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# Evangelical Review of Theology

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



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# Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

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# Editorial: Following Jesus in Our Broken World

'THE WHOLE CHURCH taking the whole gospel to the whole world'. This is the resounding vision of the Lausanne movement. Emerging out of the epoch-making first Lausanne Congress of 1974, Lausanne has functioned as a forum for a wide range of individuals, agencies and networks all around the globe that have world evangelization as their common concern. It has provided space to think together, channels of communication, opportunity for groups with special interests to meet, reflect and strategize together, publications, information for prayer and action. The Lausanne Covenant has formed the doctrinal and missiological back-drop for all this ferment of activity over three decades.

The Theological Working Group is one of several working groups within the Lausanne movement. Originally formed and chaired by John Stott, it has sought to engage in the theological reflection that needs to undergird practical mission. It is a core commitment of Lausanne that all valid forms of Christian mission in practice need to have theological grounding, and that all valid evangelical theological reflection should have missiological out-working and implications—no mission without theological rationale; no theology without missional relevance. Over the years the Lausanne TWG has held consultations and produced many significant statements and publications. Details of these, and all Lausanne's publications, can be found on the Lausanne website, [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org).

Meanwhile, the World Evangelical Alliance has also been much involved in theological and missiological reflection, through its Theology Commission and Missions Commission. Further information on these also can be found at [www.worldevangelicalalliance.com](http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com). So since we share so much in common in theology and vision, it was agreed that we should hold forthcoming consultations in association. And we are additionally grateful to the WEA-TC for offering their journal, the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, as the vehicle for the first product of this process.

Thus it was that the newly re-constituted LTWG planned a small international consultation in February 2007, gathering about thirty men and women in Limuru, Kenya. It was deliberately conceived as an agenda-setting conference, in which we attempted to identify and discuss some of the most urgent matters confronting the church of Christ in its mission in the 21st century. We knew we could not deal with all these issues in depth, but wanted at least to open them up, with a combination of six full length reflective papers, and a larger number of shorter case-studies, earthing our discussion in the gritty realities of mission at the sharp end.

The most obvious fact about the world around us today is its brokenness. At every level, from international relationships to personal disintegration, the fragmenting and divisive power of sin is appallingly evident. As the small steering group considered this, however, we quickly moved from

speaking of 'the broken world' to 'our broken world', since as Christians and evangelicals we have to confess not only that we have our own share of brokenness to grieve over, but also that in many ways we ourselves are part of the problem, even while we believe we have been entrusted with the good news of the only solution. The actions and attitudes of those who claim the name evangelical, or who are known by it in the world at large, are far from innocent in relation to the brokenness of the human family. Far from any upbeat triumphalism about the state of world evangelicalism, we believe there is a place for contrition, repentance and radical re-connecting with some of our root values in biblical godliness and Christlikeness, in humility of heart and modesty of claims.

Another most obvious thing about the world today is the depth and extent of religious dividedness, and all the dangers it is generating. There are those, of course, who blame so much of the world's strife and violence on religion itself—and they are not wrong. In such a climate, the Christian claims about the uniqueness and finality of Christ, and of the exclusive nature of the truth claims that he himself made and that the Bible makes concerning him, are reviled and rejected as intolerant and aggravating. But is the proposed alternative, religious relativism and pluralism, as tolerant as it is alleged? Is it even coherent as a philosophy? John Azumah rightly puts the Christological question in first place, where it has always been, of course, since New Testament times.

In a postmodern world the very nature of truth is disputed. If we want to claim that Jesus is the Truth, in loy-

alty to the claim he made for himself, then we are now compelled to do so in a climate that radically undermines any such allegedly absolute claim at all. Mark Chan helpfully surveys some of the major features of the postmodern mind and culture, and equally helpfully suggests ways in which the church must find effective ways of responding.

The great majority of Christians are not 'professional' Christians, in the sense of being engaged in some form of paid pastoral or evangelistic work. They are professional Christians in the sense of being engaged in the great marketplace of human work. And the marketplace is increasingly globalized. My own contribution tackles the problem that so many Christians have a dichotomized view of their lives in which so-called 'secular' work is devalued as of little importance, other than as a platform for evangelism. A stronger view of creation, culture, work, and the Bible's own vision of the new creation would reject such a dichotomy. I am very aware that the issue of globalization itself has not been addressed in this paper, and this is a gap that will need to be filled in future consultations.

Ethnic division is a highly visible aspect of human brokenness, so much so that Christians are tempted to see ethnic identity itself as a bad thing (betraying the influence of modernity as they do so). Dewi Hughes argues differently and exposes some of the contradictions in 19th and 20th century mission theory and practice in this area. Christian mission in this century needs a more carefully thought-out understanding and practice in relation to ethnic identities.

Nothing, however, seems to deliver more brokenness, in every conceivable sense of that word, than violence and war. Christian mission today not only has to struggle with the fact that it operates more and more in contexts that are riven with large and small scale conflicts, but also has to face up to the unpalatable truth that so much Christian mission originates from countries which, though professedly (or assumed to be) Christian, are deeply and appallingly implicated in violence and war. Jonathan Bonk exposes these very uncomfortable realities in an article which is bound to challenge evangelicals to examine their consciences and allegiances.

And for all sorts of other reasons, the sheer scale and quantity of human suffering in our world tears at our emotions. If Jesus was moved to compassion by the relatively small crowds of needy people he encountered, what possible response can there be to the mountain of agony endured by millions all over the world? Isaiah Dau leads us

in some reflections on this in the light of the cross and other biblical resources.

In addition to these six papers, the conference considered a dozen other case-studies, in which Christian mission in relation to various kinds of brokenness were illustrated 'on the ground'. For reasons of space, only one of these can be included here. Athena Gorospe describes the situation of overseas Filipino workers—a major contemporary diaspora—and critiques the variety of theological and missiological responses that are commonly made to this and similar phenomena.

