[1]

Westerners watching global trends in the spread of Christianity often focus on the statistical shifts of church growth to the non-western world, and those numbers have awakened many to the fantastic reality of Christ's church in the global south and East Asia. However, many of the theological and ministerial heroes of the faith are still westerners, even for those outside the West. We simply do not know much about local heroes of the faith, whose lives and ministries have marked the global church. Often the barrier is not simply neglect but the practical challenge of language. For Vietnam, this barrier is considerable.

For that reason, in this paper I explore the life and ministry of Rev. Le Van Thai, who is widely respected among Vietnamese Christians and left for us a small collection of works in Vietnamese that cover his life, preaching philosophy, and approach to biblical interpretation. Rev. Thai filled the role of President of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) from 1942–1960. Following his

[1] An earlier version of this paper was originally presented in Vietnamese at an international academic conference entitled "Christian Thinkers in Vietnam and the Region: Some Comparative Approaches" at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi, Vietnam, December 8, 2017. This article is a translation and revision of that original paper for a Christian audience that is also not very familiar with the geography or political history of Vietnam.

retirement, he wrote several books and taught at the Bible and Theology Institute in Nha Trang.[2] Through his teaching, Rev. Thai made his mark not only on the direction of the denomination but also on the lives and ministries of the generation of pastors who are currently leading the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South). However, since much of his early ministry took place in northern Vietnam, he is well-known and respected there as well.

In this essay I present a brief picture of the life and ministry of Rev. Thai and then describe his intellectual contribution by examining two of his works. Through them we see that Rev. Le Van Thai was at heart an evangelist who imagined himself living out the story of the Bible through his ministry. Although his appropriation of biblical texts may strike some readers as ahistorical and simplistic proof-texting, that appropriation bears concrete witness to his own ministerial identity. He applies this imaginative, personal hermeneutic throughout his memoirs, in which he superimposes his experiences in ministry on various passages of the Bible. We might say that Rev. Thai was consciously and imaginatively improvising on the biblical script. He was what Kevin Vanhoozer calls a minstrel of the word.[3] Although not all readers will like how we speaks about the word, part of understanding the global church is to encounter the ways in which ordinary Christians and Christian leaders engage with the word.[4] Through his memoirs, we see that Rev. Thai lived with an immediate sense that he was living out the biblical story. Rev. Thai not only applies his biblical imagination to his memoirs, he also advocates for preachers to apply their imaginations in the process of biblical interpretation and sermon preparation.

2. Life and Memoirs

The most important source for learning about Rev. Thai is his memoirs.[5] They give us a window into his life, ministry, and thought. Most other sources about the ministry of Rev. Thai depend on these memoirs.[6] Unfortunately, that means our perspective about Rev. Thai is necessarily limited. Even the Rev. Dr. Le Hoang Phu, in his PhD dissertation at New York University, depended heavily

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[2] Trần Thái Sơn, *Những Người Đi Trước Tôi* (Lưu Hành Nội Bộ, 2015), 39.

[3] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John J. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 104.

[4] Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

[5] Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm Chức Vụ* (Sài Gòn: Cơ Quan Xuất Bản Tin Lành, 1971).

[6] Trần Thái Sơn, *Những Người Đi Trước Tôi*, 29–61; Đình Dũng, "Mục Sư Lê Văn Thái," in *Tuyển Tập Tiểu Sử Người Hầu Việc Chúa* (Tp. Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Phương Đông, 2011), 325–34.

on the memoirs of Rev. Thai.[7] In general, those who write about Rev. Thai respect him, so it is difficult to find perspectives that do not agree with him, but we can still learn a great deal from his memoirs and writings.[8]

2.1 Preaching the Gospel throughout Vietnam

Above all, Rev. Thai was an evangelist. Although he was from central Vietnam, he worked in all three regions (North, Central, and South), including such places as Hoi An, My Tho, Hanoi, Thanh Hoa, Da Lat, and Nha Trang.[9] From the beginning of his memoirs, we see two key characteristics. First, Rev. Thai shows that his heart was committed to the work of evangelism. Second, Rev. Thai's biblical imagination thoroughly shaped his recollections, as if his ministry was re-enacting corresponding points of the biblical story.

The first chapter of his memoirs, "From Darkness to Light," proves those two points. Rev. Thai uses John 1:5 to describe his life before he converted as being "in DARKNESS."[10] As a youth, Rev. Thai saw himself "having the duty to protect the traditions of the spirit of his people," so he always opposed Christian preachers, which he saw as a threat to traditional Vietnamese culture.[11] However, he heard an evangelist argue that "anyone who does not follow the gospel, who does not believe in Jesus, who does not worship God, has abandoned his ancestors."[12] If one does not follow the gospel, that person loses his origin, that is, the Creator.[13] Rev. Thai reflected on that and realized he could not say who his ancestors were, even back ten generations. At the same time, he recognized that "God is the source of all creatures," so he converted to the evangelical faith in 1919.[14]

Even as a new Christian, Le Van Thai desired to become an evangelist. He compares his desire to preach with 1 Samuel 16:7, which describes God's choice of David to be king of Israel: "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart"[15] Citing this verse, Rev. Thai found affirmation from God in support of his desire to become an evangelist.

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[7] Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh Tin Lành Việt Nam (1911–1965)* (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Tôn Giáo, 2010), 14. Originally published as "A Short History of the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam (1911–1965)" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1972).

[8] Rev. Phu also provides some general information about those who opposed him.

[9] Đình Dũng, "Mục Sư Lê Văn Thái," 325–26.

[10] Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 11; emphasis original.

[11] Ibid., 13.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 14.

[14] Ibid., 17–18.

[15] Ibid., 24. Unless otherwise noted, English Bible quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

His older brother entered the first class at the Bible school in Da Nang in 1920. Rev. Thai entered the Bible school two years later, in 1922.[16] After studying for two years in Da Nang, he married and was appointed as an evangelist at the Hoi An Church, which was just a few miles down the road from the Bible school.[17] His daily work there included both teaching the Bible and meeting for worship with believers on Sunday and going out to do evangelism on Mondays and Fridays. Following his description of his ministerial tasks, Rev. Thai uses 1 Timothy 4:13–16 to describe his ministry.[18] After fifteen months, Rev. Thai returned to Da Nang to study further in the Bible school. In 1926 Rev. Thai moved many miles south to lead the My Tho Church, which is in the Mekong Delta.[19] There he rubbed shoulders with church members who came with political agendas.[20] That experience probably influenced his later perspective that the church should not participate in political activities. In My Tho he focused on preaching the gospel, and in one year 565 people were baptized there.[21]

In 1927 he returned to Da Nang to finish his studies at the Bible school.[22] After graduating, the believers in My Tho wanted him to return to minister there. However, despite his preference to the contrary, in 1928 the Executive Committee of the denomination appointed him to a ministry in Hanoi, which is in northern Vietnam.[23] He explains his experience of obeying the Executive Committee of the church using 2 Corinthians 6:1, "We worked together with the Lord."[24] In addition, when he and his wife arrived in Hanoi, they needed to find a place to live. He compares their situation to the image of the sparrow and the swallow who find a home in the temple in Psalm 84:3.[25]

In Hanoi, Rev. Thai began an evangelistic program working with the young adults group in the church.[26] They would cross the Long Bien Bridge to the village of Gia Thuong. In Gia Thuong Rev. Thai faced opposition to his preaching from the village chief, who ordered him to stop preaching

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16 Ibid., 33.

17 Ibid., 34.

18 Ibid., 36–37.

19 Ibid., 41.

20 Đình Dũng, "Mục Sư Lê Văn Thái," 44.

21 Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh*, 130.

22 Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 50.

23 Ibid., 53.

24 Ibid., 54. In this instance, I have given a translation that conveys the wording of the Vietnamese translation as Rev. Thai quotes it.

25 Ibid., 56.

26 Ibid., 58.

based on a decree from the French governor. In response, Rev. Thai argued that the decree only applied to foreigners and "the people of the protectorate" (dân Bảo hộ). But it did not apply to people belonging to a French colony, and Rev. Thai was a person from a French colony. In his memoirs he compares this event with a similar event in the Bible when the Apostle Paul used his citizenship to protect him when he was arrested in Jerusalem.[27] In 1929 Rev. Thai worked with Ms. H. H. Dixon to evangelize several areas around Hanoi, including Gia Lam, Bach Mai, Cau Giay, Yen Phu, Thai Ha Ap, Cau Den, and Ha Nong.[28]

In 1932 Rev. Thai became the chairman of the northern district of the evangelical church, which involved caring for 30 churches in the Red River Delta region.[29] In 1933, he left Hanoi to preach the gospel and start churches in Bac Giang. In three months, seventy-two people believed the gospel.[30] In addition, he contributed to the work of starting many churches during wartime.[31] In 1941, he moved to Sam Son (Thanh Hoa) to manage the churches in the area, but in 1942, when the Japanese army entered Vietnam, the church called him to return to Hanoi. At this point in his memoirs, Rev. Thai mentions another biblical character to illustrate this event: "Once again, in the spirit of Abraham, we did not know where we were going" (cf. Heb 11:8).[32] As he describes in his memoirs, during the early period of his ministry, Rev. Thai was busy doing evangelism, experiencing many events that paralleled stories in the Bible, as if he was participating in the biblical story in the twentieth century.

2.2 Guiding the Church through Political Minefields

In 1942, Rev. Thai became the President of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, taking over from Rev. Le Dinh Tuoi, who was fighting serious illness.[33] When he began this role, Rev. Thai was still living in Hanoi, and he remained there until the Japanese army surrendered and the war for Vietnamese independence began. The war against the French made Hanoi a dangerous place, and many believers left for safer areas. However, Rev. Thai and a missionary, William Cadman, remained in Hanoi to "care for the church facility."[34] Although today the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN)

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[27] Ibid., 59–63.

[28] Ibid., 67.

[29] Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh*, 163.

[30] Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 70.

[31] Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh*, 224.

[32] Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 79.

[33] Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh*, 223.

[34] Ibid., 240.

is divided into two separate denominations, North and South, at that time there was only one. Rev. Thai served as President for nineteen years, but in 1951 he moved to Da Lat and after that to Nha Trang.

Many writers agree that Rev. Thai's most important contribution as President of the ECVN regarded the relationship between the ECVN and the government. Rev. Phu comments that Rev. Thai led the denomination according to a policy of not interfering in politics.[35] When evaluating the influence of Rev. Thai, another pastor notes especially the wisdom of Rev. Thai in leading the evangelical church in a time full of political pressures.[36] Dinh Dung agrees:

> The policy of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam with regard to the nation was impacted greatly by Rev. Le Van Thai. When facing numerous dilemmas and societal convulsions, he still held fast to the spirit of faithfully preaching salvation in Christ, not participating in politics.[37]

To understand the policy of Rev. Thai, we need to understand the context of 1945. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese independence from France. Almost a week later, on September 8, Rev. Thai, along with Rev. Tran Van De, visited Ho Chi Minh. On this occasion, Ho Chi Minh suggested to Rev. Thai, "You should establish a movement of Evangelicals to Save the Nation in the church."[38] Rev. Thai considered this suggestion but said,

> All believers are immersed in the people; whatever group to which they belong, let them remain in that group. For example, the young adults, workers, boatmen, government workers, clergy; every organization has its own group to save the nation. If I establish Evangelicals to Save the Nation, then I must pull those believers out of their respective groups, thereby might I be contributing to confusion and disintegration? Besides, the principle of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam is that the Gospel must be pure and without political coloring, not engaging in politics and not permitting anyone to spread political propaganda.[39]

When Ho Chi Minh asked for a reason, Rev. Thai answered, "Because history proves, if a religion goes along with politics, then when the religion is strong, it will distract politics, and likewise when politics are strong, it will distract religion. Between the two, this one or that one will dominate the other."[40] In the end, Ho Chi Minh "agreed to let the Evangelical Church of Vietnam remain in its

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35 Ibid., 233.

36 Trần Thái Sơn, *Những Người Đi Trước Tôi*, 60.

37 Đình Dũng, "Mục Sư Lê Văn Thái," 334.

38 Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 160.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

former status."[41] It is interesting to note that during this meeting, Rev. Thai did not argue on the basis of the Bible. We can only speculate why, but nowhere in his memoirs does he justify this policy on the basis of Scripture.

When recounting this event, as well as his ministry in My Tho in 1926–1927, Rev. Thai implies that the policy of the church not to participate in politics was already in place. He does not say who created this policy, but Rev. Phu and several others noted above agree that this is a policy that Rev. Thai instituted. Whether that is accurate or not, everyone agrees that the policy of the church avoiding politics was a particular emphasis of Rev. Thai. That meant that under the Revolutionary Government, the church did not participate in the Communist Party. But just the same, under the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, the first president of the Republic of Vietnam (also known as South Vietnam), the church also did not follow Diem's party.

However, in 1955, during the time of Ngo Dinh Diem, Rev. Thai was challenged on this point. At the time, South Vietnam organized what they called an "anti-communist campaign." During this campaign, a young pastor in Saigon named Bui Tri Hien set up a Central Committee of the Anti-communist Campaign. On the basis of Rev. Thai's report regarding his meeting with Ho Chi Minh in 1945, Rev. Hien accused Rev. Thai of being a "communist sympathizer." However, local churches did not agree.[42] Rev. Phu comments that Rev. Hien's goal in accusing Rev. Thai of being pro-communist was to change the leadership of the denomination according to the wishes of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. However, Rev. Ong Van Huyen, the Chairman of the General Assembly of the General Council (of the ECVN), concluded that the accusations against Rev. Thai could be dismissed as "improper" and lacking any legal documentation to support them (the letter accusing Rev. Thai was anonymous, and signatories to the letter testified that they had been unaware that they were signing a letter of accusation), but the General Assembly considered the accusations anyway to avoid misunderstanding among the laity.[43] Following this examination, Rev. Huyen summarized the conclusions of the sessions by saying that the accusations were "slanderous and unfounded."[44] Rev. Phu concludes that, if the accusations of Rev. Thai were a conspiracy intended to lead the Evangelical Church to follow the direction of Ngo Dinh Diem's government, they failed, and the policy of Rev. Thai to avoid politics succeeded.[45] Rev. Phu praises

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41 Ibid.

42 Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh*, 271.

43 Lê Hoàng Phu, "A Short History," 341–42.

44 Ibid., 344.

45 Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh*, 275, 289–90.

the "tactful and firm leadership" of Rev. Thai who followed "a steady course of noninvolvement in politics during this period so eventful for both the nation and the church."[46]

It is interesting to note anecdotally that in all of my time in Vietnam, I have met few evangelicals who seek to participate in politics. In general, the leaders of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, including those in the north and the south, follow this policy. However, in his 1972 doctoral dissertation, Rev. Phu implies that the opposing viewpoint to this policy was widespread. This policy, "impractical and naïve as it might have seemed to many, proved to be wise and most beneficial to the church in the long view."[47] According to what I have witnessed in southern Vietnam, virtually all the pastors in the ECVN(S) are afraid of being branded a "state-run enterprise pastor," meaning that they are pastors who follow the direction of the government. For that reason, they do not want to be close to politicians and do not want to participate in political activities. Perhaps that is one of the outcomes of the events of 1955, when Rev. Thai was accused of being "a communist sympathizer." But at the same time, pastors try to avoid any activities fighting against the communist party or the government. Among the younger generation, I see some evangelical believers beginning to criticize the government on social media. However, most pastors do not do this. Quite the opposite, they avoid saying anything of a political nature.

Although Rev. Thai did not want the church to follow a political party, he rubbed shoulders with several characters who were important to the politics of Vietnam in the twentieth century. In 1933 when Rev. Ong Van Huyen was invited to become the pastor of the Hue Church in central Vietnam, Rev. Thai went with Rev. Huyen to meet with several important people in Hue. Among them were Huynh Thuc Khang and Phan Boi Chau, both of whom were famous revolutionaries. Rev. Thai shared the gospel with these two men, and in turn Phan Boi Chau read one of his poems to the pastors.[48] This event illustrates Rev. Thai's consistent focus on evangelism.

Then in 1945, in addition to meeting Ho Chi Minh, Rev. Thai met several other political leaders. After his meeting with Ho Chi Minh, Rev. Thai went to southern Vietnam to meet a missionary named E. F. Irwin in My Tho before Irwin returned to his home country. Ho Chi Minh had provided travel papers to Rev. Thai to go from the north to the south.[49] When Rev. Thai arrived in Bien Hoa, just outside Saigon, because of the dangerous situation at the time, the person helping Rev. Thai along his journey to My Tho told him that only Ton Duc Thang, who would later succeed Ho

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[46] Lê Hoàng Phu, "A Short History," 481.

[47] Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh*, 388.

[48] Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 179–82.

[49] Ibid., 160–61.

Chi Minh as President of North Vietnam, could bring Rev. Thai safely to My Tho.[50] After arriving in My Tho, Rev. Thai and Mr. Thang stayed together in a hotel room. In keeping with the heart of an evangelist, Rev. Thai shared the gospel from Ephesians 4:1–16. Mr. Thang happily replied, "In my life, this night I feel very happy and light in my heart."[51] The next morning, Rev. Thai preached in My Tho and then returned to the hotel. Ton Duc Thang told him that "the (communist) chairman of the southern region, Pham Van Bach" had invited Rev. Thai to eat a meal at the hotel. In addition to Pham Van Bach and Ton Duc Thang, Hoang Quoc Viet, a key figure in the Viet Minh and later in Vietnam National Front, also ate with Rev. Thai and two other pastors.[52] They discussed the "issue of preaching the gospel" because the government wanted to understand more about the evangelical church. On another occasion, when Rev. Thai had returned to Hanoi, and Ton Duc Thang came on a trip to the north, Rev. Thai and Mr. Thang shared a meal with William Cadman, a missionary. They discussed the political views of evangelicals to know whether evangelicals would follow the Viet Minh or not. Rev. Thai responded, "I am neither Viet Minh nor Viet Gian,[53] just a Vietnamese person who loves the Lord and serves the Lord everywhere and every way."[54] That sentence succinctly describes Rev. Thai's political viewpoint. Once again, he does not refer to the Bible, but he emphasizes the work of evangelism.

2.3 Leaving a Ministerial Legacy to the Next Generation

Rev. Thai influenced many aspects of the evangelical church in Vietnam. I want to mention three areas of influence evident in the Evangelical Church of Vietnam today: his charitable work, his reading and writing books, and the manner of his retirement.

While much of the church's energy was focused on "spiritual" work such as evangelism, Rev. Thai also gave his attention to charitable work. During the war, Rev. Thai saw that many families had lost fathers and husbands. He lamented that "innocent children" had to go without someone to care for them.[55] For that reason, in 1950, Rev. Thai proposed opening an orphanage.[56] In 1953, the construction of a facility for an orphanage and a school in Nha Trang was completed. According to

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[50] Ibid., 168.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 169–70.

[53] Viet Gian would be those who support the French regime, in opposition to the Viet Minh, who sought independence from French rule.

[54] Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 170.

[55] Ibid., 228.

[56] Ibid., 229.

Rev. Phu, this event drew the attention of many among the intelligentsia, government officials, and poor communities around South Vietnam.[57] However, Rev. Thai recounts that at that time he was opposed in this work by others in the denomination. He explains:

> The reason for this opposition in the early days within the church was because of the influence of the Christian & Missionary Alliance. The Christian & Missionary Alliance was a society for preaching the gospel to the whole world, not a society for social or educational work. Missionaries in this society never dealt with social or educational issues.[58]

Probably the debate in the twentieth century about the social gospel in America provides the background to this. It is possible that some C&MA missionaries at the time believed that missionaries should focus on preaching the gospel of salvation so that individuals may be saved, rather than becoming distracted by charitable work. The missionaries of the Christian & Missionary Alliance may have generally followed this position.[59] However, Rev. Thai believed the missionaries erred in choosing only one of the two tasks.[60] In addition to the orphanage and elementary school, Rev. Thai contributed to the construction of a medical clinic in cooperation with the Mennonite Central Committee.[61] For him, gospel preaching and helping others were not in conflict.

Second, Rev. Thai left a legacy for young intellectuals in the evangelical community. Just like A. W. Tozer of the Christian & Missionary Alliance in America, Rev. Thai did not have a high level of education. However, he is known in the Vietnamese evangelical community as a man who read and wrote many books.[62] Rev. Phu comments that Rev. Thai, "following an effective program of self-education," became "one of the most widely-read pastors in Vietnam, and the most prolific author in the Protestant community."[63]

Finally, in 1960, at the height of Rev. Thai's influence on the church, he refused to continue in his role as president of the denomination. One pastor records the words of Rev. Thai: "The time has come for the wilderness generation to make room for the generation that will enter the promised land."[64] Here Rev. Thai compares himself to the first generation of Israelites who left Egypt but had to

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[57] Lê Hoàng Phu, *Lịch Sử Hội Thánh*, 263.

[58] Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 234.

[59] For a theological critique of this neglect of charitable work, see Truong Van Thien Tu, "Menh Troi: Toward a Vietnamese Theology of Mission" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2009).

[60] Today the Christian & Missionary Alliance engages in both charitable work and personal evangelism, just like Rev. Thai.

[61] Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm*, 239.

[62] Trần Thái Sơn, *Những Người Đi Trước Tôi*, 30.

[63] Lê Hoàng Phu, "A Short History," 276.

[64] Trần Thái Sơn, *Những Người Đi Trước Tôi*, 40.

die in the wilderness of Sinai before the next generation could enter the land of Canaan. Once again, Rev. Thai explained an event in his life according to the story of the Bible. One pastor comments that Rev. Thai's retirement was one of the most important acts of his ministry.[65]

3. Works

In addition to his memoirs, Rev. Thai's writings include: *Chiến Sĩ Thập Tự (Warrior for the Cross), Những Tìa Sáng (Rays of Light), Bóng Mát Giữa Sa Mạc (Shade in the Midst of the Desert), Những Bước Thuộc Linh (Spiritual Steps), Người Truyền Đạo của Đức Chúa Trời (God's Preacher),* and *Châu Ngọc của Thi Thiên (The Pearl of the Psalms).*[66] I was only able to obtain two works from that list. Using those two works, we can understand more about Rev. Thai's thought, particularly his view of the Bible and the work of the preacher.

3.1 Người Truyền Đạo của Đức Chúa Trời (God's Preacher, Saigon, 1965)

After retiring as president of the ECVN and moving to Nha Trang, Rev. Thai taught students at the Bible and Theology Institute. *Người Truyền Đạo của Đức Chúa Trời (God's Preacher)* was a book he wrote based on his teaching notes for a preaching course.[67] A student of Rev. Thai recommends this book as essential reading for anyone thinking of becoming a pastor.[68] This work intends to guide a young preacher regarding the goals and tasks of the preacher. Through this work we can understand better Rev. Thai's view of pastoral ministry. In this essay I will focus on his view of the ministry of the preacher and pastor, particularly the call of the pastor and the relationship between the pastor and his Bible.

Rev. Thai begins this work with a chapter called "The Calling and Heavenly Ministry of the Preacher" ("Sự Kêu Gọi và Thiên-Chức của Người Truyền-Đạo"). The reason I focus on this topic is because it is very important to pastors in the Evangelical Church of Vietnam. I do not know whether they have been influenced by Rev. Thai or whether Rev. Thai is just reflecting the view of the ECVN at large. However, in an unusually concrete and clear way, Rev. Thai advances the view that a pastor must be called by God to be a pastor.

Rev. Thai describes the preacher as one who has "a heavenly ministry of unparalleled importance, because it brings the word of salvation to his fellow countrymen, fellow creatures, and works for

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[65] Ibid., 60.

[66] Ibid., 30–33.

[67] Lê Văn Thái, *Người Truyền Đạo của Đức Chúa Trời* (Sài Gòn, 1965), I.

[68] Trần Thái Sơn, *Những Người Đi Trước Tôi*, 30.

the future of the Kingdom of God."[69] In this statement he not only wants to say that the ministry is important, he also wants to emphasize the heavenly nature of the ministry. He warns students against entering the ministry of preaching because of a desire for social position or because the work is compatible with their desires; he says that such reasons "have nothing heavenly" about them.[70] Based on 1 Corinthians 9:16, he argues that a preacher "must feel 'necessity laid upon' him to become a preacher."[71]

How does one know one is called? Rev. Thai answers that God calls preachers in different circumstances. He begins with the example of the story of Amos, whom he describes as a poor shepherd who heard God speak out in the field (Amos 7:15).[72] On the other hand, Isaiah, a prophet who was active during the same century as Amos, was a friend of kings and saw a vision of God (Isaiah 6). Then Jeremiah felt for a long time that he should prophesy but was not clearly led to do so before he heard God speak (Jeremiah 1).[73] Citing these three different ways that prophets were called, Rev. Thai concludes: "So we cannot say how the calling will come to us."[74]

However, although the ways God calls are diverse, the result is the same: the preacher has "the feeling that he is appointed by God."[75] When considering the example of the Apostle Paul, Rev. Thai comments that his calling had a heavenly character and brought about an attitude of fear. Fear allows the preacher to persevere through many difficulties and challenges. In addition, in this calling, "there is a spiritual surprise" that includes "a holy pride … as well as a wondrous humility because one is called by God."[76] The response to this calling is "to offer oneself completely" to God, "not holding on to any personal will."[77]

What is this heavenly work? Rev. Thai opines that the work of the pastor when he is behind the pulpit is "to lead men and women who are tired or stubborn, joyous or sad, enthusiastic or apathetic, to enter 'the shelter of the Most High'" (quoting from Psalm 91:1). On the same page, Rev. Thai quotes from Exodus 36:4[78] to compare the work behind the pulpit with "the work of the holy

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[69] Lê Văn Thái, *Người Truyền Đạo của Đức Chúa Trời*, I.

[70] Ibid., 1.

[71] Ibid., 2.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 3.

[74] Ibid., 4.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., 5.

[77] Ibid., 7.

[78] Rev. Thai mistakenly says this is verse 11.

place" of the priests during Old Testament times.[79] Rev. Thai holds that the main duty of the pastor is not in politics, society, education, or science but "to dig deeply into the priceless treasure of redemption," "to know nothing … except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (citing 1 Cor 2:2).[80] His view regarding the pastor is consistent with his view of the relationship between the church and politics described above.