A major Lausanne III congress is planned for late 2010, and in preparation for that LTWG will be revisiting the above agenda, taking the Lausanne slogan apart and asking what we mean by 'the whole church' (in 2008), 'the whole gospel' (in 2009), and 'the whole world' (in early 2010).

*Chris Wright*

Chair, Lausanne Theology Working Group

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**Peter R. Holmes** (PhD) is co-founder of Christ Church Deal in Kent and of Rapha. He is a member of the Association of Therapeutic Communities and a management trainer. His previous books include *Becoming More Human* and *Trinity in Human Community*.

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# Following Jesus as Unique Lord and Saviour in a Broken Pluralistic World

John Azumah

**KEYWORDS:** *Pluralism, dialogue, conflict, exclusivism, inclusivism, truth, praxis, participation, uniqueness of Christ, salvation, superiority, oppression.*

## I Locating Our Discussion

Truth claims lie at the heart of every religion. The uniqueness of each religion is framed primarily in terms of its respective truth claims. In their attempts to construct a Christian theology of religions, leading theologians like John Hick, Paul F. Knitter and J. S. Samartha<sup>1</sup> have called upon Christians

to re-examine traditional Christian truth claims such as Jesus is 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn. 14:6) and 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). They argue that cardinal Christian beliefs such as the incarnation are myths and also that traditional truth claims belong to the first century of Christianity and do not make sense in our present context. They further assert that absolute and exclusivist claims have bred a 'Christian superiority complex that supported and sanctified the western imperialistic exploitation of what today we call the Third World'.<sup>2</sup> These claims pose a threat to peaceful co-existence between Christians and people of other faiths and thus, Samartha, among oth-

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<sup>1</sup> Among others, see John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: toward a pluralistic theology of religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987); Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? a critical survey of Christian attitudes toward the world religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985); Samartha, *One Christ, Many Religions: toward a revised Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991).

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<sup>2</sup> John Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, p. 18.

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ers, demand 'a re-examination of all exclusivist claims'.<sup>3</sup>

On similar grounds John Hick argues for what he calls a 'Copernican revolution in theology' which seeks to move Christian theology from its current Christ-centredness (christocentrism) to God-centredness (theocentrism). In other words, focusing on Christ separates Christians from other believers whilst focusing on God puts Christianity and other faiths, especially the major religious traditions, on an equal footing and concedes them to be more-or-less equally valid and equally true.

Contending that the notion of 'truth' is too big for one faith tradition to claim monopoly over, pluralist theologians argue that any claim to absolute truth precludes inter-religious dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Echoing this point is an often quoted African proverb: 'Truth is like a baobab tree; one person's arms cannot embrace it'. In this vein, pluralists argue that inclusivism is paternalistic insofar as it concedes that there is some salvific value in other faiths but maintains that the salvation therein is mediated through Christ 'mysteriously' or 'anonymously' to the adherents of these traditions. The way forward, according to John Hick, is pluralism:

A pluralism that is worth agreeing

or disagreeing with in its own right will hold that we have as much reason to think that the other great world religions are true and salvific as to think this of Christianity. The ground for this lies in their fruits in human life. If it seems to us that Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Taoism have shown themselves to be contexts as effective as Christianity for human transformation from self-centredness to a new centring in the Ultimate Reality that we call God, then we must affirm not merely the possibility or probability but the actuality of their being true and salvific.<sup>5</sup>

Before responding directly to the issues raised by pluralist theologians, a few points need to be clarified. First, it is important to note that the debate as to the appropriateness or otherwise of absolute religious truth claims is largely if not wholly an internal Christian debate. People of other faiths have hardly taken notice of the debates, let alone joined in them. Indeed if the same methodological approaches adopted by the pluralists in assessing Christian beliefs and biblical affirmations were to be applied to other faiths, they would be strongly resisted by their adherents.

Second, as someone from the majority south, it is noteworthy to me that the debate on religious pluralism is a western Christian debate. Religious plurality has always been an integral part of the African experience and that

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3 S. J. Samartha, 'The Cross and the Rainbow: Christ in a Multireligious Culture', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, p. 69.

4 Paul F. Knitter, 'Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus', in Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, eds., *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 7.

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5 John Hick, 'Five Misgivings', in *The Uniqueness of Jesus*, p. 80.

of other non-western societies. However, as an ideology, pluralism is the creation of western liberal thought, as Tom F. Driver explains: 'It will be the better part of wisdom to acknowledge, even to stress, that the whole discussion about "religious pluralism", as it is represented in this book [*The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*], belongs to Western liberal religious thought at the present time.'<sup>6</sup> Concerning Christianity's self-understanding, Driver asserts that pluralism is a 'demand laid now upon us Christians, brought upon us by our own history, which has largely been one of "universal colonialism"'.<sup>7</sup>

It is vitally important to locate the discussion on religious pluralism and questions about the uniqueness of Jesus within their proper historical and intellectual contexts. The legacy of post-Constantine Christianity of anathematization, damnation, excommunication and even extermination of dissenters and opponents, as well as slavery, colonialism and the enlightenment in western Europe all combine to provide the historical and intellectual contexts. Added to this legacy is the fact that the phenomenon of religious plurality is fairly new in the west as compared to, say, Africa and Asia.

Similarly, to a very large extent, the religious 'other' in western Europe are immigrants, whereas in Africa and Asia the religious other are blood relations and fully fledged citizens. The historical and contemporary religious and intellectual experiences of the west in general and western Europe in

particular, differ substantially from those of the non-western world. All of these factors combine to make the issue of religious plurality a crucial matter for western Christians in ways that it is not for, say, African and Asian Christians.

## II Critique of Pluralist Theology

Many Christian theologians have criticized different aspects of pluralist theology and questioned its assumptions and exposed its internal contradictions.<sup>8</sup> Examining some of the pluralist claims and assumptions from an African perspective, I would like to address at least two myths of pluralist theology.

The first myth of pluralist theology is the offering of theocentricism as a bridge across the major world religions. As can be seen in the writings of Hick and others, the so-called major world religions cannot even agree on how to address what Christians call God, let alone 'His/Her' (or 'Its') nature. Hick himself is not sure of the appropriate name to use and resorts to such terms as 'Ultimate Divine Reality', 'Ultimate Truth and Perfection', 'Transcendent Being', and sometimes just 'The Real'. As Chris Wright perceptively notes: 'One marked feature of [pluralist] conceptual revolution is that the *theos* who is finally left at the

<sup>6</sup> Tom F. Driver, 'The Case for Pluralism', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, p. 206.

<sup>7</sup> Driver, 'The Case for Pluralism', p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: the myth of a pluralistic theology of religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990); Bruce J. Nicholls, ed., *The Unique Christ in our Pluralist World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994).

centre becomes utterly abstract.<sup>9</sup> So abstract is the pluralist constructed deity that very few, if any, believers of the world religious traditions can recognize their deity. The overwhelming majority of African Christians (and Muslims) will find it hard to sacrifice a personal God (or Allah) for the pluralist abstract deity.

Pluralists argue that locating God at the centre of the religious universe would foster understanding and good relations between people of different religions. This argument is simply groundless speculation. The assumption here is that people of different religions are more likely to find common ground in their understanding of God. But nothing could be further from the truth. As can be seen, pluralists are even struggling to find a name for God that would be acceptable to the different faiths. 'The view we have of God', observes Lamin Sanneh, 'is not unconnected to the path by which we ascend to that view, so that dialogue must be about the path as well as about witness to the truth the path leads to.'<sup>10</sup> But more crucially, among the so-called monotheistic traditions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, for instance, it is in apparent common ground that our deepest differences are rooted. This is due to the fact that 'the risk of misunderstanding appears less in matters of difference than in matters of similarity' and as G. K. Chesterton put it:

Modern hostility is a base thing, and arises, not out of a generous difference, but out of a sort of bitter and sneering similarity. It is because we are all copying each other that we are all cursing each other.<sup>11</sup>

If putting God at the centre holds the prospects of understanding and resolving tensions and conflict between people of different religious tradition, how do we explain the internal divisions and even hostilities between members of same religious traditions who share the same understanding of God? In any case, as a leading Muslim scholar responding to Hans Kung put it:

The only religious dialogue worthy in the eyes of God is one which does not sacrifice in the name of any expediency on the human level, be it even worldly peace, that which He has revealed in each religion.<sup>12</sup>

The second myth of pluralism is the suggestion that people of different religions can together pursue and discover 'Truth' in its totality. W. E. Hocking talks about the need for religions to embark upon 'a common search for truth'.<sup>13</sup> Alan Race on his part states that an essential feature of what he calls 'tolerant pluralism' is that 'knowledge of God is partial in all faiths, including the Christian. Reli-

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9 Chris Wright, 'The Unique Christ in the Plurality of Religions' in Nicholls, ed., *The Unique Christ*, p. 33.

10 Lamin Sanneh, *Piety and Power: Muslims and Christians in West Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 6.

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11 Sanneh, *Piety & Power*, p. 7.

12 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'Response to Hans Kung's Paper on Christian-Muslim Dialogue', in *The Muslim World*, 77 no. 2 (April 1987), p. 105.

13 W. E. Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions* (New York: Harper and Row, 1932), p. 327.

gions must acknowledge their need of each other if the *full truth* (my emphasis) about God is to be available to mankind.<sup>14</sup>

In the first place, what criteria are believers going to use to determine the bits and pieces of the truth scattered in the various religious traditions? On the basis of the theory of the 'Copernican Revolution', these pieces of truth in the various religions will be the areas of convergence. If this were to happen, is the end result not going to be just one large part of the elephant? The whole idea of desiring to discover and know the totality of everything, including religious phenomena, is part of the postmodernist western delusion. If I may dare speak on behalf of African believers, regardless of religious tradition, there is agreement that religious phenomena are, by their very nature, ultimately inexhaustible. The overwhelming majority of African believers will accept the fact that in matters of religion there are some things that we do not know, cannot know and need not know. I will even go further to suggest that this is the true biblical and Christian position. Paul is very clear on this when he declared: 'For we know in part and we prophesy in part' and again, 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known' (1 Cor. 13:9, 12).

The difficulty in accepting that there are some things that are beyond human comprehension is a sign of

western arrogance. The pluralists have fallen into this trap and after failing in their obsession to *discover* the totality of God, they were left with no option but to invent an abstract, nameless deity. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim (and one must add traditional African) teaching about God is that he is inscrutable, inimitable, almighty God (Isa. 55:8-9).

This is what differentiates God from humanity. The day we are able to discover the fullness of God, as in the pluralist elephant or baobab tree, then God ceases to be God. He becomes an idol! As an African therefore, it seems to me that the call by pluralists for all religions to join hands in order to discover the 'full truth about God' is a wild goose chase that sounds repugnant to my religious and spiritual sensibilities and instincts.

Pluralists are right in decrying judgmental Christians who, contrary to 1 Corinthians 10:9-12 which teaches us that we are not yet in possession of the fullness of 'Truth', regard all other religions as false and their members as doomed. However, standing outside and expressing the view that a religion is true and has salvific value is no less arrogant than the view from outside that it is false. It is presumptuous on the part of pluralists, and indeed patronizing, to think that people of other religious traditions need the verdict of outsiders regarding the validity or otherwise of their traditions and their fate in the hereafter. Indeed, many 'thinking' (to borrow Hick's term) followers of other faiths would regard pluralists' views that their religious traditions are true as at best hypocritical, and at worst offensive. It is hypocritical because, if pluralists

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14 Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 72.

really believe what they are saying, they would join these religions! People who have followed their religious traditions over several generations did and continue to do so because they believe, know and are convinced that their traditions are true and valid. They do not need and have certainly not solicited the views of Hick et al to endorse them.