This view of the calling and ministry of the pastor is quite common in the Evangelical Church of Vietnam and beyond.[81] However, when I first arrived in Vietnam, I was surprised by the social distance between the laity and pastors in Vietnam. From one perspective, that is to be attributed to the cultural differences between America and Vietnam.[82] However, in the Evangelical Church of Vietnam there is the added idea that the ministry of pastor is a "heavenly ministry" ("thiên chức"). This perspective distinguishes clearly between the work of the pastor (as a heavenly ministry) and the everyday work of believers.

The second issue I want to mention is the relationship between the pastor and his Bible. In his memoirs, Rev. Thai imagines his experiences through the lens of the biblical story. In *God's Preacher*, he also encourages preachers to imagine themselves living during the time the Bible was being written. He asks, "How can we preach about Amos if we do not live with him on the mountains of Tekoa and see his situation, as if it were our own situation?"[83] Before preaching, the preacher must see the biblical passage as a word for the preacher.[84] Furthermore, Rev. Thai shares about one of his habits in sermon preparation. He would imagine a group of people from different situations so that he could prepare a sermon that responds to the needs of every age group, class and level of maturity in the faith.[85] This habit is focused on application to believers more than application to the life of the pastor. However, this habit is completely consistent with his use of his imagination as described above and in his memoirs.

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[79] Lê Văn Thái, *Người Truyền Đạo của Đức Chúa Trời*, 47.

[80] Ibid., 27.

[81] For example, this view about calling as related to the calling of the prophets of Israel is described in Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 24.

[82] For example, Americans do not distinguish as much between the social position of teacher and student. They sometimes call each other friends. Believers in the church also call their pastor a friend. The social distance is not great, except when the pastor is much older.

[83] Lê Văn Thái, *Người Truyền Đạo của Đức Chúa Trời*, 35.

[84] Ibid., 38.

[85] Ibid., 39.

3.2 *Châu Ngọc của Thi Thiên* (*The Pearl of the Psalms*, Sài Gòn, 1970)

After Rev. Thai published his book, *God's Preacher*, he published a commentary on the Psalms. The commentary provides another view on the way Rev. Thai engaged with the Bible. In fact, the commentary is a bit of a contrast to his memoirs, which evidence a very experiential, ahistorical approach to the Bible.

Looking at both volumes, as a scholar whose academic focus is on the Psalms, I can see that Rev. Thai has written a solid commentary, in spite of the fact that he had few reference works from which to draw. For what he had available to him, Rev. Thai interpreted the Psalms carefully. He does his best to place the psalms in the context of the scholarship he had available to him, including references to the discoveries of Ugaritic literature at Ras Shamra and the textual witness of the Vulgate.[86] He refers to several famous western authors such as Martin Luther[87] and John Calvin. His most important modern reference work was the commentary of Alexander Maclaren (1906).[88]

Rev. Thai demonstrates literary sensitivity in his interpretation of Psalm 1:1 as a process by which the wicked move toward "'sitting', which makes us think of something perpetual and a long-term enjoyment."[89] On the historical side, his commentary belongs more to the tradition of nineteenth century interpretation that emphasized the historical context of each psalm. For example, Rev. Thai accepts Psalm 13 as a Davidic psalm, and he takes it as obvious that the psalm was written when David was running from Saul,[90] although this psalm does not give any details that would support such a view. However, in explaining Psalm 2, Rev. Thai refuses to attribute the psalm either to Solomon or David because "the scope is too solemn, too immense, one cannot limit it to any kingdom of this world."[91]

In this commentary, Rev. Thai focuses on the original meaning of the text more than application to the believer today, unlike his very personal application of Scripture in his memoirs. However, he does not ignore application. He quite freely applies some psalms to the life of Jesus and to the church. For example, he applies Psalm 2 to Jesus. Although "Pilate, Herod and the leaders of the Jews" lived in the time of Jesus, not in the time the Psalms were written, Rev. Thai describes them as the enemies of Jesus in Psalm 2:1–3.[92] He suggests that Psalm 13 could be the cry of the church in

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[86] Lê Văn Thái, *Châu Ngọc Của Thi Thiên: Quyển Thượng*, vol. 1 (Sài Gòn, HCM: Phòng Sách Tin Lành, 1970), 14.

[87] Ibid., 1:59, 147, et passim.

[88] Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1906).

[89] Lê Văn Thái, *Châu Ngọc Của Thi Thiên*, 1970, 1:16.

[90] Ibid., 1:59–60.

[91] Ibid., 1:20.

[92] Ibid.

Revelation 6:10.[93] Rev. Thai also mentions ways to apply the psalms today. For example, related to Psalm 23, he advises readers not to fight their emotions, because they are "the things that teach us by the grace" of God.[94]

One of the most difficult aspects of interpreting the book of the Psalms is the imprecatory psalms. Rev. Thai's approach here is very interesting. It appears that he does not accept these words. For example, in the context of the Israelites being exiled to Babylon, in Psalm 137:8–9 the people cry out:

> O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,
> blessed shall he be who repays you
> with what you have done to us!
> Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones
> and dashes them against the rock!

Rev. Thai calls these two verses (along with v. 7), "The heart of the hateful person of the flesh who curses Edom and Babylon."[95] On the one hand, he calls this psalm the "most moving of the psalms."[96] And he sympathizes with the author. On the other hand, he does not accept the spirit of the psalm because "that is the spirit of the old law not the new law (Matthew 5:43–48)."[97] Is this the influence of Martin Luther? Rev. Thai does not say, but because he cites Martin Luther more than almost any other theologian, it is quite possible that Rev. Thai was influenced by Luther on this point.

4. Conclusion

Although Rev. Thai retired from being the president of the ECVN in 1960, he continued to work as the director of the orphanage in Nha Trang until 1968. Then in 1975, his children took him to America. In 1985 he died at the age of 95 in San Gabriel, California.[98] The influence of Rev. Thai on the evangelical community in Vietnam is deep. His nineteen years of leadership at the denominational level, as well as his teaching a generation of young pastors in southern Vietnam, ensure that his influence will continue for at least the next decade. In particular, Rev. Thai set the direction for church in Vietnam on a path of non-engagement in politics for more than the last half-century, and he may also have defined for several generations of pastors in Vietnam what it means to be called to

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93 Ibid., 1:60.

94 Ibid., 1:106.

95 Lê Văn Thái, *Châu Ngọc Của Thi Thiên: Quyển Hạ*, vol. 2 (Sài Gòn, HCM: Phòng Sách Tin Lành, 1970), 383.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., 2:385.

98 Đình Dũng, "Mục Sư Lê Văn Thái," 331.

ministry. In his advocacy for both evangelism and charitable work, Rev. Thai anticipated, in part, the commitment of the Lausanne Covenant (1974) both to evangelism and social responsibility. How much he had a hand in shaping the evangelical church of Vietnam is an issue that deserves further research. He is dearly loved and respected by many believers and pastors in Vietnam, as evidenced by the degree to which my students in Hanoi, who were born after he passed away, hold him in great affection and respect. One author summarizes what made Rev. Thai special: "On the journey of his ministry, Rev. Le Van Thai obeyed the word of the Lord and only sought refuge in him, and he walked with the Lord, and the Lord was with him."[99] His ministerial identity and commitment to self-education provides an interesting model for pastors around the world to consider, regardless of their opportunities for formal education.

[99] Ibid., 334.

Jesus as Prōtotokos in Hebrews and the African Phenomenon of Eldest Brother: an Analysis of a Potential Illustration

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ABSTRACT

This article succinctly exposits the meaning of Jesus as "firstborn" (*prototokos*) in Hebrews 1:6 before explaining the cultural phenomenon of "eldest brother" found in many sub-Saharan African cultures. It then examines both the potential benefits and liabilities of using that concept for communicating the biblical meaning of Christ as firstborn in Hebrews. In so doing, the author hopes to promote the explication of Christian doctrine in "the language of Africa" for the edification of the church there and, at the same time, facilitate greater understanding of Christology on the part of North Americans like himself. The article integrates the disciplines of New Testament studies, hermeneutics, Biblical Theology, anthropology, religious studies, pedagogy, inter-cultural communication, and missiology. It aims to model sound principles of biblical interpretation as well as the careful and appropriate contextualization of biblical doctrine in both the way it is explained and pastorally applied. It both exemplifies and explicitly encourages the potential that expat Christians teachers and other ministers have, as cultural learners, to mediate understanding and insight among various members of the global body of Christ.

1. An Anglo-American in Cameroon

A person's immersion into a different cultural context can, of course, give him or her a new lens through which to interpret the Scriptures.[1] By becoming a new missionary faculty member of the Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary in February 2003, I was "baptized" into an African context

[1] "A culture operates as both binoculars and blinkers, helping you to see some things and keeping you from seeing others." James I. Packer, "The Gospel: Its Content and Communication – A Theological Perspective." In *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture: The Papers of the Lausanne Consultation on Gospel and Culture,* ed. Robert T. Coote and John Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 101.

that seemed in many ways polar opposite to my own North American, Midwestern, middle class, Anglo culture. Because of that wonderful experience, certain strange behaviors in the patriarchal narratives of the Pentateuch became comprehendible and new possible connotations for certain Christological terms presented themselves during my reading of the Pauline epistles and the book of Hebrews. For example, the Cameroonian emphases on outward displays of respect for elders and persons of authority, careful attention to interpersonal courtesy and social protocol, a deep sense of group identity and familial responsibilities, as well as the extreme priority of hospitality were all obvious components of my new African environment and its people. It was a new awareness of the *status*, *privileges* and *responsibilities* of each family's eldest son and brother that seemed to enable a fresh and more deeply theological insight into the meaning of Jesus Christ as the "firstborn" (prwtotokoV; *prōtotokos*).[2]

I was tasked to teach a course on the book of Romans in English. The apostle Paul states in Romans 8:29 that God's predestination of the elect to conformity to the image of his Son is for the purpose of his Son becoming "the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." Whereas previously in my study of that passage the word "many" read loudest in my mind, seeming to emphasize the quantitative extent of God's saving work in Christ, now the word "firstborn" shouted for priority in the meaning of this text. The former interpretation was shown for its anthropocentrism. A new *theocentric* reading seemed to lie before me. Could Paul be stating here that the goal of God's salvation of "many" is the *qualitative* magnification of Jesus' consequent status as the eldest brother of an expansive family? Knowing that the Bible consistently indicates the ultimate goal of our salvation to be the glory of God in and through Christ,[3] I suspected that I was on to something good in this newly acquired African[4] nuance of pre-understanding and interpretation.

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[2] Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15,18; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5.

[3] See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 20-72.

[4] Though the myriad of African cultures are diverse, there are enough similarities among them to speak of an African culture. Byang Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa.* Theological Perspectives in Africa, ed. Tite Tiénou (Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1985), 40. Wilbur O'Donovan lists seven worldview elements shared by many African groups in *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, 2d ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 3-4. Cf. Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus in Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 112-113. Stinton appeals to three prominent African theologians to justify a general discussion of African ancestral beliefs. Zairean Benezet Bujo, Cameroonian Jean-Marc Ela and Tanzanian Charles Nyamiti each testify to the widespread nature and commonality of belief regarding ancestor spirits. Likewise, Richard J. Gehman summarizes the worldview of all Sub-Saharan groups as sharing three basic elements (belief in a Supreme being, the spirit world and mystical powers), thus justifying the concept and consideration of a unified, or rather singular, African Traditional Religion. See his *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Kijabe: Kesho Publications, 1989), 10 and 30.

2. On Culture, Pre-Understanding, Hermeneutics, and Contextualization

We must humbly guard against allowing our theological systems and cultural assumptions to become ultimately determinate in biblical interpretation. Pre-understanding that refuses to be corrected by new observations or knowledge only serves to corrupt and distort the interpretation of any new data acquired. That prohibits any actual growth in understanding as well as the potential practical implementation of any new understanding.[5] To interpret the Bible with intellectual integrity and practical benefit we must consistently submit our theological and semantic pre-understanding to our best exegetical interpretation of the biblical texts, allowing both our presuppositions and previous conclusions to be challenged and changed by this authoritative Word from God in this kind of "hermeneutical spiral." This paper is an attempt to obtain a better understanding of the Scriptures – and of the Christ to whom they bear testimony[6] – by implementing a certain aspect of another culture's worldview into my situational and semantic pre-understanding.

My goal is to enable a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the person and work of Christ. I aim to do that by contributing to the North American reader's understanding of one of the concepts and terms used in reference to Christ by the biblical authors. I want to explore the possibility of using the African culture's understanding of the eldest son and brother as an illustration of what the authors intended to communicate of Christ in referring to him as "firstborn." I will assess the possible insights provided by a particular cultural context while keeping the concepts and categories of that culture in their proper place relative to and merely *illustrative of* the unique and unchanging substance of special revelation. Components of African or North American culture can serve as limited illustrations of biblical concepts and categories where appropriate but should never "become the substance out of which Christian theology is grounded."[7]

In other words, my goal is to examine both the potential dangers and usefulness of employing the African eldest brother concept in illustrating the biblical meaning of *prōtotokos* in reference to Christ. In so doing I hope to promote the articulation of Christian doctrine in "the language of

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[5] Wilfred Fon says the goal of proper hermeneutics is to stimulate the church to move forward in its walk with the Lord. "The Influence of African Traditional Religions on Biblical Christology: An Evaluation of Emerging Christologies in Sub-Sahara Africa" (Ph. D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995), 69.

[6] Lk. 24:27; Rom. 1:1-6; Heb. 1:1-2; 2:1; 1 Pet. 1:10-11.

[7] Fon, "The Influence of African Traditional Religion on Biblical Christologies," 357. Gration similarly says that culture is the context but not the source of the church. In other words, the church is not rooted in the soil but merely related to the soil. See John Gration, "African Theologies and the Contextualization of the Gospel," In *Contextualization of Theology*. Lectures from the course taught at Wheaton Graduate School, 1991, 2. Likewise, William Dyrness says, "For Scripture has a larger agenda than that provided by our context, and it must finally be allowed to put our concerns in their proper perspective" in *How Does America Hear the Gospel?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 118.

Africa"[8] without confusing or compromising biblical fidelity for the sake of two worthy ends: the edification of the church in Africa and the edification of the church in *the world*. I desire to promote an international theological discussion, or rather "feast." I desire, in the words of John Mbiti, to help my US American brethren "eat theology" with our African brothers and sisters.[9] As D.A. Carson suggests, Christians of various cultures ought to be learning from and corrected by one another as we together submit to the common authority of God's Word while seeking a shared understanding of its teaching and right application in our respective contexts. In this sense, every cultural group within the universal church should "do theology" not only for its own sake but also for the sake of contributing to a worldwide understanding of biblical truth.[10] Harvie M. Conn, in encouraging global theological interdependence and mutuality between the majority world and the West, says, "Every church must learn to be both learner and teacher in theologizing."[11] William A. Dyrness adds, "Ephesians 4:13 looks forward to the day when 'we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.' This is clearly a corporate achievement in which Christians from every culture will play a role."[12] The astute and aware Christian theologian immersed in a culture not his or her own is in a unique position to mediate these various viewpoints and insights. They are a waiter at the table of the task.[13]

3. The Book of Hebrews and the Church in Africa

Though first intrigued by the use of *prōtotokos* in Romans 8:29, I have chosen to reflect here upon Hebrews 1:6. The late Kwame Bediako called the book of Hebrews, with reference to other Africans, "OUR epistle." He wrote in his book *Jesus in Africa*, "The value for us [Africans] of the presentation

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[8] A phrase, concept, and goal per Byang Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa*, 12.

[9] Cited by Hans Visser in his Introduction to Kwame Bediako's *Jesus in Africa* (Waynesboro, GA.: Paternoster Publishing, 2000), xiii.

[10] "Reflections on Contextualization: A Critical Appraisal of Daniel Von Allmen's 'Birth of Theology'," *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 3, no. 1 (1984): 52-53. Cf. William A. Dyrness, *How Does America Hear the Gospel?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 4.

[11] Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Unchanging Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 252.

[12] *How Does America Hear the Gospel?*, 8.

[13] Conn reminds his readers that the missiologist's task is "that of a gadfly in the house of theology … Missiology stands by to interrupt at every significant moment in theological conversations with the words 'among the nations.'" See *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*, 223-224. See also Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), esp. chapter 9, "Missionaries as Global Mediators." See also various stimulating chapters in the interdisciplinary festschrift to Hiebert that was edited by Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), including the chapter by Hiebert himself titled, "The Missionary as Mediator of Global Theologizing" (288-308).

of Jesus in Hebrews stems from its relevance to a society like ours with its deep tradition of sacrifice, priestly mediation and ancestral function." [14] I disagree with Bediako's conviction that the hermeneutical method employed by the author of Hebrews in relating Christ to his audience's *Jewish* pre-Christian experience by way of continuity and fulfillment is paradigmatic for relating Christ to African Traditional Religion(s) (ATR).[15] Yet I do agree with him that the theology and message of Hebrews has a particular poignancy for the African church and context. I will mention three reasons: 1) the anthropocentric concern of ATR with manipulating life forces and events for the sake of one's own personal welfare[16] is addressed by the epistle's pastoral assertion that Christ is in sympathetic and sovereign control of all things experienced by Christians facing hardship;[17] 2) warnings to Christians facing persecution and pressure to return to their pre-Christian religion[18] are relevant to African Christians facing the immense social pressure to participate in ATR against their will and Christian convictions;[19] and 3) a theology of the brotherhood of Christ[20] and an

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[14] His emphasis (all caps). Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Waynesboro: Paternoster Publishing, 2000), 27, 28.

[15] D.A. Carson asserts the questions raised by early Jewish believers regarding the relationship between culture and the gospel were raised not at the level of contextualization but at the level of theology, i.e. how the Old Covenant between God and Israel in particular related to the New Covenant. See his article "Reflections on Contextualization: A Critical Appraisal of Daniel Von Allmen's 'Birth of Theology'," in *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 3, no 1 (1984): 27. Old Testament Judaism, as both a religion and a culture informed by special revelation and regulated by divine covenant, stands in continuity with Christianity from an absolutely unique position. Kato argues for what I term and support as a "contextualized discontinuity" between Christianity and African Traditional Religions in *Biblical Christianity in Africa*. See Timothy Wiarda's "The Jerusalem Council and the Theological Task" for a survey of various theological interpretations of the Jerusalem Council's task and decision as well as the respective methodological implications of each perspective. *JETS* 46, no 2 (June 2003):233-248.

[16] "African Traditional Religion centres on man. The whole emphasis is upon man gaining the power needed to live a good life. Life revolves around man and his interests and needs." Richard Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Kijabe: Kesho Publications, 1989), 50.

[17] The Son is upholding "all things" (1:2). Hebrews addresses an exaggerated angelology that by nature minimized the person and work of Christ. See J. Daryl Charles, "The Angels, Sonship and Birthright in the Letter to the Hebrews," *JETS* 33, no 2 (June 1990): 171. Hebrews' demonstration of the superiority of Jesus over angels has obvious implications for the church in societies preoccupied with the power of lesser spirits.

[18] Grant Osborne says these warnings (3:12; 6:6; 10:19-39) are the primary purpose of the epistle. Grant R. Osborne, "The Christ of Hebrews and Other Religions," in *JETS* 46, no 2 (June 2003): 265. He also points out that the suffering of Jesus is put forward as paradigmatic for the people of God, 259. George H. Guthrie says the message of Hebrews is relevant for Christians tempted to return to their pre-conversion pattern of life in his *Hebrews*. The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 34.

[19] Gehman refers to the way family members often compel Christians to participate in the rituals of ATR in *African Traditional Religion*, 20. Kato likens the challenge of syncretism in the second century church and the pluralism of the New Testament context with the situation of the African church in his day. See his "A Critique of Incipient Universalism in Tropical Africa" (Th. D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974), 260-63.

[20] Heb. 2:5-18, esp. vs. 11.

emphasis on the communitarian nature of the Christian pilgrimage[21] resonates with a communal[22] African culture in which one's identity is largely familial and tribal.[23]

4. Jesus as Prōtotokos in Hebrews 1:6

In Hebrews chapter one, the author succinctly sets the stage for his unpacking of Christ's unique status and accomplishments as well as their implications for the lives of Christian people. The author's reference in verse six to Christ as the "firstborn" is a part of his pastoral and Christocentric commentary on Old Testament texts from the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. These texts are cited in support of the author's opening theme-setting assertion of Christ's eternality, his superiority over angels, his unique relation to God, and his status as reigning King.

4.1 "Firstborn"

The word *prōtotokos* occurs in the Septuagint some 130 times.[24] In Ancient Near Eastern culture the firstborn son received particular privileges, honor and inheritance (or "blessing") from his father.[25] George Guthrie notes in his commentary on Hebrews (citing Ceslas Spicq) that the position of firstborn "had strong religious overtones in the consecration of the firstborn to Yahweh (e.g., Ex.13:2, 15; 22:29; Lev. 27:26; Num. 3:13). A firstborn son had a special place in the heart of his father (e.g., 2 Sam. 13:36-37; 1 Chron. 3:1), shared the father's authority, and inherited the lion's share of his property."[26]

In Bruce Malina's description of "the New Testament world" we find a similar situation in the patrilocal society of the first century Mediterranean milieu. The firstborn son, along with his wife and children, often continued to live as a part of the mother and father's household even after his

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[21] Heb. 3:12-14; 10:24-25; 13:1-18. Osborne refers to the "spirit of *communitas*" which the audience was exhorted to find for the sake of enduring suffering together. "The Christ of Hebrews and Other Religions," 255.

[22] Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36-37.

[23] O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective,* 4. See Wilfred Fon's brief explanation of the traditional African worldview in relation to the family (41-54) and tribe (58-61) in his Ph. D. dissertation, "The Influence of African Traditional Religions on Biblical Christology: An Evaluation of Emerging Christologies in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995). See also Gehman's brief explanation of the African person's family and community orientation in *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, 51-54.

[24] W. Michaelis, "PrwtotokoV," In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:871; Charles, "The Angels, Sonship and Birthright," 177, citing Hatch and Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897), 977-978.

[25] Charles, 177, referring to Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33; Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 102.

[26] Guthrie, 69, citing Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. 3 vols. trans. by James D. Ernest (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:210.

own marriage. This was a privilege not afforded the other siblings. In fact, the firstborn son usually inherited the father's house after the father's death.[27] The firstborn son enjoyed a unique relationship with the father and a unique inheritance from him. However, this special authority and inheritance of the biological firstborn son could be transferred to another son. In Genesis 25:23-34, for example, we read the Lord declared the older, Esau, would serve the younger, Jacob. Conceptually, "firstborn" does not necessarily mean the eldest son but rather connotes a unique relationship between a son and his father with attendant privileges.

When the author of Hebrews calls Christ "the firstborn" in 1:6, he is merely continuing from the first five verses the idea of Christ's appointment as royal Son and heir, an appointment in fulfillment of God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. Like "son" in Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14, "firstborn" here also refers to the position and privilege conferred upon Christ by God at his enthronement.[28] The author probably alludes to Psalm 89:27 by his use of "firstborn" in Hebrews 1:6 immediately following a citation of 2 Samuel 7:14 in verse 5.[29] Psalm 89 is a commentary[30] on the promises made to David by Yahweh in 2 Samuel 7. In this psalm, the promised messiah is called Yahweh's firstborn. The coming seed of David will be made the firstborn, the highest of all the kings of the earth, by Yahweh his father. An allusion to this text not only carries forward the idea of the enthronement of Jesus as Davidic King but adds the idea of his preeminence over all other thrones and powers as well. This addition supports the author's overriding intention to demonstrate the superiority of Christ over the angels. Not only is he superior over the angels and (what I call) his "companion-brothers" (Heb 1:9 and Is 61:1, 3; Heb 2:11-12 and Ps 22:22), but he is superior over every worldly authority as well.[31]

The use of *prōtotokos* is an allusion to an Old Testament theological theme that is rooted in its analogue in Hebrew culture. As it develops in the OT, it points (and proceeds) toward God's saving work and cosmic reign in Jesus Christ. It highlights the unique relationship between the Son and Father. It emphasizes the subsequent authority and privilege from God given to Christ *after* his purifying cross-work. It connotes the inheritance due him for that accomplishment as well as his consequent and ongoing status. The title "firstborn" in Hebrews 1:6 expresses the fact that Christ

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[27] Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology,* 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 138-143.

[28] Lane, *Hebrews*, 27. "The title prwtotokoV is appropriate to a context developing the motif of Son and heir."

[29] F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews.* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 15; Charles, 177; Lane, 26.

[30] Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 143.

[31] For a discussion of the grammar and context that substantiates the English Standard Version's rendering of the introduction in verse six, "And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world," as well as a discussion of what time or event the "when" refers to, see Bruce, 17 and Lane, 26.

enjoys the unique divine favor of God the Father and rules as his king over all the earth in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. He has been enthroned.[32]

5. The Phenomenon of Eldest Brother in Africa

Siblings in the New Testament world often enjoyed the closest of all relationships among themselves. Malina says that siblings comprised "the tightest unit."[33] He cites the common practice of discussing marital problems with brothers and sisters rather than with parents or friends. Anthropologists Emily Schultz and Robert Lavenda write that in many cultures today, especially the patriarchal ones, the most important relationships between a man and a woman are between siblings of the opposite sex. In this situation, the elder brothers and sisters usually exercise some kind of control over the junior siblings.[34] This is the experience of many Bantu Africans.

Not only does the firstborn son enjoy a privileged relationship with the father both before and after the father's death but his position among the siblings and extended family is one of respect and much responsibility. Francois Kabasélé explains that this is true in Sub-Saharan Bantu cultures because the eldest brother is the sibling and child "closest" to the ancestors by nature of his prior birth.[35] He, therefore, has the right of last word in clan reunions, reunions which he is responsible to take the initiative in calling together. His siblings and their children show him and his children deference and respect. He has the right to "ritual presents" (gifts) from his siblings and their children. In some tribes, the dowries paid for marriage to the first and second daughters of his younger brothers will be paid to him. Sometimes the first wages for the new job of a younger brother will be

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[32] It seems prudent to note at this point that no man or woman should inherit their father's pastorate as a supposed birthright. That is nepotism, which is a kind of unbiblical favoritism. That reduces the ministry to a kind of family business and personal kingdom. To be a pastor according to the will of God, a man should meet the qualifications for eldership per 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-5 (see also Acts 20:17-35). In addition, he should be recognized as such a man and called to the pastoral ministry by a congregation who has assessed him according to Scripture. Of course, the son of a pastor might very well be such a person.