Related to the validity or otherwise of other religions is the exclusion and inclusion of people of other faiths in the divine scheme of salvation. The main charge pluralists level at evangelical Christians is that it is arrogant to claim one has the whole truth and by that to exclude others from God's plan of salvation. The difficulty with this pluralist charge is that the forthrightness with which they proceed to include people of other faiths into God's plan of salvation is just as arrogant as that with which exclusivists exclude them. Both instances amount to Christians assigning to themselves the role of visa officials for heaven—this notwithstanding the pluralist concern on this issue is a valid concern evangelical Christians cannot afford to brush aside. This is particularly so for Christians in Africa and Asia for whom the religious 'other' is not some unknown person in distant lands nor immigrants and refugees from some other countries, but in many cases blood relations and fully-fledged citizens.

If I may use my own case as an illustration, if I am asked the question whether Muslims will go to heaven or hell (as I am often asked by theological students), this is not a mere academic or theological question. It is like asking me whether my Muslim uncle who took care of my family and contributed

towards my theological education will go to heaven or hell. My answer to such a question is bound to be less black and white than that of another Christian who knows Muslims mainly as immigrants or people of a different race in a distant land. For us in Africa, theology cannot afford to lose this human face.

Apart from the human face, I am in full agreement with Lesslie Newbigin's caution to Christians that if we look to the Bible to answer the questions on the fate of people of other faiths, 'we shall find ourselves faced either with silence or with contradiction'.<sup>15</sup> If there is anything we can learn from Scripture on this issue, it is the fact that 'salvation belongs to God' (Rev. 7: 10, 19:1); that God 'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1Tim. 2:4); that 'with God all things are possible' (Mt. 19:26); that there will be surprises on the day of judgment! For those who count themselves 'in' will find out to their shock that they are 'out', and others will be surprised they are counted in (Mt. 25:31-46).

From the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13 we learn that there are counterfeits, including false religions. But we also learn that like the servants in the parable we can mistake good seed for weed and vice versa. Because of that, like the servants in the parable, our duty is to take care, ie, witness to all and leave the judgment to the one and only righteous judge.

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<sup>15</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, 'The Christian faith and the world religions', in John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), p. 109.

The other point is that pluralists argue that Christian absolute truth claims are imperialistic and have given Christians a sense of superiority over followers of other faiths. On this basis they call upon Christians to abandon or revise their truth claims so as to attain parity with followers of other religious traditions. The problem with this view is that it is incipiently condescending. The argument is a tacit acknowledgement that if Christians keep to their truth claims, then they are really on higher ground, in other words, superior to followers of other traditions, hence the need for Christians to condescend to others.

What this argument fails to take seriously is that other religions have their own absolute claims that give their adherents a sense of superiority to Christians and all others. So, to 'thinking' followers of these religions, what the pluralists are seeking to do is attempting to bring them down from their higher ground to a lower level rather than, as the pluralists think, generously offering to ask Christians to climb down to their level, so to speak. In any case, why do pluralists assume that people of other faiths are keen to attain parity with Christians?

### III Pluralist Concerns about the Uniqueness of Christ

I want to summarize the concerns of pluralist theologians with regard to the truth claims of Christianity in general and the uniqueness of Christ in particular, into two broad categories. First is the concern for peaceful co-existence between different religious communities. S. J. Samartha is particularly con-

cerned about the need for peaceful co-existence between people of different faiths in the Indian context and sees exclusivist Christian claims as threats to this end. Second is the necessity, in fact imperative, of dialogue between people of different religions which seems to be the main concern of Paul F. Knitter. In all of these, pluralist theologians see the traditional Christian truth claims concerning the uniqueness of Christ as constituting the main stumbling block.

#### a) Concern for peaceful co-existence

To begin with, we cannot deny that every Christian would agree that peaceful co-existence between people of different faiths is necessary (Mt. 5:9; Rom. 12:18). Following Jesus therefore involves peacemaking not just peacekeeping. This is especially so in a world torn apart by hatred and strife. Pluralists argue absolute truth claims lead adherents into thinking of their tradition as superior to others and themselves as superior to those who believe differently, leading to the danger that 'the absoluteness of the religious heart becomes the absoluteness of the religious mind—and eventually the system'.<sup>16</sup> History teaches us that this was, to a large extent, the experience of Christianity in what were then known as barbarian (western European) hands.

John Hick catalogues what he describes as the 'destructive effects of

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<sup>16</sup> Paul F. Knitter, 'Can Our "One and Only" Also Be a "One Among Many"?', in Swidler and Mojzes, eds., *The Uniqueness of Jesus*, p. 153.

the assumption of Christian superiority' in the crusades, slavery, colonialism and the holocaust.<sup>17</sup> Hick himself does not link directly these evil acts to the claims concerning the uniqueness of Jesus *per se* but rather to a Christian sense of superiority. To derive a sense of superiority from the uniqueness of Jesus, as happened with western European Christianity, can only be a misreading of the New Testament witness. Indeed, the early church which made the claims about Jesus suffered humiliation and untold persecution for their beliefs.

If there is anything we can learn from the witness of the early church on the uniqueness of Jesus, it is that of *confident vulnerability* rather than superiority. When the early Christians declared, for instance, that 'there is no other name', they were fully aware of the consequences of such declaration. Indeed they were warned not to teach in the name of Jesus at all, yet they did and faced the consequences. This is what I mean by confident vulnerability.

This confident vulnerability remained the experience of non-western Christianity, whether as the Eastern Orthodox Church under communism or various Christian traditions under Islamic rule down the centuries. Though there are certainly cases to the contrary, it remains the experience of most Christians in the majority south today. In many of these parts of the world, Christians are persecuted for their faith in the lordship of Jesus Christ. To these Christians professing the uniqueness of Jesus puts them in a

vulnerable rather than a superior position.