[33] Malina, *The New Testament World*, 138.

[34] Emily A. Schultz and Robert H. Lavenda, *Cultural Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition*, 5th ed. (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Co., 2001), 272-3.

[35] Of course, in a patriarchal society the firstborn *son* (and therefore, eldest *brother*) will have the status of firstborn whether or not preceded in birth by an elder sister or sisters. For an explanation of the conservative and organizational influence of the extended family (which includes deceased ancestors) in African society and its central importance for the lives of individuals, communities, tribes and even nation-states, see Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), 170-5; Fon, "The Influence of African Traditional Religions on Biblical Christology," 41-53; Elias Kifon Bongmba, *African Witchcraft and Otherness: An Philosophical and Theological Critique of Intersubjective Relations* (Albany, NY: State University Press, 2001), 1-16; and Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 13-26.

handed over to him. Eldest brothers are expected by communities and clans to live exemplary lives while also taking responsibility for the actions of his younger brothers and sisters.[36]

Among at least some of the many tribes of the Northwest Province of Cameroon, the financial responsibilities of younger siblings in raising and educating their children often fall upon the eldest brother and "uncle" in the family when the parents are unable or unwilling to carry the load themselves. So, too, is the eldest brother ultimately responsible for any material expenses incurred by or reparations expected for the damage done to another person or his property by the bad conduct of a junior sibling.

While expected to live an exemplary life and shoulder these responsibilities, biologically firstborn sons who fail to do so and so disappoint the family can be replaced by another son who, though not the literal "eldest," will function as such. Benezet Bujo, in describing the ceremony to install an "eldest" son as his father's heir at his father's death, comments, "Even the youngest son may be recognized as the 'elder' son, in case he proves more experienced and judicious than his older brothers."[37] When the eldest brother dies, his position, with its attendant respect and responsibilities, is transferred to the eldest – or most experienced and judicious – surviving male sibling.

Nonetheless, because the eldest brother is perceived as closest to the ancestors and has seniority[38], he (or his firstborn son after his death) is usually chosen to function as "family head" of the extended family. The family head orders the mundane affairs of the extended family[39] and functions as the family priest and mediator between the living members and the dead.[40] Elias Kifon Bongmba, writing of the Wimbum people who are the majority people of the Ndu area where the Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary resides and one of the largest tribes in Cameroon, explains that the family head (or "fai" in *Limbum*, the language of the Wimbum people) acts as religious leader of the clan, adjudicates conflicts within it and takes actions to ward off threats to it. As Bongmba explains, in protecting the family's relationships, land, and other resources, the family head is expected to use divination. He is expected to determine which traditional rituals to use in response to each threat and in order to "purify" the community of threats or the damage already done by threats.[41]

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[36] Francois Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother" In *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 117-122.

[37] See fn 22 in Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, trans. by John O'Donohue. Faith and Culture Series, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 25.

[38] Fon says, when explaining E. Bolaji Idowu's Christology, that seniority is "a concept which is predominant in sub-Saharan Africa," 103.

[39] Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 171.

[40] See Fon, 43 and Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Eldest Brother," 123-5.

[41] Bongmba, *African Witchcraft and Otherness*, 4-5.

Wilfred Fon, former president of the Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary, in describing the family life of the Nso tribe, a neighbor of the Wimbum people, in his dissertation on African Christologies, notes the "ancestral stool" reserved for the family head and upon which he sits. Fon refers to the act of installing a new family head as "enstoolment." The family head's primary responsibility, says Fon, is the unity of the family, which he calls the "greatest moral value," and which includes, at times, bringing back straying members.[42]

6. An Analysis of a Potential Illustration: Points of Contact and Potential Dangers

Kabasélé says that Christ is the "true eldest" who has not disappointed the expectations of his siblings or his Father and as a consequence was "restored and crowned" by the Father in the resurrection.[43] The issue of our own expectations and the idea that *we* might evaluate or judge Christ is problematic and will not be dealt with here. But we can without reservation or qualification affirm with Kabasélé that Christ's "crowning" as king was in direct result of his meeting the expectations of his Father. That fits with what is being stated in the first chapter of Hebrews. Christ was "begotten" (1:5a; Ps. 2:7), adopted as the "Son" of God (1:5b; 2 Sam. 7:14), enthroned (1:3, 8, 13) as the "firstborn" and highest king (1:6; Ps. 89:27), given the most excellent name (1:4) *because* of his work of making purification for sins (1:3).

Christ did not disappoint the Father but instead became "a little lower than the angels" (2:7) for a time in order to "taste death" (2:7-9) for the sanctification of his "brothers" (2:11) and the destruction of the devil (2:14-15). So, the way Christ could be considered the eldest brother in the African sense is that his session as king or "family head" is not the result of birth order or Trinitarian ontology *per se* but is the consequence of his proving to be the quality of person needed for the office. Christ has received fatherly pleasure and approval in response to his righteousness fulfilling work as incarnate Son of God in time and space (i.e. Redemptive History). As a point of application: The immense biblical theological (or "canonical") import of the terms "firstborn" and "Son" and their rootedness in cultural analogue for infused meaning, renders them indispensible in bible translation. They should also be utilized – and qualified – in discussion with Muslims about what the bible says and does not say about Jesus.

In many African families and clans, the selection of a new family head or eldest brother (in the case that the natural oldest surviving son is not fit) would be taken as a group decision. However,

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[42] Fon, 44-47. He actually refers to the act of enstoolment in the past tense, explaining that only the family head can mediate between a family member causing offence to another and the ancestors because he/she as family head has been "enstooled" upon the ancestral stool.

[43] Kabasélé, 122.

in Hebrews chapter two the author says it is *Christ* who is "not ashamed to call *them* brothers." The reason stated for Christ's approval of his brothers is that they have the same origin, or Father, as he does (2:11). In addition, God has given these brothers to Christ (2:13; Ps. 18:2). It was for them that he became like them (2:14, 17), on assignment as their "sanctifier" (2:11) and in service to the Father who gave his Son such a "household" to oversee (3:2-8).

Kabasélé affirms Christ as the "true eldest" in the above way while discussing the African firstborn's role as exemplar. The eldest brother is to set a pattern of living for his "followers" (the term for junior brothers and sisters in Anglophone Cameroon). The author of Hebrews points his readers to Christ as the supreme example of one who has completed the race of faith in obedience to the Father who set the race before him (12:1-4). The junior brothers and sisters who follow him and run the race also set before them are to look to Christ (12:2) and "consider" his example (12:3). He persevered with trust and hope in God through undeserved shame and hostility and they should do likewise. In fact, the suffering being endured by the subject-siblings of Christ is discipline designed by God *their* Father to make them share in the holiness of Christ (12:7-10).

In 12:1-4 we find Christ's status as exemplar added to that of firstborn king and articulated in conjunction with it by the epistle's author. I believe this is an instance of what William Lane calls "orchestrated Christology." Lane explains, "Individual motifs and constructs are readily recognizable, but they flow into one another so adroitly that the consideration of a dominant motif invariably involves simultaneously the consideration of secondary and tertiary themes that are introduced in concert with the dominant motif."[44] Not only is the Christology of Hebrews thick and multi-faceted, but the various facets are sounded together like an orchestra. Many individual parts are arranged to produce a fuller integrated and harmonious whole. This theological phenomenon attests to the uniqueness and fullness of Christ. We need not exclude the work/role of Christ as exemplar from Christ's identity as firstborn (at least in the theology of the book of Hebrews). So, the African concept of eldest brother is a fitting illustration in this regard. That said, the person who knows and enjoys the music of the orchestra most is the one who, while hearing the various instruments sounded together, can identify and appreciate the difference between an oboe and a trumpet and yet also perceives how the two, though distinct, harmonize for something better. He does not think or call an oboe a trumpet, or vice versa. The would be expositor of Hebrews should point out the author's harmonic movement here. We should also beware of Christological reductions that fixate on a single term and concept.

Besides being an example, the Christ of Hebrews – and the African eldest brother – is also a representative who is responsible for the misconduct of his siblings. Christ is the Christian's eldest brother in the sense that he paid the penalty we incurred by our sin against the Father. He took

[44] Lane, cxxxix.

responsibility for our offenses and bore the wrath of God in our place. Christ made "propitiation" for our sins (2:17). His payment has freed his subject-siblings from any obligation to make the payment themselves. In this way, he has also repaired the broken unity of the family. The suffering of Christ made possible, was even the means of, the Father's work in "bringing many sons to glory" (2:10). Again, it is the author's connection of Christ's redemptive suffering and his consequent enthronement as firstborn that legitimates our use of this aspect of the African eldest brother phenomenon as an illustration of *prōtotokos* in Hebrews 1:6.

Christ, as Family Head, acted as priest who offered up the only acceptable sacrifice for the sins of his family (8:9-10). He was the designated mediator between his siblings and God. The author of Hebrews associates Psalm 2:7 ("Son") with Christ's appointment by God as high priest in 5:5, again "orchestrating" his Christology. There are two significant differences between Christ's work as priest and that of the African family head: 1) Christ's sacrifice was acceptable and efficacious because it was both prescribed and prepared by God; and 2) Christ's sacrifice was "once for all" (10:10): it was a "single offering" by which for all time he perfected those who are being sanctified (10:14). In this regard, Christ's high priestly work far surpasses the Levitical priesthood (chapter 7) and Mosaic Law (10:1-4) as well as the system of African Traditional Religion(s). The person using the African concept of eldest brother or family head to illustrate the Christology of Hebrews should also clearly articulate the contrast between Christ's efficacious priestly work and the repetitious inadequacy of his own culture's traditional way of coping. Pointing out where analogies break down or illustrations fail is didactic and the contrastive method is modeled for us in the book of Hebrews.

Though Christ's work of offering an acceptable and final sacrifice is finished, he *continues as a mediator* between God and his people. He continues as High Priest in order to make intercession for his still suffering subject-siblings (4:14-16; 7:24-25). He continues as the mediator of the new covenant between God and his people (9:15; 12:24). When drawing out this point of contact between Christ as mediating firstborn (1:6) and the African eldest brother, one should especially clarify distinctions between the nature and purposes of the respective intercessions. One draws near to the throne of grace through Christ in order to receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16). In other words, Christ intercedes for the sake of getting grace for his followers so that they may persevere through suffering. In ATR, intercession is made primarily to escape various kinds of suffering, either by avoiding them altogether or having them removed once encountered.[45]

Christ's ongoing work as high priest and king functions to maintain family unity just as his completed work as sacrifice and priest created it (13:12). The Eldest Brother's ongoing work of intercession is for the sake of helping his followers finish the race of faith. He "is able to help those who are being tempted" (2:18). Because he has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, is a

[45] Of course, the Christian may ask God the Father through Christ to remove some kind of pain or trial (2 Cor. 12:8-10).

high priest through whom his followers are able to obtain mercy and "find grace to help in the time of need" (4:16). Christians can draw near to the presence of God with confidence and full assurance and are exhorted to hold fast their confession because Christ continues as their intercessor (10:19-23). He is both the founder and *the perfecter* of his subject-siblings' faith (12:2). He is, in fact, the great shepherd of the sheep (13:20) who, as an eldest brother, will restore the wayward family member to the fold. Through Jesus Christ, the God who raised *him* from the dead equips *his followers* with everything good they need to do God's will, working in them that which is pleasing in his sight (13:21). The junior brothers and sisters of Christ act aptly when they completely and without complaint entrust their lives to him, when they join with the angels in the eternal worship of the mighty and merciful *prōtotokos* of God.

7. Conclusion

The cultural phenomenon of eldest brother in Africa seems to be as "orchestrated" as the Christology of Hebrews. The position of firstborn son in the African family carries with it a variety of interrelated responsibilities and attendant respect. This is no doubt owing to the African worldview which does not dichotomize the secular and the sacred. North Americans less familiar with the contemporary African, Ancient Near Eastern, or first century Mediterranean phenomenon of firstborn and eldest brother may be helped by this brief study to better understand and appreciate the Christology of Hebrews. Of course, this project's ultimate aim for the church in the United States is that it might more confidently and consistently look to the Christ of Hebrews in all things because its knowledge of this portion of Scripture and *of him* has been expanded by a more global, multi-cultural, and *biblical* pre-understanding.

Wilfred Fon has stated, "The African cup is not large enough to contain all Biblical Christology."[46] Neither is my North American Midwestern Anglo cup. Let all of us raise our cups together to more fully drink of all that God has revealed of Christ for us in his Word. And as we do, let us always be mindful that "(t)he message of the gospel must not only be expressed in the categories and world view of the local culture, it must also fill them with biblical substance and so revolutionize them."[47] We must neither reduce nor reshape biblical Christology to simply fit the contours of our respective cultures' categories (or "cups") of pre-understanding. We must add to every receptor culture the biblical theological categories and concepts which have no contextualizing parallel within them. We must not only affirm and use existing categories for illustration and insight, but also demonstrate

[46] Fon, 209.

[47] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 215.

the inherent limitations of these categories in order to highlight the full and final, the true and better, work of Christ.[48] This is the message and methodology of Hebrews.

[48] Three excellent resources with particular instruction for this kind of contextualization of biblical doctrine (i.e. "the gospel") are Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced Gospel Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Daniel Strange, *Their Rock is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), and Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015).

Inspiration, Authority, and Canonicity of the Scripture: Comparative Study Between Hindu and Christian Scriptures

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ABSTRACT

Both Hinduism and Christianity address transcendental revelation in concrete historical settings by relating to the question of inspiration, authority, and canonicity of their respective Scriptures. Although understood and explicated in different ways, there are some similarities in which they address the issue. There are also differences. This article discusses the similarities and differences between the two. The author argues that while Hinduism and Christianity share similarities in the notion of eternality of the Word, the inscripturation of the oral traditions, and the epistemological warrant of the Scripture, they differ in their ideas of what the Scripture is, what it can accomplish, and how it achieves its goal of equipping its adherents.

1. Introduction

The relationship of the divine and human, the objective and subjective, or the transcendental and historical are necessary aspects in dealing with inspiration, authority, and canonicity of any Scripture. Karl Rahner observes that one has to distinguish between the transcendental element of revelation and the predicament expression of it in concrete historical settings.[1] However, Rahner does not satisfactorily explain the transcendental feature.[2] Nevertheless, he is right in suggesting that

[1] Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 13–16.

[2] For a brief discussion and critique of Rahner's position, see Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 144–46.

the relationship of the objective aspect of God's free communication and the subjective element of human understanding are two sides of the same coin. All religions claiming to have transcendental revelation and scripture must also address the axiom of these two emphases by relating to the question of inspiration, authority, and canonicity since they are intricately connected. This article is an attempt to provide some understanding of these relationships. How do Christianity and Hinduism understand the relationship between the transcendental/divine and the human regarding revelation? Are there some commonalities between how these two religions understand the issue? What might be some of the differences within the apparent similarities? Can the understanding of one religion enrich the other? These are some questions I will address in this article.

This article argues that while Hinduism and Christianity share similarities in the notion of the eternality of the Word, the inscripturation of the oral tradition, and the epistemological warrant of the Scripture, they differ in their ideas of what the Scripture is, what it can accomplish, and how it achieves its goal of equipping its adherents. Stated differently, there are both similarities and differences between Hinduism and Christianity regarding the origin, nature, and scope of their Scriptures, and the two must be acknowledged and maintained accordingly. Since there are differences and nuances in the understanding of Scripture – its nature and function – even within the respective religions, I will focus on the big picture while at the same time accentuating my evangelical Christian stance. This paper will proceed in three steps. First, I will set the stage by defining some terms and clarifying certain ideas. Second, I will discuss some apparent commonalities and underline the crucial differences between the two Scriptures. Third, I will conclude with brief practical applications that readers might derive from this reflection.

2. Defining Some Terms and Clarifying Certain Ideas

In this section, I will explain some terms and clarify certain concepts that might be subject to different definitions. Even though I will attempt to investigate what inspiration, canonicity, and authority of the Scriptures mean from a Hindu perspective, I will apply Christian understanding to see how far such perception of Scripture can be applied to Hindu Scriptures. Such an approach seems both natural and inevitable.[3] One can speak of the unfamiliar only through familiar terms. Likewise, I can and will talk about Hinduism through my religious and cultural lens, which is predominantly shaped by Christian terminology and worldview. I will make a comparison with Christianity, highlighting essential differences so that we grasp a broad understanding of Hinduism, the religion "so diverse that it defies generalization."[4]

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[3] So argues George Chemparathy, "The Veda as Revelation," *Journal of Dharma* 7, no. 3 (July 1982): 254.

[4] Christy Lohr and Ian S. Markham, *A World Religions Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 32.

Assuming that my readers are primarily Christians, I will focus on clarifying Hindu terms and ideas that might be unfamiliar to Christians. However, a few clarifications also must be made concerning Christianity, as there are several expressions of Christian faith as the epithet "Christianities" indicates.

2.1 Hinduism and Christianity

An argument could be made that Hinduism not only transformed but also transmuted. Whereas the former conveys the idea of undergoing a radical change while at the same time maintaining its essence, the latter can mean an alteration that includes the essence. While a similar argument can be made of Christianity in the sense that the Christianity of two thousand years ago is no longer precisely the same today, Christianity has always maintained its essential belief in the centrality of Bible, Jesus Christ, and the existence of the church. Such is not the case with Hinduism.

However, to dismiss Hinduism as if there is nothing in common between the vast arrays of manifestations would also be too simplistic. A Christian who is born in India and believes *only* in Jesus would not be considered as belonging to Hindu religion. Although Hinduism is more about a way of life than maintaining an orthodox belief, one's belief is centered on some central teachings and practices including, but not limited to, temple rituals and sacrifices, ethical practices derived from their traditions and Scriptures, and belief in their vast arrays of Scriptures, mainly the Vedas.

2.2 The Notion of Scripture

The term *Scriptures* in relation to Hinduism calls for clarifications. Some believe that the notion of Scripture in Hinduism is an exogenous import, one that is often constructed through Western linguistic and philosophical categories and therefore misleading when used in other religions' texts.[5] Others, however, argue that no term is connotation-free and any substitute term for scripture – for example, sacred writings or religious texts – also have their limitations. Therefore, the word *Scripture*, when used with proper understanding, is desirable.[6] For this article, we shall utilize the term *Scripture* even when speaking of Hindu religious texts.

However, when a Hindu speaks of Scripture, s/he is not using it in the same sense as a Christian is. James Laine points out that unlike Christianity, "'Hinduism' is no one 'religion', [and therefore] it has no one 'scripture.'"[7] Hindu Scriptures can be divided into two categories: *Sruti* and *Smriti*. Al-

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[5] Miriam Levering, ed., *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1989), 102–28, 170–79.

[6] Ibid., 5–6.

[7] James Laine, "The Notion of 'Scripture' in Modern Indian Thought," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, no. 1/4 (1983): 167.

though in modern Hinduism there is no strict dividing line between these two clusters of scriptures as some groups may consider some text more important than the others,[8] traditionally there has been a consensus that *Sruti* is the most sacred text in Hinduism.[9] As such it could be said to have a canonical status.[10] *Sruti* means that which is heard. Hindus believe that the *rsis* "heard" the eternal words (see below). *Sruti* is composed of the *Samhita* (the four Vedas), *Brahmanas* (commentary on the Vedas composed by Brahmins), *Aranyakas* (treaties by forest dwellers), and the Upanishads (philosophical and speculative material).[11]

The practices and beliefs of the popular Hinduism of today are derived more from the second category of Scriptures, *Smriti*. *Smriti* means "that which is remembered." It includes such vital writings as Puranas, Mahabharata, and Ramayana among others. Depending on the geographical locations, it is not uncommon to have native traditions added as Scriptures. Unlike the *Sruti*, *Smriti* has an earthly origin and is more accessible to the ordinary people. However, unlike Christianity, the concept of normativity or orthodoxy in Hinduism is loosely understood, therefore relegating *Sruti* to a less important place and elevating *Smriti* for a more practical purpose is also commonly practiced. It has been noted that less than five percent of Hindus know *Sruti* vaguely and less than one percent has a good grasp of its content.[12] All this to say that canonicity, inspiration, and authority in Hindu Scripture is not exactly what is understood in Christianity. While there is an idea of a central corpus of unchanging text, the Vedas, there is also openness in accommodating other writings. This then brings us to the need for a more thorough investigation of the commonalities and differences in understanding of inspiration, authority, and canonicity about the Scriptures of the two religions.

3. Commonalities and Differences Between Hindu and Christian Scriptures

Even within their respective religions, not all Hindus or Christians agree on the precise nature of inspiration, authority, and canonicity. For instance, not all Hindus agree on the number of Upanishads nor do all Christians agree on the precise understanding of inspiration, much less on inerrancy. Hence, instead of focusing on differentiating the limited and unlimited inerrancy or the

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Timothy C. Tennent, "Can Hindu Scriptures Serve as a 'Tutor' to Christ?" in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 1074.

[10] Kenneth Kramer, *World Scriptures : An Introduction to Comparative Religions* (New York : Paulist Press, 1986), 23.

[11] Tennent, "Can Hindu Scriptures Serve as a 'Tutor' to Christ?" 1073–74.

[12] Jean Holm and John Westerdale Bowker, *Sacred Writings* (London : Pinter Publishers, 1994), 72.

number of Upanishads, I will concentrate on the bigger picture. For example, I consider only the sixty-six books of the Bible as inspired even though some segments of Christianity accept more than sixty-six inspired books. I also take for granted the *Vedas* as the authoritative text for Hinduism since all Hindus accept them. Keeping this assumption in mind, we shall proceed to look at some shared similarities and dissimilarities between the conceptions of Scriptures in these two religions.

3.1 Commonalities

I will focus on three shared similarities before we discuss the differences. First, behind the concept of Hindu and Christian Scriptures lies the existence of eternal and unchanging Word. Hindus call this *anhata sabda* (*anhata* means "unstruck," and *sabda* means "sound"), and Christians link this unchanging Word to the Trinitarian God. Christians have maintained that God and his words are intimately connected to the extent that wherever God's Word is present, there is God himself.[13] The triune God is a communicating God; he eternally communicates himself – Father to the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Son to the Holy Spirit and the Father, and the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. Some have argued that this attribute is an essential feature of God, without which he would not be God.[14] This divine attribute is most clearly manifested in Jesus, who is called the Word of God. John 1:1 states that "in the beginning" (not "from the beginning") was the Word. The emphasis here is the eternal preexistence of the Word.[15] The eternal Word (God) is to be distinguished from the created media through which God's Word is communicated (Bible). However, it is through the Word (Bible) and the Spirit that we come to know the full revelation of the Word (Jesus). Even though it would be misleading to say that the Scripture is God, it would also be incorrect to separate the Scripture (God's Word) from God, because "God and his word are always *present* together."[16] Thus, the words of the Bible are the true utterances and expressions of God himself,[17] and they reflect the eternal existence of the Word.

Similarly, Hinduism understands the Word as "eternally reverberating throughout the universe" which is symbolized by *OM*.[18] Though not necessarily identified with a personal God or the Brahman, these eternal words, analogous to the Christian view of the eternal word, are uncreated and

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[13] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, A Theology of Lordship 4 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2010), 40–48.

[14] Ibid., 48. John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2013), 522–24.

[15] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:369.

[16] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 521.

[17] Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 48.

[18] Tennent, "Can Hindu Scriptures Serve as a 'Tutor,'" 1072.

everlasting.[19] Although unlike the Christian view that closely connects God and God's Word, Hindus, like Christians, maintain that the truth of the Scriptures did not originate merely from human writers. While the human authors penned the words, its referents or true meanings surpass the mere intent of the *rsis,* (Analogous to Christian belief, the *rsis* are those who received the transcendental message and recorded it. A *rsi* is one who sees.) According to the school of Advaita Vedanta, the capacity of words to signify a particular referent or denote an object is not dependent on any personal agent but intrinsic to words.[20] This assertion does not mean that words have meaning in isolation from any sentential context, but that there is no personal agent who creates or imposes meaning on the words. Instead, meanings are eternally inherent in the nature of the words and not conventionally established.[21] If meanings of words and sentences are not conventionally created but have referential meaning, the difficulty remains for the Advaita Vedanta in answering what the object references of the words are since they deny the existence of any personal entity other than the Brahman.[22] Our purpose here, however, is to emphasize the commonality of the concept of the eternality of the words. Words do not constitute reality but represent reality.

The audible sounds, which the *rsis* repeatedly heard and captured at the beginning of each creation cycle, were eventually written down as *Sruti.* The debate among certain Hindu philosophers is how exactly the Veda is eternal, not whether it actually is.[23] In this sense, Hindus can claim that their Scriptures are holy not so much because they contain the transcendental words, which are sacred, but because the sacred words in written form are the representation of the transcendental and divine.[24]

In a comparative study between Veda and Torah, to which we shall return later, Barbara Holdrege observes that both traditions explain how the gap between the divine/transcendental and the

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[19] For further discussion of the eternality of *sabda*, see Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 117–20.

[20] K. Satchidananda Murty, *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta* (Waltair: Andhra University, 1959), 15.

[21] Roy W. Perrett, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 120–21.

[22] One way the school of Advaita Vedanta has tried to navigate this seeming inconsistency is by differentiating primary and secondary meaning. Primary meaning (abhidhā) refers to "the direct relation between a word and its meaning, such that knowledge of the word leads immediately to the knowledge of its relation to that meaning [and] the secondary meaning (lakṣaṇa) of a word is the indirect or implied meaning we understand when primary meaning is contextually inappropriate. Lakṣaṇa involves a kind of transfer of meaning by using a word to denote a referent other than its normal one, but in some way intimately related to it." Ibid., 131–33.

[23] Murty, *Revelation and Reason*, 40–41.

[24] C. Mackenzie Brown, "Purāna as Scripture: From Sound to Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition," *History of Religions* 26, no. 1 (August 1986): 81–82.

human is overcome.[25] Although explained differently, they do share in the affirmation that eternal words exist "beyond the gross material world."[26] In both religions, there are strong proponents who uphold the Scriptures as the unchanging, eternal words.