Samartha, who makes an impassioned plea for abandoning claims to the uniqueness of Jesus for the sake of peaceful inter-religious relations in the Indian context, does not explain how these claims have made contemporary Indian Christians a threat to the peace and unity of the country. On the contrary, Indian Christians have been targets of persecution at the hands of adherents of traditions which Samartha commends as pluralistic and tolerant.

### b) Necessity of dialogue

Pluralists argue that dialogue between religions is an essential prerequisite to inter-religious harmony. They further argue that unless and until Christians abandon or revise their claims of uniqueness, especially the uniqueness of Christ, there can be no authentic dialogue.<sup>18</sup> The assumption here is that people of other religions come to dialogue with no truth claims of their own and therefore feel 'unequal' before their Christian partners. But we all know that Muslims, for instance, come to dialogue with a lot of confidence in their own absolute truth claims and make no apologies whatsoever for them. By insisting on abandoning truth claims as a condition for dialogue, what pluralists are asking Christians to do amounts to telling someone to cut off their roots in order to branch out to others.

<sup>17</sup> John Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity', pp. 18ff.

<sup>18</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: multifaith dialogue and global responsibility* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 30.

Muslims are Muslims because they believe Muhammad is the final Prophet of God sent to humankind and Christians are Christians because they believe Jesus is the Son of God who came as Saviour of the world. Religious truth claims are therefore not mere dogmatic statements but constitute the basis of the identity of the believers. Christian (or Islamic) truth claims were formulated as responses to the question, 'Who are you'? Paul Knitter notes that 'by announcing [Jesus] as the one and only saviour, the early Christians cut out for themselves an identity different from that of all their opponents or competitors'.<sup>19</sup> Knitter is right on the issue of identity but wrong in suggesting that it was an identity the early church 'cut out for themselves'. Worst still is Knitter's suggestion that 'New Testament Christology tells us more about the social situation of the early church than about the ontological nature of Jesus'.<sup>20</sup>

I would go further to argue, first, that the early church was not just carving out their own identity but carving out an identity for the church or the Christian faith as a whole. It is the uniqueness of Jesus that has attracted billions of Christians down the centuries to adopt the Christian faith as it moved out from its early Judaic environs to the Hellenistic, to the Barbarian and now to Africa, Asia and Latin America. In other words, Christian identity finds its meaning and purpose in the uniqueness of Jesus. Secondly, to suggest that New Testament Chris-

tological language says more about the social condition of the early church than the ontological nature of Jesus raises the question: did Knitter and his pluralist colleagues arrive at their conclusions on the ontological nature of Jesus by conducting a DNA test on him?

The early church was made up of strict monotheists, who knew the parents of Jesus, lived with him and saw him hungry, weep, get angry, crucified and buried. These were the same people who turned around and made the claims about this same Jesus as the Son of God, Lord, only Saviour etc. and many died for these claims. If Christians are asked not to take the claims of the early church seriously and literally, why should we take the assertions of Knitter and others, two thousand years later, seriously? Knitter describes the Christological language of the early church as 'survival language'. But that is completely ignoring the circumstances under which the affirmations about Jesus were made. For instance, when Peter declared that 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved', it was not in a Sunday school class. It was before a hostile audience of religious elite! This cannot therefore be caricatured as 'survival language', it is suicidal language!

Having said all that, there remains the question as to what is the real agenda behind the calls to dialogue. For instance, pluralists commend dialogue as the solution to inter-religious conflicts without providing empirical evidence as to how and why this is the case. As Jürgen Moltmann rightly points out, we know of 'the amicable

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19 Knitter, *No Other Name?*, p. 184.

20 Knitter, *No Other Name?*, p. 184.

coexistence of different religious communities without war, without conflict, without disputations and without dialogue'.<sup>21</sup> The point is that dialogue, as is proposed by pluralists, is not necessarily the solution to inter-religious conflicts. No wonder the overwhelming majority of people of other faiths, especially Muslims from the non-western world, have shown little interest in the interfaith dialogue enterprise, viewing it with suspicion as yet another western missionary ploy aimed at undermining their religion.<sup>22</sup> As a result, interfaith dialogue has remained 'the fringe activity of a small minority that is itself on the fringes of its own religious tradition'.<sup>23</sup>

#### IV Following Jesus in a Broken World

To say Jesus is unique Lord and Saviour is more than a dogmatic statement for Christians to profess by mere intellectual or mental assent. As Kwame Bediako observes, when the credentials and validity of our Christian affirmations are tested in non-Christian as well as Christian contexts, 'the true meaning of Jesus Christ becomes

apparent and validated'.<sup>24</sup> In this vein, the question of our witness to this biblical affirmation becomes crucial.

The starting point in our witness to the unique Jesus has to be that this is truth not just to be believed but truth 'to be participated in'. This means that affirming Jesus as unique Lord is not just truth for assertion but rather an invitation to recognition and participation. The disciples who made the claims about Jesus' lordship—whether we are talking about Peter at the transfiguration, the doubting and cynical Thomas (Jn. 20:28), the apostle John (Jn. 1:1-14), Paul (Col. 2:9)—came to these points not by reading scripture or repetition of a creed. These affirmations came out of their encounter and 'participation' with the person and in the works of Jesus. Christian theology in general and Protestant theology in particular has tended over the years to present Jesus as a set of ideas to be rationally argued and proven, clouding and sometimes losing sight of his figure as a person, his ministry and relationship with ordinary people.

To follow Jesus, then, as 'the way the truth and the life' in a broken world, we need to appreciate that there are three dimensions to truth: the propositional and cognitive dimension of truth; truth as praxis; and truth as a person or life. What makes Jesus unique is that in declaring 'I am the way, the truth and the life', he was laying claim to the fact that he combined

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21 Jürgen Moltmann, 'Is "Pluralistic Theology" Useful for the Dialogue of World Religions', in G. D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, pp. 150-51.

22 See Ekkehard Rudolph, 'The debate on Muslim-Christian dialogue as reflected in Muslim periodicals in Arabic (1970-1991)', in Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: a historical survey* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 297-304.

23 Sanneh, *Piety and Power*, p. 6.

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24 Kwame Bediako, 'Christianity, Islam and the Kingdom of God—Rethinking their Relationship from an African Perspective', in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 17 no. 2 (Dec. 2004), p. 6.

all the three dimensions of truth in himself. All others can only speak about or point to the truth. Crucial as the propositional and cognitive dimensions of truth are, focusing on these alone can lead to what Paul calls 'foolish and stupid arguments', intolerance and judgmentalism.

Jesus himself appears to have placed more emphasis on truth as praxis, 'the way', and person, 'the life'. Thus he could tell John's disciples: 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them' (Lk. 7:22); and 'Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord", shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Mt. 7:21). In other words, dogma, indeed orthodoxy (propositional truth), does not save. Jesus as a dogma does not save. It is Jesus as a person (truth as way and life) who saves!

Following Jesus as unique Lord in a broken world calls for participation, embodying and bearing the *fullness* of truth. Indeed, in a broken world, truth as praxis and a person (or life) becomes even more critical. In our African context plagued by conflicts, corruption and the scourge of HIV/AIDS, the saying that 'people do not care how much you know (or who you are) until they know how much you care' is vital. It is only after people see or hear about what a person has done that they take interest in wanting to know who that person is. The unique identity of Jesus goes hand in hand with his earthly ministry. Reflecting on Colossians 2:15ff Kwame Bediako

notes: 'Biblical teaching clearly shows that Jesus is who he is (ie, Saviour) because of what he has done and can do (ie, save), and also that he was able to do what he did on the Cross because of who he is (God the Son)'.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed the person of Jesus is real today and draws people to himself as he did with his disciples who followed him, loved him and only slowly came to an awareness of his mysterious identity. It is this living Christ that Christians should testify to rather than engaging in fruitless debates about his identity or his ontological nature. Church history reveals that theoretical discussions and debates often detract us from the core essentials of mission. In talking about Jesus as being the Son of God, Christian apologists and polemicists, past and present, have always sought to draw comparisons between Jesus who is divine and Muhammad who is a mere mortal. These comparisons which seek to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus sometimes seem, in my opinion, to be missing the point. If there is anything we can learn from the miracles performed by Jesus, it is the fact that he never performed a single miracle to prove his supernatural powers. He performed them to meet specific needs.

The incarnation is unique and miraculous because it is the humbling and self-emptying of God more than anything else (Philp. 2:5-10). Paul is advising Christians to have the mind of humility because the one on whose behalf we make the claims of superior-

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<sup>25</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: a Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990), p. 10.

ity 'did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped'. On the contrary he laid aside his crown of glory and took upon himself the cross that he might carry out his mission of reconciling humankind to God. If Jesus took the status of a servant upon himself so as to reconcile the world to God, is it unthinkable that he (Jesus) could take on the status of a prophet to bring Muslims to the saving knowledge of God or become an ancestor in order to reconcile the world of African primal religious believers to God? This is only a question and that is the furthest I would go. Some may find this question scandalous, but we need to be careful in forbidding things to Christ. It was not long after Peter declared Jesus to be the Son of the Living God that Jesus turned to him and rebuked him: 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men' (Mt. 16:23). In Peter's mind, it was unthinkable for Christ to suffer death, but that was his mind, and the mind of people, not the mind of God!

What makes the Christian God (revealed in Christ) unique is not the fact that he is Almighty, Supreme, King of kings and Lord of lords. All other religions with a concept of a Supreme Being believe all these about their god. The uniqueness of the Christian God lies in the fact that he is prepared and willing to descend from his throne, lay aside his crown, dirty his hands, walk in the slums and wash the feet of his disciples! It is significant to note that when Jesus asked that crucial question: 'Who do people say I am?' and got the answer that 'some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the

prophets', he did not say, 'these are wrong!' Is it perhaps due to the fact that he is all of these and yet at the same time none of these?

When Peter declared that 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God', Jesus did not say, 'Well done, Peter!' Rather he said, 'Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven' (Mt. 16:16, 17). In other words, it takes the Father, not our arguments, to reveal the true identity of the Son to the world.

Finally, in talking about following Jesus as unique Lord and Saviour in a broken world, Christians should bear in mind how the Lord Jesus himself chose to be remembered. 'And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me"' (Lk. 22:19). It is significant that, of all which he accomplished during his time on earth, Jesus chose the brokenness of his body, his crucifixion and death for his own memorial, rather than his miracles or exaltation. The lust for power and dominance is one of the principal causes of the brokenness of our world. That Jesus chose to lay these aside and even to allow his own body to be broken in order to heal a broken world is what makes him unique. By his example, Jesus is teaching us that it takes a cross to fix a broken world, not a crown!

It is precisely because he is Lord of lords and has the Name above all names that he can lay aside his power and superiority and even his life only to take them up again. And this is what Christians are called to witness to and exemplify in following Jesus as unique Lord and Saviour in a broken world.

# Following Jesus as the Truth: Postmodernity and Challenges of Relativism

Mark L. Y. Chan

**KEYWORDS:** *Meta-narrative, foundationalism, diversity, hermeneutics of suspicion, tradition, individualism, style, discipleship, witness, community, love, subversion.*

TO PROCLAIM JESUS of Nazareth as Lord and Saviour is to make an absolute and universal truth claim. When the church declares that he is the way to the truth about God and eternal life, she is making a statement about reality that is true for everyone and everywhere, and not just for Christians. Implicit in the confession of Jesus as Lord is the acknowledgement of his sovereign jurisdiction over the whole world. The universal Lordship of Christ thus goes hand in hand with the claim of his identity as Truth-Incarnate.