The second aspect of similarity is in the area of inscribing the words that exist transcendentally (in Hinduism) or in the triune God (in Christianity). To use Christian terminology, the process of this inscripturation is called inspiration. Although the word *inspiration* in relation to Hindu Scriptures is an imposition, the idea of a transcendental mechanism – an outside source beyond the native power "working" in conjunction with the human power – is observable even in Hinduism. The explanation of the cooperation of the transcendental and the immanent in the case of Hindu Scriptures differs depending on the categories of Scriptures. In the case of *Smriti* where human authors and divine agency are accommodated more openly, drawing similarity between Hindu Scriptures with Christian Scripture becomes easier. Even in the case of *Sruti*, if and when the divine element is acknowledged, the comparison becomes more plausible. For instance, T. M. Manickam makes a comparison: Quoting his own work, he explains Hindu revelation "as that *manifestation in which God imparts his communicative content to the consciousness of man and man experiences this manifestation of the Divine consciousness as the centre and substance of his own consciousness*" (emphasis original).[27] Some schools of Hinduism such as Nyāya and Vaisesika attribute the authorship of the Veda to God (Isvara).[28] In fact, some have speculated, and many have argued that the modern understanding of Scriptures as a written form, be it *Sruti* or *Smriti*, and their interpretations are largely influenced by Buddhism,[29] Christianity,[30] Western rationale,[31] and the modern transformation in India during the nineteenth century.[32] However, the question of what predates or follows does not invalidate the fact that Hinduism has its own conception of what we may call inspiration.

The process of obtaining revelation and inscripturating the revelation involves human agency in both religions. In Christianity, those agents are the prophets, apostles, and God's servants who

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[25] Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 327–28.

[26] Ibid., 327.

[27] D. S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures* (Bangalore, India: Nat'l Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Ctr, 1974), 334.

[28] Cheever Mackenzie Brown, *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India: An Historical and Theological Study of the Brahmavaivarta Purāna* (Hartford, VT: Claude Stark & Co, 1974), 10.

[29] Brown, "Purāna as Scripture," 80–81.

[30] Laine, "The Notion of 'Scripture,'" 169–72.

[31] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? : A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 138–39.

[32] Ursula King, "Some Reflections on Sociological Approaches to the Study of Modern Hinduism," *Numen* 36, no. 1 (June 1989): 79–82.

are part of God's covenant community. In Hinduism, they are the *rsis*. We must admit that the precise concept of revelation as understood by Christianity is incompatible with Advaita Vedanta (the school of non-dualism) because in Advaita Vedanta the *Brahman* (the ultimate reality) and the *atman* (the individual self) are intricately related. In Christianity, the revealer and the one receiving the revelation are two persons. That is not the case with Advaita Vendanta although later modification in Hinduism brought about the concept of Īśvara (personal God). However, an argument could be made, although not without difficulty, that even if the *atman* is the *Brahman*, this knowledge of the ultimate reality is achieved only by transcending oneself. The goal of the individual, therefore, is to experience oneness with the ultimate reality. The *rsis*, through their meditation and contemplation, develop a higher or mystical faculty that brings them in contact with the supersensuous entity.[33] The point here is not to defend Advaita Vedanta but to draw a parallel. The human agents, *rsis*, through contemplation, were able to "hear" and "see" the words[34] echoing in eternity[35] and pass on the content orally to the subsequent select followers, which eventually came to be written down. Thomas Coburn posits that the mixing of the metaphor – seeing and hearing – is not arbitrary; it is to convey the "holistic and supremely compelling nature of the experience" of the *rsis* in capturing the "revelation."[36] In other words, there is an element of direct experiential knowledge of supersensible phenomena.[37]

The *rsis* also composed, fashioned, and generated hymns in praise of the transcendent. In doing so, the *rsis* were not creating something new but giving shape to the hymn from the substance that they had received.[38]

For the Christian understanding, it is helpful to think of inspiration from three aspects: God as the source, humans as the instruments, and the writings as the product. *God* superintended the *biblical writers* so that the Scriptures are "breathed out by God" (2 Tim 3:16)[39] through humans. This understanding is consonant with the biblical assertion that "*no prophecy* was ever produced by the will of man, but *men spoke* from *God* as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet

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[33] J. Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets* (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton & Co, 1963), 18.

[34] The concept of seeing God's manifestation and hearing God's voice is also a central facet of Christian revelation. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 253–324. Bill T. Arnold argues that in the Pentateuch, "In most cases, the 'appearance' becomes a verbal communiqué from God instead of a vision of God's physicality." Arnold, "Divine Revelation in the Pentateuch" (presentation, Advanced Research Program Interdisciplinary Colloquium, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, October 13, 2017).

[35] Rig Veda 10.777.1-2; 06.009.6; 06.009.6; 10.177.1-2; 03.026.8

[36] Levering, *Rethinking Scripture*, 109.

[37] Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 231.

[38] Ibid., 235.

[39] All Scripture references and quotations are from English Standard Version.

1:21, emphasis added). Benjamin Warfield succinctly commented on this verse thus: "The men who spoke from God are here declared, therefore, to have been taken up by the Holy Spirit and brought by His power to the goal of His choosing."[40] In the end, the message the biblical writers received and wrote surpasses the mere existential experiences.

To leave it with the impression that biblical writers were mere pawns in the hands of the transcendental being would not only misrepresent Christian understanding of inspiration but also defeat our goal of drawing a similarity with that of Hindu Scripture. Like the *rsis*, the biblical writers were also holistically involved in the process of obtaining and inscribing the Word. While, strictly speaking, inspiration takes effect at the point of the writing of the Scripture,[41] the process of preparing the human personality began early on.[42] God did not impose or force any to take up the task.[43] Hence we can speak of the theology of John or Paul or Peter and at the same time talk about biblical theology. Our purpose here is to highlight the idea that the biblical writers prepared themselves morally, spiritually, and even academically to compose the Word of God. Both the *rsis* and the biblical writers exercise their wills and intellects yet were yielding to the transcendental force in the process of inscripturation. The outcome is such that both the Bible and the *Sruti* are believed to be errorless.

The third similarity is regarding ontology and epistemology. We can draw a parallel between the relationships of what is real (ontology) and how we know the real (epistemology) as understood by Christianity and Hinduism, at least in some traditions within both religions.[44] Both religions closely link ontology and epistemology. We shall focus more on the relationship between the two rather than explore each facet in detail. In both religions, the epistemological truth is implied from and based on the ontological/metaphysical truth. In other words, the epistemological truth, in the words of John Frame, is "the proper correlation between language and reality."[45] In Hinduism, the ultimate truth is Brahman. The main concern here is not in the details of the ontological understanding of realism (Christianity) or antirealism (Vendantic Hinduism), but in the fact that

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[40] Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and Cornelius Van Til, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2014), 137.

[41] Ibid., 160.

[42] Erickson, unlike Warfield, emphasizes that inspiration applies both to the writers and the writings. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2005), 242–44.

[43] Warfield and Van Til, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 155–56.

[44] The question of ontology/metaphysics and epistemology and their relationships is not without debate among Christian philosophers and theologians. It would be fair, however, to assume that there is a broad consensus that ontology and epistemology are closely related, and necessarily, therefore, must be investigated together.

[45] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 525.

one's ontology and epistemology are connected to the extent that to discuss one is also to imply the other. So (epistemological) truth for both religions is the proper correlation and representation of the ultimate Ontos.

Both Hinduism and Christianity closely relate the ontological and epistemological inquiry to their respective Scriptures. Although Christians have entertained different epistemological approaches to the inquiry of ultimate reality, they have maintained that the Bible serves as the final authority in our search for truth. The question of how we know is subsumed under the question of what is real; Scriptures ultimately define what is real. Christians do not claim that the Bible explains everything about everything. Instead, Christians maintain, as Kevin Vanhoozer rightly points out, "the epistemic primacy of the gospel and its canonical context " in search for the truth.[46] We can safely argue that Vanhoozer represents many Christians' conviction when he affirms that the Christian Scripture functions as the ultimate authority when it comes to religious knowledge.

For example, a reformed tradition in the line of Cornelius Van Til,[47] Alvin Plantinga,[48] and John Frame,[49] tie epistemology (and ethics) strictly to ontology. Dru Johnson contrasts two kinds of knowing in Genesis: knowing that is dependent on and independent of God's authority. He argues that even before the Fall of humanity there was a process of knowing. The (right) act of process of knowledge occurs not "through reflective exploration of the nature of the human condition," but "through the heeding guidance of YHWH."[50] According to him, the fault of humanity in the garden was shifting allegiance of authority from God to Serpent, moving the ground of ontology, epistemology, and ethics from God's authority to the Serpent's authority. The authority from which the act of knowing is achieved is an indispensable part of biblical knowledge, Johnson argues.[51]

Hinduism has a tradition similar to Christianity.[52] Dharm Bhawuk asserts, "In Western tradition, there is much concern about the conflation of epistemology and ontology … whereas in Indian

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[46] Kevin Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about the Post/Modern Way," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2005), 86.

[47] Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (NP: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1969), 116–228.

[48] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000).

[49] John M Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R Pubishing, 1987), 104–64.

[50] Dru Johnson, *Scripture's Knowing : A Companion to Biblical Epistemolog* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 21–23.

[51] Ibid., 18–32.

[52] I must mention that there are important variations among the six schools of Hindu philosophy; however, here I am tracing a particular strand without highlighting the differences and the nuances in each.

worldview they snugly fit together."[53] Bhawuk's explanation of the interconnectivity between epistemology and ontology and the primacy of the latter is worth reproducing here:

[W]hat is considered knowledge can be broken down into three parts: the controller, self and everything around the self, and the controller covering or permeating self and each of the elements around the self. Knowledge, it is implied, is not only knowing what we see around us in its variety as independent entities and agents but to realize that each of the elements is permeated and controlled by *Brahman*.[54]

In the same manner, Francis X. Clooney argues, "*Brahman* is the source of the intelligibility of material reality, and knowledge of *Brahman* is the final goal for all intelligent beings, human or other."[55] He continues that this knowledge of ultimate reality "is made reliably accessible only through the Veda, which is authoritative and reliable, which must be learned by those seeking liberation, and which must be taken seriously in all its detail."[56] Clooney's observation aligns with Sara Grant's assessment of Sankara's conception of *Sruti*. She notes that for Sankara "the liberating knowledge of the Self … is accessible only through that privileged form of sabha pramana known as sruti."[57]

The observations of the authors above are also in agreement with the proposal of Satchidananda Murthy[58] and the interpreters from the Purva-Mimamsa tradition who argue that the Veda is the means and justification of knowing *dharma*.[59] *Dharma* here is defined as a duty, right conduct that must be done not just for the sake of some merit. This rightness, they argue, is defined by the Vedas.[60] In other words, what is the right duty and how one knows this responsibility comes from the Vedas. This teaching is not far from Christianity, which sees God (and his words) as defining what is real (ontology), good (ethics), and how we know what we know (epistemology).

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[53] Dharm P.S. Bhawuk, *Spirituality and Indian Psychology: Lessons from the Bhagavad-Gita* (New York: Springer, 2011), 165–66.

[54] Ibid., 165.

[55] Richard V. de Smet and Bradley J. Malkovsky, *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedānta : Essays in Commemoration of Professor Richard De Smet, S.J.*, Studies in the History of Religions, vol. 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 33.

[56] Ibid.

[57] D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, 344–45.

[58] According to him, the three types of the revelation of the total four are tied to the Vedas. He summarized the second type thus: "The Veda revealed by God at the beginning of each aeon contains the final truth about Dharma and Brahman." Murty, *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta*, 10.

[59] Ganganatha Jha Mahamahopadhyaya and Umesha Mishra, Pūrva-Mīṃāṁsā in Its Sources, Library of Indian Philosophy and Religion, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan (Benares: Benares Hindu University, 1942), 175–78.

[60] Ibid., 173.

Other similarities may also be investigated,[61] but for this article, the aforementioned areas suffice. However, it would be a gross misrepresentation of both religions and their Scriptures if we were to stop by highlighting the similarities. Regardless of the resemblances, there are theological and philosophical differences that cannot be overlooked.

3.2 Differences

Here I will emphasize three crucial differences between Hinduism's and Christianity's understanding of Scripture pertaining to their nature, scope, and goals. All three are interconnected and closely related to the three commonalities we discussed. The first focuses on *what* the essential difference between the two Scriptures is, the second on *how* they are different, and the third on *why* they are different. Phrasing it differently, even though both Scriptures have similarities in view of the eternality of the word, their conceptions of what that eternal word is, how the eternal word must be appropriated, and why appropriating such eternal word is essential, are dissimilar.

First, in Christianity, the eternal word is inseparable from the personal God who is differentiated from creation, but in Hinduism, the eternal word is either impersonal or intricately related to creation, even if personal. We have mentioned that for Christianity, God's Word cannot be separated from God himself like the sunbeam cannot be separated from the sun. It is partly for this reason that Karl Barth was so insistent that revelation must be personal, not propositional. However, others have demonstrated the limitations of drawing a wedge between personal and propositional.[62] Speaking of God's revelation as propositional does not necessarily take us from an I-Thou to an I-It relationship.[63]

God, by virtue of being a triune, is a communicating God. In Christianity, the Trinitarian God is at the heart of the dispensing of the eternal word. Michael Horton phrases it perfectly: "The Father speaks in the Son and by the perfecting agency of the Spirit."[64] We have also mentioned that

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[61] Another aspect of similarity that is connected to the concept of inspiration is the existence of Scripture in the oral form before they were written down. Although the transition from the oral form to the written form was much quicker in Christianity, Scriptures continued to exist (and still exists to this day in Hinduism) in the oral form for both Christianity and Hinduism. Before the canonization (the official recognition of the inspired text), some Christian writings were scriptures in the process of canonization, and some were scripture in the making. Written and circulated letters of the apostles are an example of the former and the oral traditions, which eventually came to be written down, are an example of the latter. When the same principle is applied to the Hindu Scriptures, they do not appear so strange as when they did at first. Vempeny, *Inspiration in the Non-Biblical Scriptures*, 14–19. However, I also do not want to leave the impression that I condone uncritical comparison between the two religions such as finding Christ's figures in Hindu deities. While all people have access to God's general revelation and the subsequent blessings that come along with it, the Scriptures as God's special and final revelation must test all such claims.

[62] Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable : Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI. : Baker Academic, 2002), 51–52.

[63] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 221.

[64] Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 156.

Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the Word. He is the focus of God's revelation (John 5:39) and the embodiment of God's Word (John 1: 1–14). Also, we have discussed that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16). In Christianity, behind the revealed word stands a revealer, a personal Trinitarian God who is both immanent and transcendent, not so with Hinduism.

The Advaita Vedanta, the oldest and perhaps the most significant school of Hindu philosophy, holds to a strict nondualism. According to this school founded by Sankara, *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, is spoken of in two ways: *saguna Brahman* and *nirguna Brahman*. The latter stands for the ultimate level of reality. In this level, the *Brahman* is formless (*nir* means without, and *guna* means attributes) and cannot be described as having particular qualities. In the former level, *Brahman* is spoken of as having certain attributes, but whatever qualities are attributed to *Brahman* are the imperfect projections of human limitations.[65] In essence, the *Brahman* is impersonal.

Therefore, in the Advaita Vedanta School, the subject behind the revelation is not a personal God. The *rsis* becomes the subject. While the divine descends into the realms of human beings in Christianity, the *rsis* ascends to the abode of the transcendent in Hinduism.[66] One is God-centered while the other is self-centered.

The Hindu concept of a personal God behind the eternal word is a reification of the concept of *Brahman*. Dissatisfied with Sankara's nondualism, Ramanuja sought to reconcile the paradox of one and many gods.[67] This school of thought came to be known as modified dualism. However, Timothy Tennent points out that Ramanuja locates the "manyness" within the one Brahman, placing all created order in the one body of Brahman.[68] Thus even in his model, the concept of an I-Thou relationship as understood in Christianity is unviable because Ramanuja's model either yields a monistic picture of reality where everything is subsumed in Brahman or a relativistic reality in which multiple realities (gods and goddesses) are sanctioned. In either case, the personal is dissolved into impersonal. Holdrege's observation that the Veda is "described as the realization of an impersonal reality and not as union with personal God"[69] is true with both schools of Sankara and Ramanuja.

The second area of difference concerns the scope of the Scripture. Whereas in nature we emphasize the characteristics of the revelation and the revealing agent, in scope we will accentuate how such eternal words are appropriated. In Christianity, tying the revealed Word to the personal God necessitates the discussion, and at times intense disagreement, regarding the meaning of the text.

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65 Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, 41–42.

66 Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 328.

67 Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, 43.

68 Ibid., 44.

69 Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 330.

Although the meaning of a sentence need not always be tied to the psychological state of the agent, evangelical Christians have maintained that the meaning of the biblical text cannot be separated from the intention of both the biblical writer and God. Therefore, the cognitive element becomes a crucial point. If there is a revealer, discovering what the revealer intends to communicate becomes a key factor. The questions of whether the New Testament writers respected the Old Testament authorial intent, whether there was only one single meaning to the text or there was a fuller meaning than the authors were aware (i.e., *Sensus plenior*), the relationship between God and human authors, etc.,[70] presuppose that behind the text there is a communicating agent whose objective must be respected and upheld. Hence in Christianity, orthodoxy or heterodoxy is taken seriously. Although other political and cultural factors were involved, the sharp disagreements between the Eastern and the Western church on theological matters, the question of canonicity, the development of the early Creeds, the Reformation, etc., all reflect the Church's desire to maintain orthodoxy. Orthodoxy presupposes faithfulness to the command, and fidelity to command assumes a personal lawgiver.

Therefore, among the evangelical circle, canonicity of the Scripture is understood as the church recognizing rather than deciding what the Scripture is.[71] The criteria for defining canonicity, such as apostolicity (association of a given work to apostles), orthodoxy (the test of conformity to the Church's rule of faith), and ecclesial usage (test of broad acceptance of a given work in the early church), etc., were important guides in determining what should and should not be included in the canon. However, the church added and omitted certain texts on the basis on the authority in the text, not in the church, because the inspiration is in the former not the latter.[72] Michael Horton puts it succinctly: "Ultimate authority always reside outside the self and even outside the church, as both are always *hearers* of the Words and *receivers* of its judgment and justification."[73] Therefore, the inclusion and omission of writings to the canon was an important debate because the canon of Christianity is a bounded set.

Conversely, in Hinduism, the meaning/content (*artha*) of the text is often subordinated, although not necessarily dichotomized, to the sound (*sabda*)[74] and therefore the notion of orthodoxy is not as important as in Christianity. Until the Scriptures were written down later out of the fear that they were in danger of being lost, they were jealously guarded by the Brahmins and transmitted orally. The Brahmins were responsible for preserving the purity of the sound from the contamination

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[70] G.K. Beale, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI. : Baker Books, 1994).

[71] Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 4–5.

[72] Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 172.

[73] Ibid., 194.

[74] Brown, "Purāna as Scripture," 73–74.

of outsiders.[75] According to Frits Stall, for Hindus, "There is no tradition for the preservation of meaning, a concern regarded as a mere individualistic pastime."[76] Therefore the focus for Hindus is not so much on the *content* but the *form* of the transcendent words.[77] Thomas Coburn aptly explains it thus: "For many Hindus, the holiness of holy words is not a function of their intelligibility. On the contrary, sanctity often appears to be inversely related to comprehensibility."[78] The phonetic element, not cognitive, is the primary focus of their Scripture. Even in *Smriti*, where the divine role in revelation is more emphasized,[79] the cognitive component takes the backseat to the phonetic. The words of J. Gonda about this issue are worth quoting in length:

> The divine, the Highest assumes the form of sound substantialized in mantras, in which It, or He, reveals Its, or His, particular aspects. These mantras existing in the minds of men, in embodied souls, may "work" or become effective when the consciousness of that man, the worshipper or aspirant to self-realization, achieves its union with that Consciousness which manifest itself in the form of mantra. To produce the designed effect the mantra must be pronounced correctly.[80]

Although Gonda talks of the *designed effect* and of *achieving a particular goal*, indicating meaning and purpose, the focus is not on discerning specific cognitive content. The focus of the mantras is on the phonetic, on the repetition of words and sounds. James Laine argues that people like Ram Mohan Roy were instrumental from turning the use of Veda as a ritual-chanting instrument to "a *text* to be examined and more importantly whose meaning has immediate corporate, social consequences."[81] However, such a move was met with stiff resistance from some circles because, according to Laine, the notion of scriptural truth as "discursively reasoned or exegetically derived" was an innovative idea.[82] Thus writing down the Oral Scripture was resisted for a long time as Hindus saw written image as an obstruction to the holy sounds.[83] Wilfred Cantwell Smith observes that even "in the eighteenth century, European visitors to India found themselves wondering whether the

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[75] Frits Stall, "The Concept of Scripture in the Indian Tradition," in *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition*, eds. Mark Juergenmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1979), 122.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 333.

[78] Levering, *Rethinking Scripture*, 112.

[79] Tennent, '"Can the Hindu "Scriptures Serve as a "Tutor" to Christ?"' 1074.

[80] Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, 66.

[81] James. Laine, "The Notion of 'Scripture' in Modern Indian Thought," 169.

[82] Ibid., 171.

[83] Smith, *What Is Scripture?* 133–139.

Vedas existed since no one in India seemed ever to have seen or known a copy of these works."[84] Even though the Vedas were considered authoritative, Hindus believe that truth is encountered not primarily through the text, but mystically or existentially with the help of the gurus.

Unlike the Christian view of Scripture that locates the authority primarily in the text, the Hindus locate the authority in such persons as the gurus and individuals. Here is an irony. On the one hand, behind the Christian Scripture is a personal God whose revelation is now given in a written form and faithfulness to whose intention is vital. On the other hand, behind a Hindu Scripture is an impersonal agent, and fidelity to its purpose now primarily lays in the hands of *rsis* or individuals. Because the Vedic cognition is not about cognitively grasping some eternal will of a personal agent, but about becoming one with the *Brahman* by directly experiencing the supersensible phenomenon, the Vedic content cannot be merely passed on as cognitive truth. The whole person must experience it. Even though the truth is encountered not contrary to the Hindu Scriptures, it can be and should be encountered apart from the Scriptures. The *rsis*, having obtained this supersensuous experience and having accessed the abodes of the transcendent,[85] are now able to guide and assist others who in turn may also be able to achieve the same goal. Thus, Smith's argument that the true meaning of the Scriptures lies not in the text but the minds and hearts of readers[86] seems to apply to Hindu Scriptures.

In Hinduism, the debate about the role of the Hindu community concerning the canonicity of the text is not as big of an issue as in Christianity. Although the Brahmins acted as the magisterial authority in safeguarding the Vedas, the vast majority of Hindus added other Scriptures as authoritative. In the process, therefore, even the Brahmins accepted such additional texts as part of the canon. The concept of a closed-canon does not exist in Hinduism, at least as it is in Christianity. While Christians attempts to alter their beliefs and practices based on their Scripture, Hindus reified their beliefs based on their practices. In fact, what would be considered incompatible versions, if not contradictory views, of Hinduism such as *Sankhya* dualism, *Vaisesika* atomism, *Mimamsa* atheistic ritualism, and *Vedantic* monism, are all upheld together as part of Hinduism.[87] That is not the case with Christianity, which sees the relationship between the Scripture and the ecclesial community as central. This brings us to the next area of difference.

The third area of difference between Christian and Hindu Scriptures is regarding the goal. In Christianity, Scripture and ecclesial community cannot be separated because the primary purpose

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[84] Ibid., 139.

[85] Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 229–231.

[86] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur'an," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 4 (1980): 505.

[87] Vempeny, *Inspiration in the Non-Biblical Scriptures*, 12.

of the Scripture is to equip the church and draw people closer to God. Whether it is revealing God's nature, human predicament, or Jesus Christ, Scripture is given so that it will function as means to equip readers for righteous living. Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for *training in righteousness*" (emphasis added). In fact, one of the primary goals of the incarnation of the Word, Jesus Christ, was precisely for the reason that humanity would receive him and thus become children of God. The idea of righteousness expresses the standard of conformity to the will of a God who gives the law.[88] We become more righteous or more like God not merely by obtaining cognitive knowledge, although that is important, but by following his commands. C. C. Newman concisely puts it thus: "Humanity expresses righteousness in and through loyal obedience" to God's command.[89] To draw closer to the fellowship of the triune God is the end goal of Christian Scripture.

Depending on the denominational affiliation, Christians have articulated differently about the need and importance of participating in the life of God. For the Orthodox denomination, Christian mission is more than "proclaiming some ethical truths or principles but calling people to union with God," i.e., participating in the divine energies, not essence (*theosis*).[90] Similarly, the Reformed tradition has emphasized the concept of union with Christ, and some, similar to the Orthodox tradition, have also formulated a Reformed understanding of *theosis*.[91] Even though there are nuances in articulation, Christians unanimously agree that the primary purpose of the Scripture is to help the church achieve a meaningful relationship with the triune God.

While the Christian Scripture focuses on God's search for humans, Hindu Scriptures focus on humanity's search for God or the transcendent. Hence, the goal of achieving an interpersonal relationship is not the primary focus of Hindu Scriptures. For *rsis* in particular and Hindus in general, humans initiate union with the transcendent/gods. While Christianity emphasizes positive response, obedience, acceptance, and submission to the revelation to obtain a theotic life (life in union with God), Hinduism stresses that Moksha is attained through the application of self-acquired techniques such as mantras, meditation, and enchantments.[92]

With Christianity focusing on a personal relationship with the Creator and Hinduism on an impersonal realization of the self, the commonalities between these two religions become insubstantial compared to the differences. Therefore, Christians must be cautious of any uncritical equivalence

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[88] Daniel G. Reid, ed., *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament : A One-Volume Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL. : InterVarsity Press, 2004), 955.

[89] Ibid., 971.

[90] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY. : St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, c1995), 22–23, 124–126.

[91] Gannon Murphy, "Reformed Theosis?," *Theology Today* 65, no. 2 (July 2008): 199–212.

[92] Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 328–329.

between the two, much less assume or speculate that these two religions provides different ways of relating to one God. Both Hinduism and Christianity are two religions that seek to answer the question of the transcendental revelation and the human predicament of appropriating the transcendence. One starts from above, and the other from below; the conclusions they reach are antithetical to the extent that a comparative study without emphasizing the radical difference is of little benefit to the adherents of both religions.