Such an uncompromising affirmation, however, is anathema to postmodern sensitivities, where the very notion of absolute and objective truth is either politely passed over as a relic

from a defunct Cartesianism or roundly scoffed at as a guise for ideological imposition. Christians who persist in proclaiming Christ as Truth-Incarnate risk being tarred with the brush of narrow-mindedness or even bigotry.

How then is the church to share the truth about Jesus and follow Jesus as the truth in a postmodern world where truth itself has been made problematic? The challenge in the postmodern age is to commend the truth of Christ to those who do not believe in the very notion of truth. What follows is an attempt to chart a course forward for evangelism that takes into account the opportunities and challenges posed by postmodernity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction is often made between 'postmodernity' as a description of a socio-cultural phenomenon or ethos, and 'postmodernism' as an ideology or a philosophical viewpoint.

## I Features of the Postmodern Mood

Postmodernism is famously difficult to define. The word 'postmodern' is used in a variety of ways, and postmodernism or postmodernity is a complex and hydra-headed phenomenon not amenable to easy characterization. Postmodernism can mean different things to different people. To the architect, artist, or novelist, postmodernism refers to a particular style; to the philosopher, it designates a movement away from Cartesian epistemology; to the political theorist, it signals the end of utopian ideologies; and to the economist, it may describe the transition from an industrial-age economy to an information-age economy.

Postmodernity seems to be best described than defined. It is more a mood than a movement, with its impact felt not only in academia but also in (popular) culture at large.<sup>2</sup> It is generally acknowledged that postmodernity represents a new chapter in the cultural history of the world, even though the extent to which it is related to modernity is a matter of debate. Some scholars understand postmodernity as a new phase in philosophical reflection, while others see it as a form of hypermodernity.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the postmodern tag has been

applied to various developments in architecture, art, music, epistemology, philosophy of science, literary criticism, philosophy of language, ethics, and critical theory. These varied tributaries that together run into the big postmodern lake converge on a common revolt against modernity and its key ideas. Postmodernism may be used as a label to designate the positive philosophical viewpoints represented by Foucault, Rorty, Derrida, and other scions of suspicion and deconstruction, or it may simply describe the mood of life that bears the marks of exhaustion from a spent modernity.

Such is the diversity of postmodernism that it is better described as a loosely connected bundle of diverse viewpoints than as a unified and monolithic movement with a clear centre, sharp boundaries, and official spokespersons. Nevertheless, despite the variety, there are leitmotifs that seem to coagulate into a fairly discernible shape such that one is justified in painting a portrait of it, albeit with broad impressionist strokes.

### 1 Rejection of an authoritative meta-narrative (Grand Story)

A key pillar of the postmodern mutiny against an Enlightenment-defined modernity is the rejection of all overarching stories that explain and give meaning to life. As Lyotard characterizes it, there is in postmodernity an 'incredulity toward meta-narratives'.<sup>3</sup>

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2 See Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990); and Gene Edward Veith, *Guide to Contemporary Culture* (Leicester: Crossway Books, 1994).

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3 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

Whereas modernity valorizes human self-confidence and glories in the fruits of rational scientific achievements, postmodernity decries such utopian triumphalism in favour of a modest if not despairing stance towards the idea of truth as unitary and universal. In place of the universal, postmodernity focuses on the particular. There is no simple reality, only representations of it; there is no singular truth, only multiple truths. There is no grand reason, only socially defined reasons. As a way of looking at the world, postmodernism is the worldview that says no worldview exists. It denies the possibility of a 'God's eye view' of anything, and in place of universal and objective truth that transcends all expressions of it, postmodern pluralists argue that we have only community-specific stories that have no truth-validity outside the communities in which they function. The idea of an independent external reality that can be intersubjectively investigated is dismissed as a myth.

## 2 The non-existence of ultimate foundations

The search for a firm philosophical foundation for knowledge has exercised thinkers since the Middle Ages. Descartes's nomination of the thinking *cogito* as a philosophical first principle exemplifies the kind of epistemological foundationalism that says a belief is justified only if it can be shown to be anchored in some foundation of indubitable first principles. Without going into the intricacies of this discussion, suffice to say that the postmodern insistence on the contextual contingency of all ideas means that even the so-called indubitable foundational

beliefs are socially constructed and have no priority over the beliefs that they purportedly support. Instead of a hierarchical structure for knowledge, postmodernism is decidedly anti-foundational. It focuses instead on the contextuality of human knowledge and probes epistemological claims in the light of human limits. Accordingly, knowledge is by nature uncertain and subject to revision since knowledge claims are interpretations rooted in social contexts.

## 3 Relativizing truth-claims; celebrating of diversity

Modernity seeks a truth that is objectively out there in the world. In postmodernity however, one has no access to the truth 'out there'. All we have is truth that is essentially a social construct made up of raw materials supplied by historical and social conditions. It assumes a constructivist view of knowledge whereby all truth claims are claims *from somewhere*. To enquire into the nature of knowledge or truth can be, according to philosopher, Richard Rorty, only 'a sociohistorical account of how various people have tried to reach agreement on what to believe'.<sup>4</sup> Truth is perspectival. The quest for objective truth independent of the knower is a lost cause. Instead of *the* truth, we only have 'truths'.

Since people cannot be abstracted from their contexts, the way they 'see' the world is by learning the language of

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<sup>4</sup> 'Solidarity or Objectivity', in Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 24.

the communities of which they are a part. There is no access to how things really are (i.e., objective truth) since one cannot escape the influence of language on one's thoughts, beliefs, and even experiences. In short, what we experience as 'reality' is mediated through language, which is in turn supplied by community and tradition.