4. Applications to Contemporary Missions

First, it will be worthwhile to remember that the relativistic claims of truth do not bother Hindus as much as they do to Christians. As far as Hindus are concerned, our standards of truth and falsity do not apply to them. Even though Hindus are acutely aware of common logic such as the Law of Non-Contradiction and observe the law in their daily life, when it comes to philosophical reading, they are not so much bothered by such laws. Hence, logical argumentations and demonstrations may not be the most efficient tools for evangelizing the Hindus.

Second, Hinduism's strong emphasis on the eternality of truth and the ability of words to represent truth is a bridge where Christians and Hindus can develop meaningful conversations. Unless we define truth in terms of a linguistic game, as some have done, we share with Hindus that words/languages represent, and correspond to, reality. In this aspect, truth claims cannot be a mere linguistic claim of and by a specific community. Christians can cultivate this aspect of shared resemblance with Hinduism as a window for further evangelism. The Hindu emphasis on hearing and remembering and Christian emphasis on the importance of cognitive comprehension through careful textual analyses to develop a deeper relationship with the triune God can be cultivated for more meaningful exchange.

Third, we must uphold the Bible with the highest respect. In this regard, we can learn from Hindus. We have explored how Hindus considered their Scripture (the *Sruti*) to be errorless regardless of their ability to understand and explain. An average Hindu does not know much, if anything, about their Scripture yet they esteem their sacred texts to the highest level. They cannot imagine a religious belief system built on something that contains error. Today, many Christians are losing confidence in the truthfulness and veracity of the Scripture. The doctrine of inerrancy has become a source of division rather than a means for edifying Christians. There is a place for debate, but we need to maintain, if not restore, our confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible. Benjamin B. Warfield once bewailed that Christians have come to "agree that there is less of the truth of God and more of the error of man in the Bible than Christians have been wont to believe."[93] He could

[93] Warfield and Van Til, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 105.

not conceive of a Bible that contains error. Regardless of whether we agree with Warfield's precise understanding of Scripture, we can agree that the Bible is God's Word and as God's Word it is holy, right, and without error. It demands our obedience. This is not bibliolatry, it is submission to God; for what the Bible says, God says.

Fourth, we must embrace and cultivate an epistemological posture grounded in the Scripture. It is true that different cultures come to the Scripture with various presuppositions. It is also true that as we read the Scripture from various perspectives, we are enriched, and the truth of the text is enhanced. A Christian from a Muslim community background may bring insights that a Western Christian may not be able to see or a Hindu convert may manifest sensitivity that others are not accustomed to. The right interpretation or an authentic Christian living is not the monopoly of one denomination or region; all Christians have the right to read the text and apply it in context that addresses the existential challenges and realities of life. At the same time, it is also true (must be) that all Christians stand under the authority of the Scripture. We bring insights and perspectives, yet the claims of the text must test our views. We try to understand the text in its own terms and let them speak to our concrete realities.

Fifth and lastly, while keeping Scripture as the supreme authority, our contextualization methodology must make room for experiences of the grassroots Christians. Since all our experiences are built on the pre-existing framework – cultural, mental, societal, etc. – the pre-Christian traditions and experiences are neither to be suppressed nor baptized completely; they are to be critically encountered, redeemed, and integrated in contextualizing the gospel. Such was the case with Western Christianity. We see the residue of the pre-Christian beliefs and practices in the names of the weekdays, in the observation of Christmas and Halloween; we celebrate the bravery and sacrifices of our ancestors and heroes (Veterans Day and Memorial Day) even during corporate worship gathering. We integrate those practices in Christian life with the awareness that all things are being redeemed through Christ. Even those who tend to see it differently are mindful that disagreements in these areas are in-house Christian differences. We could extent the same courtesy and self-criticism to the practices of our brothers and sisters around the globe. This proposal is not a call to adopt a negative syncretistic Christianity, but a suggestion to allow room for Christianity to emerge through the interaction with the inspired, infallible Word of God. This would mean, among other things, that the truth of the Scripture must be wrestled with and understood using available local categories. We can make sense of the unknown only through the known. This process is not an easy task, but one which Christians must pay careful attention.

5. Conclusion

I have discussed some commonalities and differences between the Hindu and Christian Scriptures. While there are similarities in the notion of the eternality of the Word, the inscripturation of the oral tradition, and the Scripture functioning as a ground for epistemology, there are differences concerning the nature, scope, and goal of Scriptures. Therefore, we maintain the differences while comparing the similarities and vice versa. We should be careful not to ignore the similarities while emphasizing the differences. We should also be careful not to draw similarities without understanding the underlying theological and philosophical assumptions. Christian Scripture must uphold the Trinitarian origin, Christological focus, and ecclesiastical emphasis. For Christianity, Scripture is to be understood within the covenantal relationship between God and his people. Anything that undermines this focus must be checked. One can respect the Scripture of other religions while at the same time maintaining our conviction of the uniqueness of God's revelation in and through the Christian Scripture.

Book Reviews

Whereas it is standard practice for academic journals to limit critical reviews to books published within the past year or two, the editors of the *Journal of Global Christianity* will occasionally publish reviews of older books for the following five reasons:

1. Certain older books continue to be recommended by Christian ministries and therefore ought to be critically evaluated.
2. Classic bestsellers may be more readily available to our readers in the majority world than newer books are, and therefore reviews of these books will serve *JGC* readers.
3. While reviews of books that were published soon after the release of the books themselves may at times be found on the internet, a contemporary evaluation of older books is more appropriate for contemporary readers of them.
4. Books about global missions, especially more popular level books, have not been as *frequently*, as *critically*, or as *biblically* assessed by reviewers with formal training as has Christian literature from other disciplines, such as church history and biblical studies. We want to remedy that slight.
5. Western classics may not be among the most helpful books for the majority world church today. Reviews published by the *JGC* are written with the non-Western church leader and cross-cultural servant in mind.

Banks, Robert J. *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. 262 pages. $27.50, paper.

If you have an uneasy feeling that all is not well with the prevailing models of theological education, then Robert Banks's *Reenvisioning Theological Education* may both encourage you and further unsettle you. On the one hand, it may encourage you because Banks and the many authors with whom he interacts note many of the same problems that you likely see. On the other hand, Banks's contemporary relevance may discourage you when you note the publication date and realize that not much has substantially changed in almost twenty years. In his introduction, Banks explains that a deficient theological education is not just a problem for pastors-in-training who hope to lead churches, but it is a problem for the churches, that is, *all the Christians*, that these pastors-in-training eventually hope to lead. From his vantage point in 1999, he believed that the discussion had helpfully shifted away from merely operational and logistical concerns and had become centered on theological concerns, yet he lamented that even this progress "has not yet changed the way most theological institutions operate" (10). Therefore, he aimed not to articulate his position "idealistically," but

to "talk about concrete ways it can be realized" (3). In this way, his approach mirrors his ultimate aim: calling and motivating educational institutions to embrace a missional alternative in order to actively move toward reunifying theory and practice, knowing and doing, reflection and action.

Banks divides the book into four major parts, each containing four chapters and a conclusion, followed by a two-chapter conclusion to the book as a whole. Part one comprehensively orients the reader to the primary players involved in the discussion. Chapter 1 introduces the "classical" or "Athens" model primarily via Edward Farley's *Theologia*, which Banks credits with sparking the theological education debate. Chapter 2 discusses Joseph Hough and John Cobb's practical theology and Max Stackhouse's *Apologia* as representatives of the "vocational" or "Berlin" model. In chapter 3, Banks examines Charles Wood's "visionary discernment," David Kelsey's emphasis on "knowing God truly," and Rebecca Chopp's Christian feminist approach as attempts to help Athens meet Berlin in a "dialectical" model. Finally, Banks summarizes his analysis of and personal reservations with respect to each of these proposals in chapter 4 before considering the efficacy of what he calls the "confessional" model in the work of Catholic theologian George Schner and evangelical theologian Richard Muller. This somewhat counterintuitive pairing seems to have the intended effect of silencing those who would suggest that this is only an issue in more liberal, mainline denominational institutions. In part one's conclusion, Banks makes perhaps the most startling and disheartening observation in the entire book: the theological education debate has for the most part either ignored Scripture or denied its relevance to the conversation.

This observation is the launching point for part two, where Banks aims to fill this significant void with a biblical vision for theological education. The first chapter makes a case for the Bible's role in the discussion, and chapters 2, 3, and 4 look at ministry formation before Christ, by Christ, and after Christ. Unfortunately, this is the weakest section of the book. While Banks's effort to bring the Bible into a conversation largely devoid of it previously is commendable, many of Banks's biblical references are either incorrectly cited or not relevant to his point. This makes assessing many of his claims difficult. He makes many keen observations about certain biblical texts along the way, but he has a tendency to ignore their historical and canonical contexts and rather jump straight over their original meaning to applying those observations to the present practice of theological education. His conclusions seem to be eisegetical rather than exegetical.

Although Banks begins to outline his model on the basis of somewhat shoddy text work, we would do well to remain attentive for there is much to learn from his unique perspective. Part three exposes the deficiency of educational models that fail to actively integrate theory and practice. Chapter 1 mines the best aspects of "mission-oriented" and "missiological" education in pursuit of the "Jerusalem" or "missional" model and critiques them for thinking "too much in terms of reflection *on* rather than reflection *in* ministry and life" (137). Chapter 2 defines the missional model as being "primarily though not exclusively concerned with actual service – informed and transforming – of

the *kingdom* and therefore primarily focuses on acquiring cognitive, spiritual-moral, and practical *obedience*" (144). Banks then elaborates upon the missional model by succinctly contrasting its goals and practices with those of the other major models. Finally, chapters 3 and 4 describe how the tasks of learning and teaching must change if an institution adopts the missional model. Banks concludes with a brief look at three examples of innovative theological schooling in order to motivate the reader to ask the question he answers in part four: "How do we do that?" These include the "school" of Alexandria, educational practices during the Reformation, and the reflections of both R. Paul Stevens and Banks himself on their own experiences with education.

Part four demonstrates that the task of reunifying theory and practice consists of more than altering the curriculum. While Banks discusses curriculum reform in chapter 4, he emphasizes the need to adjust to the changing demographics of students pursuing theological education, including greater numbers of non-traditional students as well as women and ethnic minorities (chapter 1), the need for both personal and communal dimensions in formation (chapter 2), and the need for broad-spectrum changes in the institutional culture of schools, churches, and the academy (chapter 3). Being aware of the comprehensive scale of this proposal, he preemptively prepares the eager reformer for either institutional inertia or outright opposition, but offers only light rebuttal to some of these anticipated objections. He also provides more examples of missional community education, schools for servant leadership, and interdenominational ventures in an effort to prime the imagination for those who need a more concrete picture of what this kind of education might look like.

Contrary to claims in some other critical reviews of the book, Banks does warn against the potential for anti-intellectualist interpretations of his thesis (149–56). His negative reception among some academics may be the result of establishment-challenging statements like this: "Too much research and writing focuses on in-house concerns, and too much of this is purely technical, epistemological, and methodological" (217). Banks could have strengthened his thesis by devoting more space to articulating the purpose of the church and its role in theological education. Although a well-argued definition of the church's mission seems basic to his effort in this book, he instead assumes his theological footing is firm. He suggests that the church is responsible for setting the theological agenda, yet he misses the opportunity to show how church-based theological education provides both theological oversight and the appropriate arena for action-oriented learning. Next, Banks states that the church's "prime task is to undergird its people's vocation in the world" (219). This demonstrates his good and necessary temporal concerns, but unfortunately these seem to remain disconnected from the ultimate end of education. As John writes, "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20 NIV). Therefore, Banks could have drawn more tangible lines between the love of neighbor and the love of God. Although *Reenvisioning Theological Education* is hampered by some significant weaknesses, its equally significant

strengths continue to make it an invaluable contribution to present day conversations about the proper mode(s) of theological education.

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Conner, Benjamin T. *Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness: Exploring Missiology Through the Lens of Disability Studies*. Missiological Engagements. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2018. 184 pages. $24.00, paper.

Numbering more than a billion people, they are among the most marginalized and underchurched people on the planet. Yet persons with disabilities can be found in every ethno-linguistic people group and geographic region of the world. People with disabilities represent a huge missional opportunity, even in those countries considered highly evangelized. However, strategies to understand and engage people with disabilities in a cross-cultural context remain embarrassingly sparse. Benjamin Connor's book *Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness: Exploring Missiology through the Lens of Disability Studies* is a welcome attempt to bring disability studies and missions into dialogue. Connor, with a PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary, is professor of practical theology as well as creator and director of the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan.

This book highlights a great divide between progressive/mainline church scholars and those who would be considered Evangelical or Reformed. *Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness* summarizes several decades of scholarship around disability that is largely unexplored and unknown in the Evangelical church. However, Connor does not engage the significant scholarship on missions that has been done in the Evangelical church over the past several decades. What results is much that is helpful for understanding disability among Evangelical pastors, church planters, and missionaries who are serious about reaching all peoples with the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ despite Connor's lack of scholarship on missions.

Connor's summary of scholarship around and the current experience of disability is the strongest portion of his book. It is a helpful service for pastors and leaders who have little experience with the realities of living with a disability and who may not even realize how limited their perspective of disability is. That includes using outdated language with regards to disability. For example, Connor's discussion of the difference between impairment and disability notes that not all people with disabilities suffer because of their physical or sensory impairment, but because they are discriminated against in society.

In the context of the church this often takes the form of low expectations, even that a child or adult with a disability can only receive service from the church and not provide service or leadership to the church. For pastors and church leaders who have never considered how much the culture has shaped their view of people with disabilities, Connor provides a needed corrective, especially noting how people with disabilities are not included in missions:

> I have found nothing that looks at the contributions from and perspectives of people with disabilities or that considers how their experiences, perspectives, and insights might inform missiology (26).

Connor recognizes that disability covers a vast span of abilities which cannot be adequately explored in his work, so he concentrates on two groupings of people with disabilities: the Deaf and those with intellectual disabilities. Intellectual disabilities, in particular, are rarely considered in the context of the Bible and the church:

Concretely, in my preparation for this chapter, I did not find the issue of ID (intellectual disability) or disability in general addressed at any depth (and rarely at all!) in any of the works about the image of God or theological anthropology that I surveyed. (107)

This is a glaring oversight for the church given that more than six million people in the United States and as many as 200 million people in the world live with intellectual disabilities. Given Paul's statement to the Corinthians that "the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. . . " (1 Corinthians 12:2 ESV), our churches should have special regard for people with intellectual disabilities as vessels of God's grace and power.

Connor's engagement with deafness and Deaf culture is one of his most interesting sections as he outlines that deafness is both a disability as socially understood and also a unique people group with its own culture and language. The history Connor unfolds includes both the heroic and the horrific, and how the best of motivations and intentions by hearing people can be laced with cultural assumptions that are harmful to people with disabilities. This is an important contribution that anyone engaged in Christian ministry should take seriously.

Yet these chapters also exemplify a weakness that pervades the book. Connor's engagement with God's word is limited and often perfunctory. New interpretations are allowed to stand without thoughtful engagement because the experience of disability is allowed to be of equal or higher credibility than historic understandings of Scripture. For example, in a brief discussion about Jesus engaging a Deaf man in Mark 7, Connor presents an interpretation by Fr. Thomas Coughlin, a Deaf Dominican, that Jesus is commissioning the formerly deaf man rather than healing him. Connor then notes a disagreement with that interpretation by two Deaf readers, but does not develop either explanation in relation to the other. Nor does Connor himself engage this novel reading of the Bible. One is left to wonder, if Connor is correct that "Coughlin's experience of deafness and participation in Deaf culture. . . has formed his hermeneutical framework and allowed him to see and hear

something that is lost on hearing interpreters" (97), then why were his two Deaf readers' differing interpretations not more seriously engaged? What if all three are wrong?

Connor also misses a prime opportunity to explicitly connect great missional need with better missional practice by neglecting to address existing opportunities to bring the gospel to Deaf peoples. According to the Joshua Project, there are thirty-nine unreached Deaf people groups in the world, including twenty-one Deaf people groups with an "unknown language." Connor does not mention these realities for Deaf peoples, specifically, or that cross-cultural missions in general would benefit greatly if it were engaged both to and by people with disabilities.

Neither does Connor's discussion of intellectual disabilities include significant study of the Bible, preferring to instead emphasize a new way of engaging people through "iconic witness." Connor rightly notes that people with intellectual disabilities "are sometimes theologized out of significance due their limited capacities for abstraction and rationality" (103). He addresses this offensive redefinition of the worth of people with ID through what he calls "appropriation of Orthodox theologies of evangelism and witness" (103–104):

> I am convinced that the theology of the icon may inform our understanding of the image of God and rescue it from being dominated by notions of rationality. At the same time, icons can stimulate our attentiveness to mystery and create conceptual spaces where the church can appreciate some of the ways that people with ID participate in bearing the Spirit's witness (124).

While interesting, we cannot really assess the worth of this proposal for iconic witness because it does not engage God's Word in a serious manner. History has taught us that imagination can take people into deeper levels of sin and depravity as much or more frequently than it has raised our theological understanding. And, as with his unscholarly critiques of capitalism early in the book, here he posits outdated and stereotypical evangelical practices in contrast to this approach. This occasional employment of strawman arguments is unfortunate as it detracts from much that is worthwhile in the book.

It would be a mistake to dismiss the book based on the limitations above. Missions conferences and mission agencies frequently emphasize Revelation 7:9 in their work: a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. People with disabilities are part of those nations, tribes, peoples and languages. Connor notes that the church is hurting itself by not including people with disabilities:

> The absence of their concerns and presence in theological schools and congregations diminishes the church's capacity for ministry and the fitness of our witness. No one is impaired to the extent that they can't bear the witness of the Spirit, and no single person should be disabled from participating in the church's witness (141).

Ultimately, though, without more seriously engaging God's Word, Connor leaves us with strong

desires for people with disabilities participating as full members in our churches and in God's work in the world through missions without effective means for achieving it. This is where he would have been helped by expanding his engagement on missions to include evangelical scholars, pastors, and missionaries. For example, Ralph Winter, a Presbyterian American missionary and cofounder of the American Society of Missiology, was instrumental at the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in guiding mission agencies toward thinking in terms of ethnolinguistic people groups rather than countries per se. He recognized that billions of people around the world had no access to the gospel message in their language, even in so-called "reached" countries. In line with Winter's legacy of strategic thinking, we ought to encourage the church to seriously consider what would be most effective in missional efforts to Deaf communities, including the equipping and sending of Deaf American Christians to serve Deaf peoples in many cross-cultural contexts.

At the 2010 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, John Piper, co-founder of Desiring God and author of *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, made this plea to the international gathering of missionaries, mission agency leaders, pastors, and denominational leaders:

> Could Lausanne say – could the evangelical church say – we Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering? I hope we can say that. But if we feel resistant to saying "especially eternal suffering," or if we feel resistant to saying "we care about all suffering in this age," then either we have a defective view of hell or a defective heart. I pray that Lausanne would have neither.

Piper's call is even more expansive than Winter's; all the suffering of every kind that people with disabilities experience – physical, emotional, and social – should be addressed by the church, even as the greatest need of all humans is to be fully reconciled with their God through Christ and on the basis of his finished atoning work on the Cross. There is no reason that those living with disabilities cannot bring this good news of Jesus somehow to anyone in any cultural context.

The church needs examples of what including all peoples in the work of missions can look like. Lord willing, a new book about the impact of disability on missions and evangelism will be released in 2019. Co-edited by David Deuel, PhD, of the Christian Institute on Disability, and Professor Nathan G. John, a public health physician with extensive experience in various African and Asian countries, this book will include chapters that engage the Bible and the experiences of those living with disabilities who are already involved in missions. Hearts and minds must be transformed by God through his Word for the miracle of full engagement and full inclusion to happen in the church. Connor's work is a helpful introduction to current thinking on disability and an overdue challenge to the Evangelical church and its seminaries to take seriously the hundreds of references in the Bible to disability and debilitating disease.

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Davis, John Jefferson. *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2012. 168 pages. $24.00, paper.

Having written on topics ranging from ethics to systematic theology to science, theologian John Jefferson Davis could quite appropriately be described as an integrationist. His previous work has addressed questions such as the following: Does Scripture say anything about the ethics of free market economics (*Your Wealth in God's World*, 1984)? How do science and faith converge, and does Gödel's Proof relate to theology (*The Frontiers of Science and Faith*, 2002)? How should Christians think about the medical, ethical, and legislative aspects of abortion (*Abortion and the Christian*, 1984)? Davis is both eminently interdisciplinary and eminently Christian. In his 2012 book *Meditation and Communion with God*, Davis again explores life in God's world in light of God's Word – specifically, regarding the topic of biblical meditation. This review will trace the contours of the book's argument and evaluate his focus, organization, and success at integration.

Davis summarizes his goal in writing the book in the following way:

> *Meditation and Communion with God* seeks, from an explicitly biblical and Christian point of view, to promote a form of Christian meditation based on a robust biblical and *Christian* theology and informed by insights from recent scientific research and interreligious studies, where such insights are consistent with the core teachings of the Christian faith (18).

Davis divides the work into three parts. The first draws on a diverse pool of non-theological evidence to provide a warrant for his project. The second is primarily theological, using biblical themes to argue for the theological claims of his thesis, and secondarily philosophical, using analogies from technology to illuminate the points he makes about ontology. The third part provides practical guidance on how to meditate biblically.

The author's interdisciplinary approach aids him in the first section, where he identifies six scientific, interreligious, and social factors that are prompting US Christians to re-examine meditation. Interest in spiritual disciplines has increased as many seek a way out of widespread shallow Christianity; ignorance of Scripture runs rampant, meaning Christians must devote more time to reading the Word; information overload in our technological age has weakened mental focus, prompting a desire for correction; religious syncretism and popular cross-religious "borrowing" call for clarity regarding what distinguishes *biblical* meditation from other kinds; new medical research on Buddhist meditation points to potential similar health benefits of Christian meditation; and trending theological emphases, such as inaugurated eschatology and the believer's union with Christ, beg to be integrated into our understanding of meditation. Citing these six factors, Davis argues that the theology and practice of Christian meditation that he presents will address or solve

each point. While Davis's book clearly arises from his North American context, the theology and historic Christian practices that he describes are true and relevant for all believers across the globe.

Most of Davis's book is ontological-theological: it argues for a certain understanding of the natures of God, the Christian, the Christian's relationship with God, and Scripture in light of fundamental theological truths. Within this ontological-theological worldview he frames a proper understanding of meditation as "a believing, prayerful, and receptive reading of Scripture [that] is an act of communion with the Triune God, who is really present to the reader through and with the biblical text" (34). Davis grounds this worldview in the theological reality of inaugurated eschatology: the kingdom of God has arrived with Christ's advent, and we are already living with one foot in the age to come. This doctrine entails our real union with Christ and, therefore, our true presence with the Son, before the Father, by the Spirit – a uniquely Christian view of "how personal agents are located in space" (55). Davis explains this reality by introducing the concepts of "extended" and "complex" selves and using analogies from wireless digital communication technology to describe the Christian's intimate and real connection with the Triune God via the Holy Spirit.

Inaugurated eschatology demands an "inaugurated ontology." Davis identifies seven aspects of our place in the kingdom of God which should inform our understanding of Christian meditation. First, "persons in loving relationships are metaphysically ultimate" (70); the essence of reality is not impersonal "Being" but the personal Trinity, from whom all creatures receive their being. Second, "we are really present to heaven, and heaven is really present to us" (75). Third, we are now "Trinitarian-ecclesial selves" (80) – defined by our relationship to God and the family of believers – so there is real communion in meditation. Fourth and fifth, we exist and are now saved to delight in the Trinity with the community of the saints, this delight being both the present context and goal of meditation. Sixth, we know true reality by the Spirit's illumination of our minds through Scripture, which enables our meditation on the things of God. Seventh, the Scripture on which we meditate is a living, authoritative word that belongs to and in the church (not solely the academy) and shapes the Christian imagination (not merely the reason), so that we should read "believingly, prayerfully, and receptively" (34). Our place in Christ's inaugurated kingdom also implies that we should approach Scripture according to a "fourfold sense": historical-grammatical, moral (or ethical), Christological (or Christocentric), and anagogical (or heaven-focused and devotional). Acknowledging multiple ways to rightly think about a text supports the creative and "connective" approach to meditation Davis suggests in the final section.

In the final third of the book, Davis outlines his suggestions for a uniquely biblical form of meditation. He describes three "levels" of meditation: a beginning "slow, prayerful, meditative reading of [one passage of] Scripture" (123), an intermediate "whole-brain" meditation that studies the relationship between two or more texts (122), and an advanced "worldview meditation" he calls "The Five Practices of Right Comprehension" (122), which systematically reviews a series of texts that

together shape some aspect of the Christian worldview. This section is strong in providing detailed practical advice for beginners and demonstrating how, precisely, Davis's prior theological points should shape the Christian's thinking as he or she meditates. The book concludes with testimonies from Christians, all former students of his, who have begun to meditate using these methods.

Overall, *Meditation and Communion with God* provides a useful introduction to Christian meditation and theological concepts trending in the academy, even for readers without formal theological training. Davis excels at communicating abstract theology in accessible ways, and the book rewards close reading. Devoting most of the book to meticulously developing a conceptual framework for *Christian* meditation equips the reader for navigating the cultural issues that necessitated the book in the first place. Davis has well considered the religious syncretism, scientific research on meditation, shallow North American Christian spirituality, and other cultural issues that make this topic and his approach to it so helpful.

Unfortunately, readers may find his organization less approachable. The thesis does not appear until the beginning of the third chapter, many pages after Davis's roadmap introduces the – potentially bewildering – array of subjects that his book will cover. Given his interdisciplinary approach, clearly stating his thesis sooner and pointing out how each part of the book relates to the whole would have better served his readers. Though chapters typically begin by referencing their relation to the preceding and following sections, Davis does not explicitly relate each chapter to the thesis.

However, the brilliance of the book's integrative approach and use of analogies well compensates for this lack of a clearer structure. Davis shines in integrating various topics and disciplines. In particular, using social networking analogies to explain how personal agents may be present in an "extended," "non-molecular" manner is as unusual as it is helpful. The doctrine itself is not new; Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* present essentially the same ontology in its treatment of the Lord's Supper and the believer's union with Christ through the Spirit (Davis at times cites Calvin and other Reformed theologians). However, grasping the sense of such an ontology proves difficult, and Davis has found an analogy that holds explanatory power for the layperson immersed in technology. The modern realities of "media presence," cyberbullying-prompted suicides, long-distance video calls, and Facebook friends signify a transition in the modern understanding of material presence. Functionally, material and immaterial presence have moved closer together in our minds. Davis's notion of an "extended" self – a self that may be truly, though non-materially, present – helpfully retrieves a cultural concept for theological use. Davis plunders Egyptian gold as the best of the Christian tradition has always done.

In all, *Meditation and Communion with God* provides a timely and helpful orientation to Christian meditation, especially for the lay reader. Davis has presented a rationale, an ontological-theological framework, and practical guidelines for a supremely biblical practice of meditation. I hope

that his goal of introducing meditation as "an invaluable source of growth and renewal for any Christian" (8) will meet with wide success.

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Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 506 pages. $49.99, paper.

My first class in seminary was not on hermeneutics. It should have been. When I finally did take a hermeneutics class, my professor told us, "If you only take one class in seminary, this should be it." Today I wholeheartedly agree with that statement, and I find myself teaching "hermeneutics principles" to my church parishioners all the time. And I love to integrate hermeneutics principles into all the seminary classes I teach. My argument in this review is that theological education (especially cross-cultural theological education) should begin with hermeneutics as its bedrock, and the best one-stop-shop Biblical hermeneutics volume for this purpose is *Grasping God's Word* (*GGW*) by Duvall and Hays. I don't say that because this volume is my favorite volume on biblical hermeneutics or because it's the most comprehensive. Pride of place in my heart goes to Grant Osborne's *Hermeneutical Spiral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). I have jokingly told some aspiring pastors to skip seminary and just memorize that book! Nevertheless, I still say that *GGW* is the best choice because it is the most versatile. In addition, application of the authors' principles doesn't require a large reservoir of secondary sources.

My first trip to Cameroon was quite an experience. I was all set to give a seminar on the manifest presence of God in the church. I was fired up to preach and teach. I was ready to impart wisdom. I was ready to advocate for the centrality of the church in the Christian mission. But I found out quickly that this wasn't what they needed the most. The issue I noticed was that the faithful Cameroonian pastors I served alongside were beleaguered by home-spun prophetic declarations from their marginal parishioners. The pastors were also battling against loud "prosperity gospel" advocates in their community who would cherry-pick Bible verses to promote a perverse agenda. The church itself understood manifest presence and the work of the Spirit in the church. They probably understood it better than I did. But they struggled to view the Bible as a collection of books with authors and genres and authorial intention.

My second trip to Cameroon was different. A group of seasoned pastors and experienced cross-cultural leaders encouraged me to lead a seminar focused on hermeneutics, and specifically the interpretation of OT texts. I jumped at the chance. I was thrilled to find out that *GGW* had already

been introduced to my audience, and they had already worked through the basic principles of that book. My experience teaching in Cameroon was demonstrably more fruitful this second time around, and I even got to show them the hermeneutics process by example as I preached repeatedly in local churches. It proved to be a much better use of time and energy. I've had similar experiences in Romania and Serbia. I'm convinced that the need in most cross-cultural settings is the same need that we have in the United States: people need to know how to interpret and apply the Bible. That's the bedrock of all other theological study.

For years, I've marveled at the popularity and the ubiquity of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*. Has any one volume been more influential on budding young theologians, pastors, and their well-read parishioners all at the same time? Why has it been so popular? I think it boils down to structure, readability, and accessibility. It filled a void in Christian circles when many systematic theology volumes went over people's heads or far afield of conservative evangelical convictions. And even though *GGW* hasn't experienced the same level of popularity and success, I think it should be the hermeneutics volume of choice for evangelicals, and especially evangelicals who teach cross-culturally.

Why? Aren't there many other, good hermeneutics volumes? Yes, there are. In fact, I had many professors in seminary who bemoaned the number of hermeneutics volumes. And I heard more than once the lament, "People want to write more about hermeneutics than they want to practice hermeneutics." I don't think that accusation is valid for Duvall and Hays. Many of us in the West have had to slog through a fifty-page discourse on epistemology as part of a hermeneutics course. We've also had to deal with burgeoning issues like postmodern relativism, deconstruction, reader-response criticism, and higher criticism. Hermeneutics volumes tailored for North American scholars, thinkers, and pastors need to touch on these issues. But in my experience, these concerns are much less prevalent in other parts of the world. What most pastors need instead is a basic understanding of how to approach the Bible and how to extract rich nutrients for themselves and their congregations. *GGW* moves quickly from the theoretical to the practical, and the vocabulary of the book makes it readable and accessible in the mold of Grudem's *Systematic Theology*.

The strength of *GGW* is not just its readability and accessibility; there are also excellent illustrations and visuals in the book. For example, the illustration of the "Principlizing Bridge" is solid gold. I can still remember walking my Cameroonian listeners through the five-step process of interpretation.

Step 1: Grasp the text in their town. What did the text mean to the biblical audience?

Step 2: Measure the width of the river to cross. What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?

Step 3: Cross the principlizing bridge. What is the theological principle in this text?

Step 4: Consult the biblical map. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible? Does the NT teaching modify or qualify the principle, and if so, how?

Step 5: Grasp the text in our town. How should individual Christians today live out this modified theological principle?

They loved this. And I kept coming back to that "bridge" every time I taught through a different book of the Bible or a different genre of Scripture. It was exactly what they needed to process the sometimes difficult and abstract theory of Bible interpretation. It made sense to them, and it helped them process each book of the Bible with a trustworthy grid that led to present-day application.

Another strength of this volume is that the principles don't require a lot of secondary source research (e.g., commentaries, Bible dictionaries). Those resources are sometimes hard to come by outside of North America, and sometimes hermeneutics volumes can assume easy access to libraries, personal or otherwise. That's not something cross-cultural educators can assume with their students. Of course, the authors of *GGW* encourage the use of secondary sources; they even have an appendix that shows students how to build a personal library, but the essence of their methodology doesn't require secondary sources. That's key.

A few weaknesses of the book should be stated as well. The book is too long and involved to effectively teach in a one-week course or seminar (500+ pages). Ideally, a professor would teach the material in two sections: 1) Hermeneutics and the OT; 2) Hermeneutics and the NT. This could even be integrated into classes that teach Intro to the OT and Intro to the NT. If that wasn't feasible, then I would encourage teachers to skip (or abbreviate) part 3 of the book, "Meaning and Application." Another weakness is the decision to put the NT (part 4) before the OT (part 5). This rubs me the wrong way as an OT specialist, because the OT is so formative for everything we read and encounter in the NT. Teachers should feel free (like me) to reverse the order of the book. I also think that the Law section of the book (chapter 19) is confusing. I much prefer Calvin's (and Luther's) threefold use of the Law to Duvall and Hays' approach. For my part, when I taught on the OT Law, I supplanted *GGW's* chapter with my own discussion on moral, civil, and ceremonial Law.

The great opportunity that I see with having a one-stop-shop for all things hermeneutical is the standardization of methodology and illustrations. I believe that the best hermeneutics volumes emphasize the same things. They affirm inerrancy. They strive to discern authorial intent. They move from observation to interpretation to application. But many volumes take a more circuitous route to get to application than *GGW,* and this can bog down the learning process for students. Like the authors say in their own volume,

> *Grasping God's Word* is organized pedagogically rather than logically. A logical organization would begin with theory before moving to practice. But that is boring to students and they lose interest before they ever get to the 'good stuff.' We have organized the book in a manner that motivates students to learn.

I believe that the authors have accomplished that objective, and I've seen it firsthand in my interaction with students. Also, I would love to see the "Principlizing Bridge" illustration become the standard visual for biblical hermeneutics. Once explained, this illustration can transform the way students interpret the text. I've seen that transformative effect in my own life and preaching, and because many cultures are more visually-oriented than text-oriented, the book's illustrations provide helpful pedagogical tools.

The biggest obstacle that cross-cultural teachers will have to overcome is the perception of a Western bias as it relates to hermeneutics. Why do we emphasize authorial intent? What about the Holy Spirit's role in interpretation? Is the methodology in *GGW* too structured, rigid, and cerebral? Teachers need to be ready to address these issues and argue from a perspective of universal communication principles. We should not fixate on education or expertise at the expense of basic communication theory. In other words, we should focus on respecting the intent of the person communicating and not defraud the communication act by importing our own meaning into the author's words. This may take some time to process with students. Teachers should be prepared to contextualize that conversation in the particular setting of the students. This will help them to see the universality of this communication principle (i.e., nobody wants their words twisted or misunderstood by a listener). Then the principle can be applied to Scripture.

Also, a teacher should not be dismissive of the Holy Spirit's role in the interpretation process. Keep stressing that the same Holy Spirit who wrote the Scriptures indwells the person who reads and applies them! This should be a point of emphasis that reinforces the methodology and doesn't supplant it. If necessary, Chapter 12 of *GGW* can help with this.

There is a plethora of hermeneutics volumes on the market for theological education. This superabundance can be overwhelming, and that's partially why identifying the best and most versatile volume is so important. While many volumes would faithfully fulfill the duty of teaching hermeneutics, Duvall and Hays have produced the best all-in-one source for this task. Teaching hermeneutics is incredibly important in both the North American context and abroad. So, it's crucial for teachers to have the right resource that will give them the best bang for their buck to maximize their teaching efforts. If you have an opportunity to teach only one class cross-culturally, teach hermeneutics. If you only have one monograph to bring and work through, use *Grasping God's Word*.

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Ellul, Jacques. *Islam and Judeo-Christianity: A Critique of Their Commonality.* Translated by D. Bruce McKay. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 126 pages. $15.00, paper.

I remember the first time I read an essay by Jacques Ellul, his "The Meaning of the City." I loved his writing, his thinking, and his concerns though I disagreed at times with the distinguished French Protestant sociologist and philosopher (I later discovered the cause of my unease was Karl Marx's influence on Ellul. Though Ellul was not a Marxist, his explanations owe much to the dialectical system of Marx and Hegel). I wanted to read more of Ellul, and when I finally did, I was not disappointed. The posthumously published Islam and Judeo-Christianity was also a great pleasure to read.

This volume exists because of Ellul's daughter, Dominique. The book is less a unified piece than it is a cobbled together effort (and I say that without derision). Part I contains three chapters in which Ellul examines commonly (mis)held views of why Islam must be favorably compared with Christianity. Part II's three essays are "The Influence of Islam," "Preface to The Dhimmi," and his foreword to Bat Ye'or's The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam.

Ellul begins part I, "The Three Pillars of Conformism," with a brief overview of how and why he came to write on the topic. He accounts for why the West – especially the French – has a reformed view of Islam, that it is an "Abrahamic religion." Ellul even calls the change of perspective a "conversion" (5). That is, the mysterious Oriental religion that once threatened an enlightened Occident was transformed almost overnight into the misunderstood, peaceful, and well-meaning religion. This transmogrification was fostered by the economic situation (the oil crisis of 1973–74), Islamic migration and population growth, as well as colonization and its deleterious effects. When all is said and done, the most significant cause may be the secularization of western societies with the marginalization of religions and muting of religious differences. If the U. S. follows the same ideological line as France – disregarding the voices of clear thinkers like Ellul and Besançon, but thinking reality is best understood by a Lyotardesque neglect of competing metanarratives for the sake of unity and guidance – we will face similar problems.

Most westerners believe there is no essential difference between Islam and Christianity. Isn't it true that the three great religions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity claim Abraham as their father, thus uniting the three in an ineluctable bond? Ellul's answer is quite simple: "To declare 'we are all sons of Abraham' means absolutely nothing" (18). But how did he come to this conclusion? He examines the biblical history of Isaac and Ishmael and concludes: "The question is who among Jews, Muslims, and Christians performs the works of Abraham (which all come down to the consecration of an absolute faith, without limits, without weakening, in the God who is revealed) … and the works recommended by the Koran do not seem to me at all like those of Abraham" (18).

"Monotheism," the second of the three essays, begins with this reminder: "The word God is an empty word. We can make of it (and have made of it) anything at all" (19). Ellul makes his case by arguing that just because Islam and Christianity are monotheistic, this is not justification to understand them as the same, let alone similar. What is the "enormous split" (25) between the two religions? The incarnation; it is the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity that regulates how Christians think about God – and why Muslims denigrate Christians. I am sure that those who wish to dialogue and find commonality with Islam will continue to do so. My question – and Ellul's – is this: What is the similarity between an unknowable God and the God who has revealed himself as redeemer, messiah, prophet, priest, and king? The answer, to me, seems self-evident. None.

Ellul's final essay of part I reveals the veneer of thinking Islam and Christianity are similar. "Religions of the Book" begins with a question I have heard from friends and colleagues who do not understand the problems of Islam: "How can we not reconcile two religions that have a similar basis, that have the same general orientation, that are religions based on written documents?" (31) What appears to be such a deep question is like comparing the pomegranate to the pomme de terre. They sound alike and are both round, sort of. Therefore the similarity is overwhelming. Ellul disagrees.

Ellul raises several important distinctions between the two books. My favorite is his statement about the Bible – with the implication that the Qur'an comes nowhere close to being like it: "God speaks to a person who receives this message, who understands it more or less, who interprets it, and who writes it down. I am well aware that I will shock the reader by saying that the biblical writer understood the message more or less, and yet that is so!" (33)

Not everyone will appreciate Ellul's perspective on biblical infallibility. He is not arguing for a perfect book but an inspired book given to man by divine means. In other words, for Ellul the Bible does not have the burden of proving itself the infallible, divinely dictated word of God. This is the burden of the Qur'an. Caveat lector: Ellul strays from conservative Evangelicalism at times, but I found his incisive critique of Islam refreshing.

Three more essays comprise part II. In "The Influence of Islam" Ellul aims to show "the deformation and subversion to which God's revelation in Jesus Christ is subjected" (43). I call this the problem of the islamization of Christianity, an all-to-common occurrence among misguided Christians. Ellul's topics for discussion include practices, rites, and attitudes that have seeped into Christianity from Islam. For example, "Canon law expands after the pattern found in Islam" (47) Whether or not there is real evidence for such a connection, Ellul's supposition is intriguing. The result of such islamization is that "the legal spirit penetrates deeply into the church" (47) The reader may find this a controversial chapter.

The second essay, "Preface to The Dhimmi," defends Bat Ye'or's research on the dhimmis and the deceleration of the church under Islam. He suggests four stages for the resurgence of Islam. Initially, Muslims threw off their colonizers in the 1950s. This led to a revival of Islam in light of

independence, Pakistan being a prime example. As independence nurtured revival among Muslims, there developed "an awareness of a certain unity of the Islamic world over and above its political and cultural diversity" (65). Finally, oil has provided the lubrication for the engine of economic growth, furthering the Islamic resurgence.

Ellul's final essay, "Foreword to The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam," is the foreword to Bat Ye'or's book of the same title. Here Ellul supports Bat Ye'or's work – that the west must stop listening to the Arabic version of history as if it were the only version that matters. The voice of the peoples subjugated by the Muslims must be heeded. Ellul champions the success of this call by Bat Ye'or's work.

The appendix of many books is often missed. Do not miss this one: "Foreword by Alain Besançon to Islam et judeo-christianisme." It is a pithy and realistic look at Islam by means of the question, "What status can Christian theology assign to Islam? Could it be considered a revealed religion, or a natural religion?" (87) Besançon concludes that Islam is a natural religion in which faith in God is not necessary. Islam is a law to be obeyed; there is not imitation of the divine by his subjects, only submission to shari'a. God is inaccessible and remote. The author's final imprimatur on the whole matter is that Islam and Christianity are "two religions separated by the same God" (98). Islam is, for Besançon, a way of life that speaks to the natural. What we see in nature, in biology, in astronomy, physics, and all the physical sciences is what helps the Muslim understand the God of the universe is real. But beyond that it cannot rise to a religion like Christianity in which the disciple knows, imitates, and speaks with God. And so Christians, if they wish to communicate with Muslims, "must rely on the common human nature they share with them" (98). Regardless whether the reader agrees or disagrees with Besançon, he has provided some intriguing ideas upon which to ruminate.

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Harrison, Glynn. *A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing*. London: InterVarsity Press, 2017. xi + 216 pages. $15.00, paper.

The winds of the sexual revolution have been blowing hard across the plains of Western culture since the 1960s, resulting in dramatic shifts in mainstream cultural views regarding sex, marriage, and human sexuality. In a world that is ever more connected, regardless of the continent you call home, the ramifications of that shift are coming (or have already come) to a place near you. This can certainly be said about the place I call home, the capital city of a small republic in Central Asia. Anecdotal reports from multiple Central Asian friends reveal that prostitution is readily accessible, pornography is just as much an issue here as it is in the West, and fewer young people are waiting

for marriage to have sex for the first time. I've met one openly bisexual individual who is involved in a local LGBT community. On several occasions, men have suggested to my wife that she marry them, even though they know she's already married. We have been told that many Central Asians view Western women as promiscuous, mostly because of the image of women the West has exported. While all of these behaviors have existed for as long as mankind has been sinful, the sexual revolution that rocked the West has at least played a role in introducing them into the mainstream around the globe.

How did such a revolution succeed in the West and then reach to the heart of Asia? In his book *A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing* author Glynn Harrison argues that the most effective tool used by proponents of the sexual revolution to propagate their cause is storytelling. In short, they've told a good tale, one that comes across as more attractive than the story Christians are telling about sex, and that tale has won the masses over. Here's how Harrison summarizes the story that proponents of the sexual revolution are spreading:

"For centuries, traditional morality had us – all of us – in its suffocating grip. Year after year the same old rules, chained to the past, heaped shame on ordinary men and women (and boys and girls) whose only crime was being different. Enemies of the human spirit, these bankrupt ideologies befriended bigots and encouraged the spiteful.… No more. Change is here. We are breaking free from the shackles of bigotry and removing ourselves from under the dead hand of tradition. Our time has come" (51).

It's hard to argue with such a story. Who would want to be thrown in with bigots and the narrow minded who stomp on the little guy? This story appeals to values such as caring for people as individuals, fairness, and standing up against oppression. As these values have risen in importance in more individualistic societies, stories that appeal to these values increasingly resonate with people. Having caught on in the West, such stories are now racing toward all the places globalization might carry them, as evidenced to me by many of my local friends.

Of course, Harrison's description of the story of the sexual revolution is not the only alternative narrative regarding sexuality being told around the globe today. Though the sexual revolution in the West has definitely influenced mainstream thinking in Central Asia, other, perhaps "pre-revolution," narratives still have a grip on many. For example, many believe the story that men and women should be held to different standards regarding their personal fidelity to their marriage vows. Here men are almost expected to come to their wedding night with experience; women, on the other hand, must be virgins. My wife, a nurse, regularly treats women for sexually transmitted diseases that they have gotten from their husbands on account of the husband's infidelity. A woman's infidelity is unthinkable while a man's infidelity is commonplace.

How are Christians to respond to so many competing narratives regarding human sexuality? They could cower and fall silent out of fear. They could rant and rave and shake their fists. They

could try to refute the narratives on logical or historical grounds. Or, as Harrison argues, they could set about topping such tales with a story of their own, a story that is more captivating than anything else anyone has ever heard. First, however, Harrison recommends that Christians pause and reflect. How often has the so-called Christian story regarding human sexuality, a story marred by themes of shame and hypocrisy, driven people to embrace contrary narratives that they find more appealing? Harrison concludes, "Where the [sexual] revolution has forced us to face our shame and hypocrisy, we should say 'thank you' – and mean it" (89). It's always best to begin with the removal of the plank in our own eye.

Only then are we in a position to critically analyze the shortcomings of the story that proponents of the sexual revolution are telling, and the shortcomings are many. Harrison cites research from the social sciences revealing that the promises their story makes are not coming true. By and large, Westerners are not having more and better sex and have not found deeper and more satisfying relationships. The promise of self-realization and of discovering a better, self-made identity has also gone unfulfilled. The rise of divorce and cohabitation has taken its toll on children who are more commonly finding themselves in unstable home environments, environments correlated with fewer opportunities for future success.

In light of competing narratives, we're left with a very important question: Do we as Christians actually have a better story regarding sex, marriage, and sexuality? Harrison believes we do. Such a story rings with the theme that true human flourishing doesn't happen when human beings reject God's design for sexuality; rather, they flourish only when they embrace it. Those living outside that design are not as free and realized as they think, and that's a story the world isn't hearing – not in the West, not in Central Asia, and most likely not where you live. Such flourishing is not merely individualistic in nature. Ripples of the decisions of individuals have positive effects on families, on local churches, and on society as a whole. "We believe that these ways of life, rooted in our Christian identity, are not only good for us, but that they are good for everybody. They help build stronger communities and protect the most vulnerable of all – our children and the poor" (179). It is our love for our fellow man and a desire for the good of all that compels us to hold to God's designs and invite others to do the same.

Harrison argues that the Christian story about sexuality is rooted and grounded in the grand story of the Bible. A good God created a good world, including sexuality. That means he defines it, and we're not left scrambling to figure it all out on our own. Our identity, too, comes from him and is not something we must invent for ourselves. He's invited us in to take part in his reality, and only when we live within the constraints of his good designs are we truly free. Though sin has marred all we see and has thus made it difficult to walk according to God's ways, based on the cross of Christ, we can trust that God really does have our good in mind when calling us to live in certain ways and not in others. In addition, our story is one that includes a purpose since Christians know what sex

is ultimately for: to be "a taste and a picture of divine love" (136). Sexual union in marriage is a metaphor for an even deeper, richer, and closer union that will exist between the risen Christ and his people for all eternity, and it is precisely in the depths of our own sexual desire and experience that we begin to understand the intensity, the fullness, and the faithfulness of Christ's love for his bride. Celibate singles also put God's faithful love on display by living out the truth that God's intimacy with his people is based on his exclusive covenant with them alone.

How might the biblical narrative regarding sex, marriage, and sexuality come to bear on a place like Central Asia? How different would the story of a man who willingly gives himself up for the good of his wife out of fierce sacrificial love sound in the face of the local narrative in which, in many cases, a wife's main duty is to serve her husband? Such truths and actions could be just as shocking and attention grabbing as any story out of the sexual revolution.

In the final pages of the book, Harrison challenges Christians to work on crafting a better narrative through which we can share our worldview of human sexuality. We should do this, he says, by identifying the values that caused the competing story to be so well-embraced in the first place and connect our stories with those values as well. For example, since the value of care of the individual played such an important role in the propagation of the stories told by proponents of the sexual revolution, we would do well to address how our story actually better cares for individuals than theirs does. Objective statements of truth are not enough to alter a person's most deeply held beliefs. Painting authentic stories while living out the truth of them in one's singleness or marriage is the way to reach people's hearts with the good news of a better story.

In the face of our rapidly globalized world, the central thesis treated in *A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing* could not be more relevant for Christians across the globe today. The biblical story regarding sexuality is better, and it alone sets out the only conditions under which humans can truly flourish. Harrison's articulation and defense of this thesis comprised the book's greatest strengths. Without oversimplifying a complex and expansive topic, Harrison builds a compelling, thought-provoking case while keeping his tone sensitive and even-handed. Though beyond the scope of Harrison's book, I did find myself wanting his thesis fleshed out for cultures such as the one in which I live, cultures where the sexual revolution is only now beginning to reach, cultures which must now come to terms with this new narrative in light of other equally errant narratives of their own. In addition, it occurred to me that his thesis applies to spheres of life beyond human sexuality, for is not the biblical narrative regarding God's design for all of life a better story than the one most people have heard? Such examinations easily warrant separate books. May Harrison's book fuel such further examination, and may it encourage us all to boldly and unashamedly embrace God's story about human sexuality.

Eric Evans
Central Asia

Jipp, Joshua. *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. xiii + 206 pages. $20.00, paper.

Saved By Faith and Hospitality is a book for our times. Xenophobia, tribalism, and consumerism contribute to the current cultural context the US church inhabits. Therefore, expressions of biblical hospitality to "the other" provide a strategic way forward missionally in a society that increasingly views the Christian church through lenses of suspicion, distaste, and ignorance. Though Joshua Jipp's work addresses specific US cultural issues, the themes and principles of Scripture that he surveys may be applied broadly in how the global church views and interacts with strangers, particularly cross-culturally. Jipp's provocative title stresses the necessity of hospitality, which is often overlooked or misunderstood in the US church context, as a crucial expression of saving faith for all of God's people.

Jipp, an associate professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, first became interested in the role of hospitality to strangers during his dissertation work after noticing that this type of hospitality permeated Luke–Acts and played a role in several other New Testament texts as well (xi). Jipp suggests that Christian hospitality to strangers in both roles (that of "host" and that of "guest") is at the heart of the Christian faith, as evidenced in God's movement toward his people when they were strangers, outcasts, and immigrants. The key role that hospitality to those outside the church plays is not tangential but central in the church's expression of faith: "Hospitality to strangers is at the core of the church's identity and mission; it is part and parcel of what we celebrate when we partake in the Eucharist; it is foundational for how members of the church relate to one another; and it provides direction for the church's mission in and to the world" (3).

Jipp defines biblical hospitality as "the act or process whereby the identity of the stranger is transformed into that of guest" (2). He states that "the primary impulse of hospitality is to create a safe and welcoming place where a stranger can be converted into a friend" (2). This definition radically re-orients the idea that biblical hospitality is something we offer only to those like us, or those who can reciprocate. Rather, Christians are to imitate Jesus, who offers indiscriminate hospitality to people of different social statuses and ethnicities. Jesus does not limit the divine welcome to specific groups of people; instead, he embraces stigmas and subverts stereotypes by offering a broad welcome to those around him.

The book's title correctly suggests that there is a close link between hospitality and saving faith throughout Scripture. For example, "hospitality to Jesus appears to function in the Gospel [of Luke] as a sign that one has embraced the message and person of Jesus" (7). However, Jipp explicitly clarifies that the close link is not one that forms the basis for our justification. Loving the stranger is not a form of "'works-righteousness', as though we could accumulate merit with God by loving the stranger" (7). Rather, expressions of hospitality to strangers and "the other" serve as evidence that God's people have been welcomed and converted from strangers into friends on the basis of God's

hospitable work of sending Christ to atone for our sin. People who have received such mercy long to extend it to others.

The book focuses on divine hospitality in the first three chapters and human hospitality in the last three. After briefly presenting God as the divine host to his people in the Old Testament, Jipp establishes the unique hospitality of Jesus, which is indiscriminate, non-reciprocal, and socially equitable, by exploring table-fellowship in Luke–Acts. God's welcome is solely dependent on his hospitable disposition toward us as expressed through his gift of saving faith, and regardless of social worth (36). Christian fellowship is the celebration of God's hospitality toward us in Christ. The church, as a stigmatized community of sinners, is called to offer welcome to the stigmatized as we have been offered divine welcome. Jipp could have expanded this chapter by listing more examples of the stigmatized to whom the church might extend a gracious welcome. "The stigmatized" could include former or current prisoners, the unemployed, single parents, individuals who have experienced divorce, those who struggle with addiction, those in low economic brackets, those struggling with same-sex attraction, racial or ethnic groups outside a local church's majority culture, and many others.

Jipp raises the very relevant question that has been asked publicly among US evangelicals in the past two years but is fundamental in every culture: "Can churches embrace the Bible's unity (not uniformity) of God's people as those marked as recipients of God's hospitality without simultaneously forcing ethnic, cultural, and/or religious minorities to assimilate into majority culture definitions of Christianity?" (50). Using examples from Paul's New Testament writings – particularly in relation to the communion table – Jipp demonstrates that in spite of continued cultural, ethnic, status, and lesser theological differences, the fundamental identity of the church is their "shared experience of divine hospitality, namely, God's gracious extension of welcome and friendship into his family" (53). Finally, Jipp examines the hospitality of Jesus in the Gospel of John as a model for the way the church can view its own mission: inviting others into experiencing God's hospitality through the various practices of human hospitality. This re-frame is particularly helpful for those ministering in post-Christian cultures where the gathered church's worship service is no longer strategic as the focal point of welcome for those outside its doors. Parallels between the nascent ancient church, which met often in homes, and current opportunities for engaging in evangelistic witness through hospitality in homes might encourage many readers.

Jipp then shifts his focus to three common barriers to biblical hospitality: tribalism, xenophobia, and greed. He demonstrates that Luke in particular seems to "make a point invoking cultural stereotypes … only in order to overturn them specifically to show the church that these are the people to whom God's salvation has been and will be extended, and that they are not only worthy of receiving but are supremely capable of practicing and initiating friendship, hospitality, and philanthropy" (113). Regarding tribalism, Jipp notes that some of us entertain a false sense of superiority,

as if we are always the benefactors, while those outside our circles are always the beneficiaries of our hospitality. He argues that the Bible indicates God's people often extend hospitality through the role of guest. This emphasis provides a significant backdrop for the current discussion of how Christians should relate to those of other religious faiths or backgrounds. Paul's role as guest of the pagan sailors in Acts 27 illustrates how a guest can work even within his host's religious framework and mental logic to move his host toward Christ. Jipp does not engage in a thorough assessment of current contextualization issues, so readers should remember that careful contextualization is important when following this paradigm. Those who engage long term in "guest" style ministries among those of opposing religious belief systems will need to be thoughtful regarding how to work within those systems without compromising or confusing the gospel message.

Again, this model can encourage those of us in post-Christian cultures to take our witness and hospitality further than our own home by receiving friendship and hospitality initiatives of those around us who do not share our beliefs. Wisely, disciples of Jesus often engaged in the "guest" role in teams of two or three to provide support, fellowship, and accountability for one another as they formed new relationships in new places. Considering where there could be opportunities for natural inroads in a community for friendship, conversation, and mutual hospitality can strengthen the church's witness in cultures where distrust of the church prevails apart from personal connections to its members. Jipp reminds us that seeking to serve marginalized, outcast, and suspect groups such as prisoners, the sick and diseased, and the economically disadvantaged has historically been the church's practice. Churches willing to engage these groups in our society will find no lack of opportunities for Christian service and witness.

In his timely chapter on xenophobia, Jipp reminds readers that "Israel's perpetual immigrant identity before God is a constant reminder that God's people are dependent upon God's hospitable welcome of them as his people" (127), and that God's law provided safeguards and protections for vulnerable immigrants living in Israel. He examines God's love for the stranger as expressed in his commendation of the hospitality of Abraham and Lot and his condemnation of the inhospitality of Sodom and the Israelite city of Jebus. His discussion of Ruth notes that she, as an immigrant who received haven under Israel's immigration law, subverted the stereotype Israel would have had of a pagan Moabitess. Jipp's exhortation to consider the immigrant from a spiritual perspective rather than merely a "political issues" lens is timely and provides impetus for the church to seek ways to serve and connect with refugees and immigrants. This is not to say that issues of illegal immigration and the volume of legal immigrants shouldn't be considered from a political standpoint, but that the church is called to provide help and protection for vulnerable people who tend to be easily exploited.

Finally, Jipp addresses greed. Although this chapter has the most relevance for Christians living in individualistic societies, Jipp's thought-provoking principles, again, can be applied to Christians in any culture. "Much of the seemingly sound economic advice we receive (and act on) does not

operate according to divine abundance but scarcity" (147). "Our economy, in fact, is dependent upon us not ever being satisfied with what we have" (149). He states that consumer societies tend to blind us to the needs of those who are lonely, hungry, and alienated as we continue to make decisions that will ultimately benefit our own desires. Some will disagree with Jipp's framing of our economy, perhaps, but he cuts through economic theories and jargon to reveal the human impulse at the heart of greed that prevents us from sharing what we have, and keeps others and their needs invisible to us. Jipp's antidote applies to us all: replacing greed with acts of mercy will come when we trust God to provide for our needs out of his abundance, rather than trusting our own accumulation for our security. Where giving in ancient cultures was founded upon reciprocity and competition, Jipp argues, both Jesus and Paul advocate for a model of giving that is non-reciprocal, "where gifts are given freely and acts of mercy are performed in compassionate solidarity in the expectation of reciprocity and reward *from God*" (160, emphasis original).

Saved By Faith and Hospitality is a helpful retrieval of hospitality that is truly biblical. In addition, it is well worth reading for its relevance to current issues in US culture as well as its exposure of barriers in the human heart that exist in many cross-cultural scenarios.

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Miller, Duane. *Two Stories of Everything: The Competing Metanarratives of Islam and Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Credo House Publishers, 2018. 171 pages. $15.99, paper.

The author has done us a great favor in providing a comparison of Islam and Christianity as competing and irreconcilable metanarratives. Miller's book comprises nine chapters: Protology (beginnings); Anthropology; Israel, a Failed Attempt; Jesus, the Mediator Between God and Man; Muhammad, the Prophet and Statesman; Life in the Community; The State of the Mission; Eschatology; and the Conclusion, and the book concludes with a glossary of mostly Arabic and Islamic words. In his prologue, Miller mentions a reading list to be found at the end of the book, but there is none in the Kindle version, which I read. Such a list might be present in the printed version, but the closest thing to a reading list that I found is the footnotes. Each chapter concludes with questions for discussion, thus making the book a possible resource for Sunday school, small groups, and missional communities.

Even though he is comparing and contrasting the two religions, Miller has not taken the comparative religions approach. He writes, "I believe that forcing Islam and Christianity into the enlightenment category of 'religion' is a harmful move" (Loc. 99). He is interested in the trajectory of each

of the two stories, the two metanarratives. Miller's examination of the narratives allows the reader to see where and how they begin, their development and coherence, and finally, how and why the stories reach their respective climax and resolution. This right-brain approach is helpful, especially since it is not written for specialists but for the Christian in the pew. I know some might benefit more from a simple listing of doctrines and ideas from each religion for comparing and contrasting. If that describes you, Miller's book may not be for you.

Miller's presentation of Islam's story is spot on. He offers us a conservative, orthodox, Sunni version of Islam; since this would include the majority of Muslims, it is a wise choice. The heartbeat of each of the two metanarratives, as he sees it, is anthropology. I think this will surprise most readers. Why? One might suppose the doctrine of God is the essential and defining doctrine of any religion. Yet Miller takes an approach that is anthropocentric. It is each religion's view of human beings that directs the story, he claims. God may have initiated the story, but the object of divine action is humankind – essentially true for both Christianity and Islam. Let the reader not be surprised; I am confident Miller will win you over in the end to the helpfulness of this perspective for his project, at least.

As much as I enjoyed the book and learned from it, it is not without some difficulties. Mostly my discomfort came *not* from the discussion of Islam, but of Christian theology. Or was it the author's discomfort leaking through the pages? Miller is an Anglican attempting to walk the tightrope of discourse among his brothers of various theological stripes. I applaud him for that, yet he makes a statement that caught me off guard: "Sin is a manifestation of death" (Loc. 548).

It's not that I disagree with the idea, but isn't sin the cause of death? First, what was accomplished on the cross? Jesus conquered death (John 11:25–26; Rom 6:9; 1 Cor 15:54; 2 Tim 1:10; Rev 20:6), sins were forgiven (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 9:14, 28; 1 Pet 3:18), and reconciliation between God and man was begun (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:19; Eph 2:13; Col 1:20). *Sin and death are not something that should be separated* as if they are unrelated realities (consider Romans 4:25). The NT writers habitually speak of death and sin in the same breath (1 Cor 15:17; Rom 6:23; James 1:15; Heb 2:14; Rev 20:6). So, I laud the author's emphasis upon death. We often focus our thoughts on sin as the main problem, because it was sin that brought death, shame, dishonor, and guilt into the world. Nevertheless, Miller's reminder to us about our separation from the God who made us is important and well noted.

One other major wrinkle in his theology appears with this statement (from chapter 4): "Ultimately, the locus of the Kingdom of God is in the person of Jesus himself and his actual, physical body. This is why the Gospel of John focuses so much on Jesus' seven 'I am' statements. . . . This is also, I suspect, why his disciples must actually eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6). Indeed, it is impossible to enter the kingdom of God apart from acceptance of the reality that Jesus is the Lord in this Kingdom" (Loc. 567).

Had Miller not added "actually" to his statement about eating and drinking Jesus I would have no complaint. Because the author is Anglican, it is expected he would hold the view of transubstantiation (or a variation of it); but the confusion – at least in my mind – comes when I try to marry the statement above with his final phrase of the paragraph which states how one enters the kingdom. I may be nit-picking, but how Miller is describing the entrance into the Kingdom seems a bit unclear. Do we do so by "actually" eating and drinking Jesus in the Lord's Supper or do we do so by merely accepting him as Lord of the Kingdom?

Finally, I must note how I wanted to break out into applause as Miller closed the book. He makes a statement that resonates among those of us who have ministered to Muslims. It stands as both a challenge to Christians of placid faith and the challenge of Islam: "I find the public religion of Muslims (and Eastern Orthodox Christians) compelling and refreshing. Yes, sometimes it can be confrontational, but the introspective Christianity of the West with its quietism and compartmentalization strikes me as defeatist, bland, and feeble-hearted" (Loc. 1428). May the Lord use this book to stir his people in the West and elsewhere to a more vibrant faith and vital witness, especially among Muslim neighbors.

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Nehrbass, Kenneth. *God's Image and Global Cultures: Integrating Faith and Culture in the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016. xx + 229 pages. $30.00, paper.

Modern missionaries cringe when old pictures of indigenous peoples clad in white shirts and black ties, gathered for worship with English hymnals in hand, pop up from the recent past. These pictures are a reminder of the ongoing struggle to discern between one's own mere cultural preferences and cultural forms that are the necessary outworking of a biblical worldview. While the battle may have shifted away from shirts and ties, the problem of culture remains. Kenneth Nehrbass's volume is a helpful guide for "World Changers" (a term Nehrbass uses to describe missionaries and other cross-cultural workers) to understand culture and to equip themselves for cross-cultural impact.

Nehrbass has been both a pastor and a member of Wycliffe Bible Translators. He now directs and teaches in the Intercultural Studies program at Biola University. A key observation and assertion for him is that globalization has a major impact on culture. With nearly 190 million people living outside their home nation and 44 million of them forcibly displaced, the opportunity for Christians to reach people groups that were formerly inaccessible has never been greater (11). The church however has had a varied response toward the acculturation of these migrants. The author builds the case

that God's plan is multiculturalism. While aspects of culture may change as peoples move, "deep structures" of culture persist. In order for the gospel to penetrate these cultures, a one size fits all "McChristianity" is inadequate. The gospel must be contextualized to be accurately communicated from one culture to another.

Culture is famously difficult to define. *God's Image in Global Cultures* attempts to build a theology of culture. Functioning with a faithful evangelical framework that embraces the authority of Scripture, Nehrbass examines whether the cultures of the Bible should be read as prescriptive for all Christians or merely descriptive of those other places and times. He wrestles with the questions that arise from looking for a normative cultural type in Scripture. Nehrbass points his readers to the nature of the Trinity itself as the fountainhead of all culture.

After exploring various theories that exist for why humans are cultural beings, the author concludes that the answer is rooted in men and women bearing the image of God. Humanity bears God's image in a creative way. Nehrbass states, "The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit fellowship in creative activity. Humans, as image-bearers, are mediators or stewards of the order of creation and that is really what culture is about: "'The creative re-ordering of existence'.… This is by its very nature a socio-cultural activity'" (62–63). He goes on to argue that cultures are an outflow of humanity's image bearing. Cultural output may be morally good or morally evil, but in creating culture, humanity is demonstrating the functional image of God – "to be in God's image is to function in cultural ways" (73).

If Adam and Eve were created in the garden of Eden with an original culture, then shouldn't Christians be seeking to regain that cultural archetype? Nehrbass answers that question with a resounding, No! Rather than being created with a set culture that should be emulated for all time, Adam and Eve were created as culture *makers*. Cultural diversity is a product not of the Fall, but rather of mankind being created in God's image. Because God created humanity to be creators, the diversity that one sees in the world should be expected.

Nehrbass tackles the tough questions that face anyone working in multicultural ministry: is it right to change a culture, and how does one evaluate a culture without being ethnocentric? Here Nehrbass walks a tightrope by guiding the reader to evaluate cultural features without labeling the "sum total of one culture as better than the sum total of another culture" (113). Cross-cultural workers are encouraged to withhold judgement until they are able to properly study and analyze a culture in detail. Beyond cultural traits that are clearly defined in the Scripture as good or evil, Nehrbass suggests that cultural activities should be evaluated based on how they allow us to "enjoy God without idolizing culture" (113). Cultures are not static and change is inevitable. It is a given that making disciples of the nations will result in the transformation of a culture.

In examining God's plan for culture, the author identifies five systems that must exist within a culture: political system, economic system, religious system, material system, and social system

(145–46). He then works through each of these systems to demonstrate that there can be diversity in the ways that a culture organizes itself and still be in submission to Christ. While Nehrbass treats each of these categories only briefly, his analysis is sufficient to convince readers that 1) the tendency toward ethnocentric bias is strong, but that 2) there is a faithful path forward.

The value of *God's Image and Global Cultures* is found in the way that practical application is built on the foundation of a theology of culture. Chapter 10 examines thirteen "value orientations" that are often described as dyadic categories. These categories are often presented as polar opposites. Categories such as individualist/collectivistic, honor/shame, and being/doing are examined in detail from a biblical Christian perspective. Nehrbass helpfully provides charts with key characteristics of each value orientation and Scripture that coincides with each value category. He challenges the reader to examine his or her own culture on a continuum from low to high on each of the of value orientations, and compare the results to a kingdom view of that same value orientation. The author then provides concrete examples of how this exercise could be used to foster more effective multicultural ministry.

As someone who has struggled with the tension of desiring to effect gospel transformation while also being uncertain of his own cultural biases, this reviewer found *God's Image and Global Cultures* to be immensely helpful. Nehrbass demonstrates a high view of Scripture throughout as he wrestles with the implications of the authority of God's Word on one's understanding of culture and cultural interaction. On points with which many other missiologists might disagree, such as his interpretation of *ethne* in Revelation 7 (70–71), Nehrbass's exegesis and supporting arguments are clear enough to provide the reader a map for tracing his thought process and coming to his or her own conclusions.

Nehrbass balances biblical exposition with broad scholarly interaction. He exposes the reader to key thinkers in ethics, philosophy, and anthropology and interacts with them in a way that models the cultural interaction that he prescribes throughout the book. The reader is left not only with a working knowledge of the scholarly discussions around culture but also with practical steps to evaluate, engage, and change culture. The explicit practical applications and the many discussion questions provided make this an excellent resource for small groups and missions teams. *God's Image and Global Cultures* should be required reading for all missions leaders.

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Padilla, C. René. *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom*. Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2010. xix + 211 pages. £9.99, paper.

The Lausanne Conference of 1974 was called "possibly the widest-ranging meeting of Christians ever held" by *Time* magazine (xv). Under the leadership of John Stott, evangelicals from around the globe gathered to discuss Christian mission and the role of the church in the world. The numbers were astonishing: "Nearly 2500 participants and 1000 observers from 150 countries and 135 Protestant denominations" (1). The resulting "Lausanne Covenant" included "topics related to Christian social responsibility, radical discipleship and church renewal and unity" (6). The robust discussion around these topics was due largely to the input from Latin American theologians, including C. René Padilla. *Mission Between the Times* is a collection of papers and articles delivered at Lausanne and at a number of follow-up conferences and discussion groups, and captures in one explosive volume the penetrating insights of a leading Latin American evangelical. Originally published in 1985, Padilla's insights are as relevant and necessary as ever as 21st century Christians wrestle with the relationship between the gospel and social responsibility in the world.

Chapter 1, "From Lausanne I to Lausanne III," describes the global evangelical context surrounding these essays. The first Lausanne Congress was "one of the most significant worldwide missionary events in the twentieth century" (1). Following Lausanne I, a number of follow up conferences wrestled even more deeply with this relationship and progressively clarified the necessity of good works in social, political, and economic spheres. However, Lausanne II seemed to reduce the mission of the church once again to "evangelism in isolation from social responsibility" (16). Lausanne III (at the time of the original writing) seemed to be at a crossroads, with the opportunity to address the issues of radical discipleship, globalization and poverty, and environmental issues. The rest of the essays capture in part Padilla's contribution to these discussions.

Chapter 2, "Evangelism and the World," was originally shared at Lausanne I. The New Testament uses the term "world" in a number of different ways: all of creation, the present order of human existence, humanity hostile to God, and the whole world hostile to God and enslaved by the powers of darkness. Evangelism must proclaim that Jesus is Lord of *all*, and not fall into either secularism or "culture Christianity." True evangelism requires repentance, including from the ways we have been entangled in the systems of this world. American Christianity is not the only culprit in terms of this syncretism, but "because of the role that the United States has played in world affairs as well as in the spread of the gospel, this particular form of Christianity, as no other today, has a powerful influence far beyond the borders of that nation" (53). "Our greatest need is for a more biblical gospel and a more faithful church" (65).

Chapter 3, "Spiritual Conflict," was part of a symposium called to further explore the Lausanne Covenant. Padilla describes a powerful "consumer society" that is "the offspring of technology and capitalism" that has spread from the affluent West to the rest of the world (69). Behind this

materialism lie "principalities and powers" that remain "entrenched in the ideological structures that oppress humanity" (72). This consumer society is idolatrous in character and has tremendous "power to condition men and women" (73). The church adapts itself to this worldliness when it reduces the gospel "to a purely spiritual message" and when it also "reflects the conditioning of the consumer society" (76, 78). The church will experience conflict when it takes the gospel seriously and begins to oppose this world system.

Chapter 4, "What is the Gospel?" was delivered at the IX General Assembly of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. In an insightful bit of exegesis, Padilla first explains how the original Hebrew and Greek words for "gospel" were historically used to announce the birth of a new king or the victory of a king over his enemies. In the New Testament, the term takes on an eschatological note – an announcement that the end time ultimate kingdom has broken into the present. There are a variety of ways to express this "good news," but Jesus Christ underlies "all the descriptions and weld[s] them into a unity" (92). The gospel announces salvation from the consequences and power of sin as well as complete restoration of man, woman, and all creation. This message calls for a response – repentance and faith – which is necessarily evident in good works.

Chapter 5 explores "The Contextualization of the Gospel." Every interpretation is conditioned by our attitude toward God, our own ecclesiastical traditions, and our culture. Communicating the gospel necessarily involves culture, as seen in the incarnation, otherwise there could be no meaningful response, either positive or negative. Padilla points out that almost all of the theological resources published, even in Latin America, are dominated by writers and thinkers from the West. This results in a lack of real contextualization of the gospel and the inability of those local believers to withstand challenges to their faith. The result is that the second and third generation leaves the faith. All theology needs to be based on the Word of God, with attention to concrete historical situations, in obedience to Christ.

Chapter 6, "Christ and Antichrist in the Proclamation of the Gospel," was given at the Second Latin American Congress on Evangelization (CLADE II) in 1979. The New Testament describes the antichrist and various antichrists with imagery that connects to the Old Testament, especially the book of Daniel. Rather than relate these teachings to some specific contemporary figure, Padilla highlights the most powerful and dangerous world system as the consumer society: "Behind the materialism of this consumer society is the spirit of the Antichrist" (141). Christians must discern the nature of the times in order to be faithful in the present situation.

Chapter 7, "The Fullness of Mission," was first presented at the Fourth Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies. Padilla offers a nuanced critique of "growth statistics" in the spread of Christianity. Many converts seem to be unified "under the impact of Western technology" but are no more than "baptized heathen" (148), and many unevangelized regions still remain. Much mission continues to be done "from a position of political and economic power with the assumption

of Western superiority" (151) rather than true partnership. Wealthy countries are in an "affluence explosion," and need a radical reorientation to "the demands of social justice" including a redistribution of wealth (155–56). "Such a change could take place only if the church were willing to follow the way of repentance and self-limitation" (156).

Chapter 8, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogenous Unit Principle [HUP]," is Padilla's famous critique of the HUP. God's plan is to unite all of humanity and all of creation under the headship of Christ. The example of Jesus, the initial Jerusalem church, and in Antioch demonstrate this unifying principle and show no evidence of separate churches along the lines of ethnic homogeneity. Especially the issue of circumcision in Galatians and Acts 15 demonstrates that keeping the two parties in intimate fellowship with one another, not segregated, was central to the concerns of the gospel. The same is true of the church at Corinth. Though we should be rightly concerned that numbers of believers increase, the HUP abandons a central concern of the gospel, has no real basis in Scripture, and can leave wealthy, materialist, racist Christians isolated and with no concern for believers in other situations.

Chapter 9, "New Testament Perspectives on a Simple Lifestyle," was delivered in 1980 to explore of the meaning of a phrase in the Lausanne Covenant in which affluent Christians committed to "develop a simple lifestyle." Padilla starts with the fact that Jesus was a poor man – he became poor for us! He brought blessing for the poor, and this cannot be reduced to merely "spiritual poverty" without any reference to material poverty (as many are prone to do). He called the rich to renounce their riches, and affluent Christians cannot simply assume that this doesn't apply to them. Care for the poor was a central element in the early church, so that the "age-long ideal" (Deut 15:4) was fulfilled. Contentment is essential, connected with temperance, and a view of ourselves as "stewards of God's gifts summoned to live in the light of God's generosity toward all and his special concern for the poor" (198).

Chapter 10, "The Mission of the Church in Light of the Kingdom of God," explores inaugurated eschatology, what it means to be "between the times." Time itself has been restructured; the kingdom is already here and not yet consummated. The church is the community of the kingdom, the place where the kingdom is presently manifested on earth by the Spirit. Good works are a manifestation of the kingdom, bringing Christ's kingly rule to bear on all of reality. Though his reign is universal, the world needs to enter the kingdom now in order to escape judgment when it is ultimately consummated.

C. René Padilla is a remarkable man, and *Mission Between the Times* is a remarkable collection of essays. It stands as a testimony to the necessity and fruitfulness of cross-cultural theological discussions. This book is a classic and deserves a wide reading. Christians in the affluent West, evangelicals wrestling with the relationship between the gospel and social justice, and missionaries seeking to take the gospel to unreached peoples can all learn from Padilla's insights. Readers should

be warned: this book is not for the faint of heart. Western readers especially should be prepared to have cultural idols torn down and their hearts exposed to the piercing gaze of the Scriptures. For those who wish to confront their own blind spots, this leading voice in global evangelical theology is a great place to start.

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Sanders, Fred. *The Triune God*. New Studies in Dogmatics. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. 256 pages. $24.99, paper.

Fred Sanders is a systematic theologian on faculty at the Torrey Honors Institute of Biola University in La Mirada, California. He has written a number of articles, dictionary entries, and books concerning the debates surrounding trinitarian theology in the church today. As wide-ranging as the topics in that debate are, Sanders often focuses his contributions on the Scriptural grounds and historical expressions of trinitarian theology that the church has consistently affirmed as orthodox. Much of the debate surrounding the Trinity today revolves around the methods utilized to construct various theological proposals.

Sander's goal in this particular book, *The Triune God,* is to "secure our knowledge of the triune God by rightly ordering the theological language with which we praise the triune God" (19). This is a lofty ambition, not only because of the subject matter but due to the polarization in the current debates around the Trinity. Sanders roots his claims in the manner of the Trinity's self-revelation, saying that we ought to make "dogmatic conclusions about how the doctrine [of the Trinity] should be handled on the basis of the way the Trinity was revealed" (19). The whole of the book attempts to explain both the basis and the route forward for these conclusions. It is an excellent example of a theological work that is balanced in its interactions with theologians from various historical eras and theological perspectives.

Sanders does not begin with the abovementioned revelatory basis for doctrinal thinking about the Trinity. Instead, the first chapter attempts to reorient the heart and mind of the theologian, saying that theology is "not itself" if it is not doxological, seeking its "point of arrival in the Transcendent One" (28). Trinitarian theology for Sanders aptly serves "that spiritual quest" since it is the very study of the being of God (34).

Chapter 2 takes up the discussion of the relationship between knowledge of God and the nature of revelation, and introduces topics that Sanders will develop throughout the book. Knowledge of God as triune is located properly within God's own life (without being defined by what is *not* God) and revealed only by those three persons who exist together as God in one essence: Father, Son, Spirit.

This knowledge is rightly understood within the biblical concept of mystery, "concealed-then-revealed across the span of Scripture" (45). God reveals himself primarily by the "personal and eloquently self-interpreting missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit," the topic of the third chapter. Neither tradition nor human experience are sufficient sources for Trinitarian knowledge, but both serve to point people to Scripture. To this end, Sanders restricts (for the purposes of this conversation) the term *revelation* to the personal missions of the Son and Spirit.

Chapter 4 takes up these two events as the "most direct forms of revelation" (21). These two events only become clear as communicative events when Scripture is understood to be the unified narrative of God's intentional self-communication through the story of salvation. The next chapter contains a careful discussion of the ways that the names of God (which Sanders calls "revealed metaphors") relate to the internal processions that the missions reveal. The last three chapters complete the circle by returning to the biblical witness and proposing a way towards a Trinitarian exegesis in both testaments that is faithful to its dogmatic task and stands up to more modern criteria of exegetical theology.

Chapter 5 is the densest and arguably the most important chapter of the book. In it, Sanders shows his capability in interpreting and applying the Christian tradition for the sake of modern conversations. Although he defends the traditional conception of God as pure act, he is willing to leave room for an account to be made to the contrary as long as it does not sacrifice core tenets of our understanding of God, such as *aseity*. As he traces the traditional understanding of how the Trinitarian missions reveal the processions of God's inner life (the Father begetting the Son; the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son), Sanders ably demonstrates what is at stake in saying these things. While keeping the two guardrails of God's incomprehensibility and the Scriptures as divine revelation in place, Sanders slowly reroutes the modern Trinitarian conversation back into traditional categories without wholly rejecting the modern frameworks. His discussion of the term *person* as used in Trinitarian discourse is a clear example of this. After citing widely from Augustine to John of Damascus to Francis Turretin, Sanders then draws on Gilles Emery to argue that the traditionally accepted definition of person from Boethius "guarantees [the] foundation" of attempts to further understand the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rather than excluding those attempts (141).

Most helpful in this chapter is the challenge to the current reigning terminology of *immanent* and *economic* Trinity. Sanders's previous work on Karl Rahner now leads him to suggest that the immanent/economic dichotomy that Rahner popularized (and which has been adopted by both liberal and more conservative scholars alike) has actually created a roadblock between the Christian church and the traditional expressions of Trinitarian actions. His claim is that the modern idiom of immanent (God's inner life) and economic (God's works of salvation) trinities cannot quite express what early Trinitarian theology sought to express so carefully. For instance, the immanent and

economic categories make it quite awkward to say that the immanent Son came economically and took on human nature. Sanders asks a barrage of questions: Is there an immanent and an economic sonship? Is sonship simply both immanent and economic? In creating "two referential planes, each with its own network of relations," the immanent-economic schema invites such dichotomization and abstraction that the identity of each in the one God can slip away in matters of speech. Adding to this that the origin of the schema includes potentially unorthodox views of God's inner relations (per Johann August Urlsperger, who said, "For in the essence of God there is no Father, Son, and Spirit.… In short: one essence, no first, no second, no third, no greater, no lesser"), Sanders makes a solid case for rethinking our Trinitarian vocabulary in this area or at least becoming much more methodologically aware.

Turning to the theological interpretation of Scripture, Sanders critiques both the history and status quo of the current separation between disciplines before demonstrating a way forward. Throughout the book, Sanders aims to bring the disciplines of biblical and exegetical theology closer together. From citing G.K. Beale and Benjamin Gladd to develop a biblical theology of mystery in which to place Trinitarian revelation, to discussing of the role of critical scholarship in the development of modern Trinitarian theology, Sanders strives to bring together what ought not to have been separated. His chapter on Trinitarian exegesis and the two following chapters on the testaments of the Bible provide ready examples of this kind of exegesis. However, it would have been helpful to the reader if Sanders had included extended excurses throughout the book highlighting specific passages in which these foundational doctrines can be seen, especially in the section entitled "The Canonical Hinge" in chapter 8.

One example of this Trinitarian exegesis that stands out in the book is *prosoponic* reading, the "practice of discerning the [divine] speakers of *prosōpa* in reading Scripture" (226–235). This is the practice of identifying the particular speaker behind respective texts of the Old Testament, whether it be the Father, the Son, the Spirit, or the church. (The word "prosoponic" is derived from the Greek term *prosōpon*, "person".) Sanders provides multiple examples of this, the first being from the opening of Mark where the Evangelist identifies God the Father as the speaker in Isaiah 40 (which Sanders suggests is the kernel of the quotation compiled from numerous texts).

Additionally, in his chapter on the Old Testament, Sanders refutes the centuries-old practice of identifying Christ in the Old Testament theophanies. His rejection of this practice may seem at first to be unnecessary and his argument too brief. However, his suggestion that the Son being the fitting messenger in Old Testament theophanies "would only dictate that the … theophanies of the Old Testament must *mean*, but not be, the Son" is especially intriguing. Although he admits with Augustine that, "based on his inner-Trinitarian status as the one who is eternally from the Father and expresses the Father, [the Son] might be the appropriate messenger of God even in the old covenant," Sanders also wants (again with Augustine) to protect the "unrepeatable uniqueness

of the incarnation of the Son" (225). As a *via media*, Sanders suggests seeing the Old Testament theophanies as created manifestations which may signify the presence of one of the divine persons without that divine person assuming the nature of the signifier, as in the incarnation. A potential New Testament parallel to this, he says, is the dove which descends during Christ's baptism, which signifies the Holy Spirit "operating under the form of an economy of signs but not in a personal mission" which would be parallel to the incarnation (226). Subsuming theophanies into the "economy of signs and intentions" brings together many different disciplines of exegesis and theology, most notably typology, retrospective prosoponic reading, and Trinitarian theology proper. Regardless of whether this point is ultimately convincing, Sanders has opened the way for more constructive theological partnerships to take place across the theological academy that has become so disintegrated.

Sanders closes the book with a shorter chapter containing eleven theses on the "revelation of the Trinity and its implications for a well-ordered doctrine of the Trinity and the overall shape of a theological system" (23). These theses point clearly to the distinct aim of this book. It is not principally focused on constructing a doctrine of the Trinity through exegetical or dogmatic argumentation, nor is it mainly concerned with retrieving the very best of Trinitarian theology throughout the history of the church, although it does both of these things quite well if not comprehensively. Instead, Sander's aim is to help us to understand how we ought to go about arriving at a doctrine of the Trinity, namely, through the revelation of God in the Scriptures. Trinitarian doctrine is neither a fanciful abstraction from the words of Scripture nor a doctrine that is expressed explicitly and semantically in them. Instead, "the revelation of the Trinity is bundled with the revelation of the gospel" (239).

Sanders writes with characteristic clarity, avoiding both rigid prose and complicated digressions. Any person interested in learning more about Trinitarian theology would benefit from this book, although some of the concepts will prove challenging to those without a basic knowledge of the doctrine already. Although there are many sections of the book that could serve well as introductions to certain areas of Trinitarian theology, there are also numerous sections of the book that move clearly beyond the introductory level and attend to some significantly higher-level concepts. Footnotes are kept to a minimum, while there are generous indices for Scripture references, topics, and authors referenced. This book could therefore be used profitably in both a church's Sunday school class or a college / seminary classroom. But for those studying at the seminary level, it will best serve simply as a starting point for further and deeper study with other sources, both primary and secondary.

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Terry, John Mark, and Robert L. Gallaghar. *Encountering the History of Missions: From Early Church to Today*. Encountering Mission. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 416 pages. $29.99, paper.

John Mark Terry and Robert Gallagher should be commended for their attempt to survey the history of Christian missions in a single volume both succinct yet comprehensive enough to serve as a textbook for a semester long course on the topic. Eighteen chapters span roughly 350 pages that take readers from the well-trod ground of "missions in the early church" to a rare and insightful chapter explicating the pervasive influence on today's missions scene of Fuller Seminary's Church Growth Movement school of thought. The authors aim for a global perspective on the history of missions in three main ways: first, by shifting early attention from the imperial Roman church to a chapter on Persian and later Nestorian missions (chapter 2); second, by including in their purview a millennium of Eastern Orthodox missions (chapter 4); and, third, by including a few notable majority world church leaders and missionaries as part of two chapters on The Great Century of Protestant missions (chapters 12 and 13) and one chapter focused on twentieth century Evangelical expansion (chapter 14). In this largely chronological presentation, readers progress through chapters on "Celtic," Orthodox, Dominican and Franciscan, "Medieval Renewal" (namely Waldensians, Lollards, and Hussites), Reformation, Jesuit, Pietist, Moravian, and Methodist missions, specifically. Thankfully, there's a topic index. The second half, chapters 9 and following, flow and fit together better as the focus of the book becomes Evangelical Protestantism, though not exclusively, and the authors' missiological assessment of current trends. Terry and Gallagher seem to find their own voices after relying too uncritically in the first half of the book on scholars of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Nestorian traditions. The final chapter, "In Retrospect and Prospect," succinctly and incisively brings the study to a conclusion after helpful chapters on Missionary Councils and Congresses, Specialized Missions, as well as that on The Church Growth Movement.

Textbooks of this genre and scope are few and far between, so I was drawn to this book by the mere title and topic. I was also attracted to this new entry in Baker's Encountering Mission series for two other reasons: first, by my extraordinarily high regard for the 2010 addition to the series, *Encountering Theology of Mission* by Craig Ott and the late Stephen Strauss; second, by a curious appreciation for any joint project between a longtime Southern Baptist professor and former missionary, on one hand, and a Charismatic Australian department chair at Wheaton College and member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, on the other hand. Terry and Gallagher are both seasoned missiologists and experienced academics who, over the years, have helped provide leadership for a broad swath of Evangelicals in the (interdisciplinary) discipline of missions studies.

Like the earlier book, which I frequently and affectionately refer to among my students as "Ott and Strauss," *Encountering the* History *of Missions* by Terry and Gallagher is full of references to

other scholarship in the field. It thereby serves readers as an introduction to some of the more seminal and standard literature on the history of missions in various subsets of the area. Unlike Ott and Strauss, though, this book is far less invested in weighing various perspectives and interpretations before judiciously reasoning its own conclusion from issue to issue. That said, it does include some attention to the history of missiology along with a history of missions activity itself. It might be considered an introductory missiological take on the history of missions.

This is a book for Evangelical students and practitioners. The authors state their belief that the history of missions "is as inspiring as it is instructional" (361-62). Baker's Encountering Mission series is meant to be an update to the prolific twentieth century output of Evangelical missiologist, J. Herbert Kane. In the final chapter, Terry and Gallagher appropriate Kane's judicious and charitable assessment of the history of missionary thought and practice, both "what missionaries did wrong" and "what missionaries did right" (355-59). In addition to this, the authors do provide some summary assessment along the way throughout the book. For example, chapter 2 includes a section on "Methods of Eastern Mission" (30-32), chapter 4 *concludes* with a survey of the "characteristics of [Orthodox] missions" (86-88), chapter 7 includes a section on "Methods of Missions" by Calvin's Geneva (135-38), chapter 10 concludes with "Mission Methods" of the Moravians (210-20), and chapter 12 has a paragraph on William Carey's "keys to success" (249).

In keeping with a broad and Evangelically ecumenical (or ecumenically Evangelical) perspective, Terry and Gallagher offer a charitable introduction to the place of missions in the thought of Martin Luther followed by a description of early Lutheran missions and a survey of eventual Lutheran expansion throughout Scandinavia (138-48). The missionary contributions of John Calvin's Geneva and its ministerial training academy are rightly captured as well, except for the curious omission of any reference to the Huguenot mission to Brazil in 1556. Although the chapter on Reformation missions is too narrowly focused on Wittenberg and Geneva, at least the authors don't erroneously dismiss these centers, and the Reformation movement as a whole, as *unmissionary*. That is a mistake made not only by sixteenth century Roman Catholic polemicists but by some church historians and Arminian apologetes today. Historians Michael Haykin and Kenneth Stewart have in recent years, respectively, corrected this error with historical data.

One could hope from Terry and Gallagher, though, a more accurate framing of the differences between Arminianism and Calvinism as one finds in the section on Wesleyan hymnody (237-38). Despite the fact that in the section on Calvinists in missions, the authors note Calvinist belief in predestination and election and do so without critique, in this later section the authors pose Arminianism over against *hyper*-Calvinism, which they wrongly identify as mere Calvinism *proper*, saying Arminians are those who believe that "a person could choose whether to receive God's free grace offered to all humanity. Thus, the believer was responsible to proclaim the good news for people to accept this salvation." But that's what biblical Calvinists believe, too.

Twenty-first century Evangelicals in the United States may know little about their continental (European) Pietistic forebearers. The chapter on Pietist missions is a helpful introduction to the movement as a whole as well as to particular figures such as August Francke, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, and Christian Schwartz. The chapter on significant missionary councils and congresses may also illuminate conservative U.S. American Evangelicals unaware of the history of these gatherings and their respective outcomes. The section on the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, though, notes without critical clarification that "many historians view the Edinburgh conference as the beginning of the ecumenical movement" (272). Regrettably, Terry and Gallagher make no reference to Brian Stanley's excellent retrieval of Edinburgh 1910 as a meeting of conservative Christians primarily concerned with the evangelization of the world and Christian conversion (which is a 2009 entry in Eerdmans's Studies in the History of Christian Missions series, a series more historiographic, academic, and ecumenical than Baker's).

Encountering the History of Missions has characteristic weaknesses which make me hesitant to assign it to undergraduate students, at least without careful mediation on my part. These five weaknesses could be classified as 1) undefined terms, 2) uncritical attributions, 3) curious omissions, 4) unclear writing, and 5) simple errors.

In later chapters the reader will encounter definitions and explanation for more familiar terms such as indigenous (258), paternalism (273), universalism (278-9), pluralism (279), and nationalism (279). However, in early chapters the reader encounters these technical terms *without definition*: Arianism (12), "the Tyrol" (14), "a metropolitan" (27), metal work and "illumination" (52), eucharistic community (54), archimandrite (82), Albigensian (90), antipope (117), the Papal Schism (117), and interdict (125). These undefined terms gave these chapters a cut and paste *pastiche* kind of feel to them, though I'm not suggesting the authors plagiarized.

In today's Google world where readers can find definitions with a quick search online, I'm more troubled by uncritical attributions and statements made by these Evangelical authors than I am by terms left undefined by them. The following references, in my opinion, should include theological comment, but don't: the liberal Adolf von Harnack is quoted as merely a "German Lutheran theologian" (6); "Arian Christianity" is noted without critical assessment (13); a supposed quote from Jesus is taken from the Gospel of Thomas without qualification (30); Spaniards are said to have searched for gold and "brought Christ" to native peoples through military conquest and forced conversions (91); Ignatius Loyola is said to have had a "radical conversion to Christ" (150), and post-Trent Jesuits said to have presented "the gospel" (157, 158, 170). On the opening and closing pages of chapter 8, Jesuits are posed as both "faithful to Christ" and "flexible in [Christian] expression" (150, 170); it seems the laudable pedagogical intentions of these missions professors (who apparently teach students in their classrooms, rightly, that missions must combine both faithfulness and flexibility) have gotten in the way of sounder historical and theological reflection.

Third, there are curious omissions to a copious survey work and textbook like this one. Tertullian is not cited when the authors write, "The blood of the martyrs really did prove to be the seed of the church" (10). Nor do the authors indicate that their turn of the phrase regarding John Wesley, "The world was his parish," is derived from his own words (224). The Patronato Real of 1493 is partly explained but not named (91-92). The survey of Jesuit missionaries omits Roberto di Nobili. The significant missions theologizing and activity of the seventeenth century Further Dutch Reformation is slighted. There is no explanation of what makes "modern" missions *modern* (245) other than a seven-point explanation of the new era inhabited by William Carey and turn of the century trans-Atlantic Evangelicals (244-5). Related to that is no explanation of Carey's argument or main point, even, in the *Enquiry* (245). For an exposition of Carey's multifaceted theology of missions motivation, see my 2012 article in the journal *Missiology* (vol. 40 no. 1).

In addition to these curious omissions is unclear writing. The distinction between the Persian, Syrian, and Nestorian churches is not always clear in the second chapter. Medieval renewalists, as the authors call them in chapter 6, are sometimes unhelpfully called "Reformers" with a capital R, thus confusing them with sixteenth century Protestants. Also, did the sixteenth century Protestant Reformers really believe "clerical offices" were unbiblical? Well, yes and no. What exactly were the "mystical" aspects of the Christian faith emphasized by Pietists (200, 212)? Why is the "Sifting Period" of the Moravians called that (208-09)? Why are the Holy Club, a mission to the American colonies, and German Moravianism called "instructional persuasions" that helped guide the development of Methodism (226)? Is "instructional persuasions" some kind of Aussie expression? Failing to explain clearly John Wesley's controversial relationship with Sophy Hopkey and its sequence of events, the reader is even left to wonder if Wesley romantically pursued another man's wife (228).

Fifth, simple errors, though each arguably insignificant, together mar the historical integrity of the book. The Anglo-Saxon Boniface is covered in the chapter on Celtic missionaries (58-61), but that mistake has more to do with a poorly chosen title for a chapter more inclusive than Celtic missions. (The reader should consult Edward Smither's *Mission in the Early Church* for a more adept historical and missiological handling of primary and secondary sources on European missions in this early medieval period). Terry and Gallagher make Luther's 95 Theses sound like a collection of grievances against Roman Catholicism and a summary of Reformed theology rather than the specific attack on indulgences that it was (139). John Eliot, Puritan "Apostle to the Indians," is said to have "used the Dominican model" (98). However, historians attribute Eliot's method of missions amongst seventeenth century Algonquin to either copying the Jesuit *reducciones*, following English and Puritan traditions, or, as I argue in my dissertation (2015 Boston University), a combination of Congregationalist ecclesiology, primarily, plus Eliot's own trans-Atlantic experience of Christian community and the pressing contextual reality of hostility toward "praying Indians" from both Native traditionalists and ungodly colonists alike. Terry and Gallagher claim that the World

Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 "ignored the problems of Western colonialism and paternalism" (273) but make no reference to V.S. Azariah's famous plea for FRIENDS (which might actually support their point). Nor do they recognize the observation in the John R. Mott penned report of Commission 1 that colonialism brought to majority world peoples Western materialism, other temptations, and the poor testimony of nominal Christians, besides some technological benefit. In addition, the authors' claim that Islam seemed on a slow decline at the point of the Edinburgh conference (280) ignores the fact that participants at Edinburgh, and missionaries of the day, felt a race was on in Africa between gospel advance and the southward spread of Islam. It was recognized at Edinburgh that animists, once converted to Islam, much more rarely then turned to Christ.

The potential readers best served by this book are perhaps those familiar with general church history already but who want to begin adding a better comprehension of the multi-faceted missionary – and non-Western – component(s) of the story. Modern era majority world church leaders and missionaries noted include Ko Tha Byu (252), Samuel Adjayi Crowther (256), John Sung (290), and Sundar Singh (294). One wonders, though, why the section on the church in Latin America today is one small paragraph long (296) whereas that on Europe is half a page (295-96), that on India is half a page (295), Africa gets a full page (293-94), while "East Asia" (290-91) and "Southeast Asia" (292-93) each get more than a page. While in the quasi-academic fashion typical of the Encountering Mission series Terry and Gallagher expose readers to a smattering of other secondary literature throughout the book, in this brief section they refer to none of the burgeoning body of literature on "world Christianity" as both an historical phenomenon and an emerging academic discipline, apart from a 2014 newspaper article on the church in China. Readers should be pointed to the work of Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, Samuel Escobar, Dana Robert, Miriam Adeney, Ogbu Kalu, Jehu Hanciles, Allan Anderson, Scott Sunquist, Kirsteen Kim, Paul Freston, Robert Frykenberg, Brent Fulton, Todd Johnson, Philip Jenkins, Mark Noll, et al. Terry and Gallagher do cite, though, in the conclusion to this chapter and section, David Barrett's *World Christian Trends* (2013) and quote from Ruth Tucker's second edition of *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (2004).

While several women missionaries are mentioned throughout the book, four female pioneers are highlighted by sidebars: Ann Haseltine Judson (252), Helen Roseveare (293), Amy Carmichael (295), and Betty Green (324). Mary Slessor (266-67) and Joy Ridderhof (328-9) each have subsections of chapters devoted to them. The nineteenth and twentieth century "women's movement in missions" is appropriately included though only briefly surveyed (264-268). Terry and Gallagher posit some "motivations," "pioneers" (such as Betty Stockton, Cynthia Farrar, Eliza Agnew, and Lottie Moon), "organizations," and "contributions" of the movement. By claiming that "feminism" (unexplained) and a rise in social status were among what motivated single women in the nineteenth century toward missions (265-66) the authors confuse the motivation(s) of actors with an historical interpretation of what happened and an observation of outcomes that obtained. Again, like so much ground

covered by this book, the section functions as an adequate introductory survey that might inspire further study of the topic in more focused books and monographs by the experts in respective fields.

Instructors and masters level students of missions and missiology may find this a useful reference work and pedagogical resource. The book includes a twenty-five-page long Reference List with approximately 500 entries. Many helpful sidebars throughout the book highlight particular persons, events, issues, or primary documents. Sidebars, though brief, include discussion questions that could be used by an instructor who is able to steer the discussion toward appropriate conclusions. Many sidebars are biographical vignettes of both missionaries and missiologists, and some include excerpts from primary documents, thus serving as a good source of quotes. The authors also employ quotes from their respective subjects throughout the main text of the book. In addition to the sidebars, case studies are included after ten of the chapters, four of them from Paul and Frances Hiebert's *Case Studies in Missions* (Baker, 1987). Not all of these seem like actual "case studies," but are more like longer sidebar presentations of primary material, such as hymn lyrics from Isaac Watts and the Wesley brothers, respectively (after chapters 10 and 11), with discussion questions following.

While I was initially skeptical that an entire chapter on the Church Growth Movement was warranted, it proved a helpful, objective-while-somewhat-sympathetic explication of the current missions scene. Terry and Gallagher posit eight socio-historical factors that facilitated the trending of this school of thought, including its promotion by mega-churches and parachurch organizations (338-40). They then posit seven consequent "streams" that flowed out of Donald MacGavran's influence, such as the now popular targeting of "unreached peoples" in missions (or, to clarify, "Unreached People Groups" [UPGS]) as well as Church Planting Movements (CPM) as the missions goal and strategy *de jour* [my phrase]. Even if one's convictions don't jibe with the book's appreciative tone regarding MacGavran, this chapter could serve as a stand-alone resource well descriptive of what is "out there" and requiring critical, discerning engagement. I have in mind here a resource for anyone considering missionary endeavors, but especially pastors and others who would advise, equip, and shepherd either current missionaries or would-be cross-cultural workers. Terry and Gallagher, themselves, note six needed improvements to the Church Growth Movement. They admit, as well, that it "never developed a thorough theological foundation" while emerging from a pragmatic and sociological point of view (352). The authors fail to mention that CPM has since overshadowed CGM, at least in the area of cross-cultural ministry, and that CPM is even now itself being rebranded or tweaked as DMM (Disciple Making Movements).

Some final reflections on the authors' apparent perspective regarding contextualization is called for: it certainly seems middle of the road and noncontroversial, albeit also uncritical. Their claim that elements of a pre-Christian culture could serve as a "foundation" for the Christian faith (158) may be taken as either overstatement or, perhaps, as a more accommodating and Charles Kraft-like posture toward indigenous worldviews and culture than Paul Hiebert's safer (and better) "critical

contextualization" approach. While the following commendation of Celtic missionaries is appropriate *per se*, it leaves open to interpretation the proper final shape and extent of one's pre-Christian worldview in the life of transformational discipleship: "[T]hey were able to work within the worldview of particular societies and help the people incorporate the gospel into a unique type of Christianity without destroying the culture" (62). The authors do commend, though, examples of Christian social reform and critically note philosophical religious pluralism as a reason for the decline of mainline missions (278-79).

Regrettably, Terry and Gallagher follow a trope employed by advocates of Insider Movements: they posit an "extraction" method supposedly employed at large by a previous generation of missionaries and then contrast with it a more "radical" (their term) C-5 and C-6 approach taken by some today that, they say, leaves converts in *the mosque and their communities*. This seems to imply that missionaries past and present who aren't "radical" like that have never tried to leave converts in their neighborhoods and families (288-89). This is the fallacy of the excluded middle. They do rightly commend the usefulness of anthropology and sociological insights for faithful missions (284-86, 343) but do so without any accompanying warning of potential missteps, such as the reverse engineering of strategies in ways that compromise biblical ideals and theological principles, especially sound ecclesiology. Such a warning is wise today since such reverse engineering is rampant. They also include a paragraph on "improved linguistics" (286) and a section on "Bible Translation" (314-18) without any reference to contemporary controversies regarding translation theory, such as the use or omission of familiar terms (especially "Father" and "Son") in translations for Muslim audiences.

The brief final chapter, "In Retrospect and Prospect," fails to deliver on its promise (in its own introduction) for a consideration of *how* to meet the remaining needs in our contemporary world. Though, to be fair, readers will find much "instruction and inspiration" for missionary praxis in the content-packed eighteen chapters leading up to the final page. Other titles in Baker's Encountering Mission series, especially "Ott and Strauss," also provide much to consider and assess in view of that important question. Despite its weaknesses, *Encountering the History of Missions* accomplishes in text book form, and as a single volume, what no other book I'm aware of does: it provides a history of Christian missions that is succinct yet comprehensive enough to serve as a textbook for a semester long course on the topic, though informed and careful attention to detail by the instructor is advised. (Tucker's *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* takes a biographical approach that is both its strength and weakness. Dana Robert's much briefer *Christian Mission* is limited by an attention to particular themes and the historiography of missions. *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*, edited by Martin Klauber and Scott Manetsch of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is limited to the Protestant era, but does include chapters per continent about missions in

and from the contemporary world church. Volumes by Stephen Neill and J. Herbert Kane, respectively, are classic and seminal but outdated.)

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