If all claims to universality are relative to the social contexts in which they arise, and if there is no neutral and objective basis upon which differing viewpoints may be adjudicated, then one ends up with multiple perspectives jockeying for supremacy with no one perspective enjoying privilege status. Diversity of viewpoints is celebrated. When everyone has a right to his opinions, and when these opinions cannot in principle be challenged, then no opinion is wrong. Thus the Bible is no more authoritative than other sacred texts. Each is relevant within the context of the different religions, and none can claim to be an exclusive route to the truth.

The aversion to unity and universality results in a *pluralization* and a *parochialization* of truth. What is true for a group of people at a certain point in time is not necessarily true for another group. Truth is assumed to be contingent on one's point of view. Truth is tribalized in postmodernity. Such egalitarianism means that the criteria for truth are strictly immanent to the form of life or social contexts in which the different truth-claimants live. With no pressure to conform to an agreed upon standard, the door is opened to a plurality of viewpoints and the embrace of differences.

Postmodernists are not as exercised over whether a truth-claim corre-

sponds to reality as they are over whether it works. It is in this sense decidedly pragmatic in orientation. As Rorty puts it, 'There is nothing to be said about truth save that each of us will commend as true those beliefs which he or she finds good to believe'.<sup>5</sup> In other words, truth is really a matter of preference, and preference depends on how useful a particular 'truth' is in a particular situation.

Postmodernity has a high tolerance for the inexplicable since there is no longer any need to conform to an overarching standard of rationality before something may be said to be meaningful. The postmodern mood, unlike the arguably arrogant mindset of the Enlightenment, accepts epistemological scepticism as a given and is even prepared to embrace potential meaninglessness. Pushed to its extreme, postmodernism has a nihilistic streak.

#### 4 Hermeneutics of Suspicion

The contingent provenance of all ideas in postmodernity is joined by the suspicion that claims to absolute truth are but attempts by the powerful or those with vested interests to stifle dissent and push their agenda. 'Reality' is the creation of those in control. Reason and truth are therefore regarded as inherently political and subversive. Thanks to Foucault, Nietzsche, Derrida, and others, all assertions of truth are really propaganda. Foucault claims that we 'cannot exercise power except through the production of truth',<sup>6</sup> and

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<sup>5</sup> Rorty, *Objectivity*, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 132.

'truth' can be twisted and distorted to suit those in control. For Nietzsche, there are no facts, only interpretations brought about as a means to achieve the individual's 'will to power'. If 'truth' is really an attempt by the powerful to make us conform to their reality, then one can understand the need to apply a hermeneutics of suspicion.

Postmodernism in its atheistic form is wary of truth claims and suspicious of religious authorities and pronouncements. To some postmoderns, the claim that Jesus is the truth may simply be a mask for colonial imperialism, religious intolerance, or even patriarchal chauvinism.

### 5 Tradition, subjective (spiritual) and holistic experience

Following on from its social constructivist view of knowledge, attention is paid to the formative role played by tradition in shaping how people think and what they think about. Postmodernism critiques the modern idea of the autonomous, imperious, and unified ego, and displaces individualism with an emphasis on the communal. Yet there is ironically a strong individualistic strand in postmodernism. The systemic suspicion that one has towards authorities leads to a situation where one can believe or trust only one's own assessment. In the absence of a frame of reference other than oneself, each person becomes his or her own authority in interpreting what is right and determining how one ought to act.

Reacting to the dominance of reason in the industrial-scientific ethos of modernity, the postmodern temper

promotes a more holistic understanding of the human person that takes into account the physical, affective, aesthetic, social-interactive, and spiritual dimensions. Not wanting to restrict knowledge to simply apprehending with the mind, postmodernists seek experiences that engage the entirety of their beings, particularly those that are unconventional and thrill inducing. Words alone are not enough; they seek participatory engagement in the consumption of experiences. There is a greater willingness to experiment and try new things as postmodernism sanctions the evolving of new trends and multiplying of fads.

### 6 Transience and the triumph of style

The repudiation of an essentialist metaphysics in radical postmodernism impacts not only its view on truth but also its understanding of the self. Unlike the Cartesian self and the Kantian self, in postmodern thinking, the self is no longer an active agent but 'an opaque product of variable roles and performances which have been imposed upon it by the constraints of society and by its own inner drives or conflicts'.<sup>7</sup> Instead of a substantive essence at the core of a person's being, the self, like notions of truth and reality, is a constructed persona contingent on social and linguistic conditions and influences. And because the postmodern self is fragmented, multi-

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 121.

phrenic, and saturated,<sup>8</sup> it is not surprising to find people in the postmodern age plagued by an inner uncertainty about their identity. The postmodern self seeks constantly to invent and reinvent itself. Substance gives way to form, as attention is paid more and more to one's roles and functions, with people looking to their social contexts for cues on what they should be and do. Since there is nothing beyond what you see on the outside, then what you see is what you get. The obsession with the body beautiful and other industries devoted to image manipulation and the changing or polishing of persona are but symptomatic of the loss of stability at the heart of the postmodern self.

And to make the already protean nature of the self even more fluid and uncertain, we have the proliferation of choices made possible by globalization and the blinding speed of life in the urban centres of our world. The incessant bombardment of the senses with offers of goods and services in our media-saturated society leads to a heightening of the consumerist appetite, which in turn translates into the easy replacement of the old with the new and novel. Instead of lamenting the loss of permanence, transience is lauded as a good thing. Without an inner stable identity to help one navigate the turbulent waters of postmodern pluralism, and without a centralized authority to appeal to for guidance, the postmodern denizen is left hanging on the floating debris of a

destroyed modernity, and drifting with the ebb and flow of fads and fashions.

## II Engaging Postmodern Relativists Evangelistically

The fact of ethnic, philosophical, and religious diversity in society is incontrovertible. While this empirical pluralism is not without its social problems, what concerns us is the kind of postmodern philosophical pluralism that relativizes all truth-claims. How should the church respond to the challenges posed by relativism as she seeks to fulfill her mandate to point the world to Jesus the Truth?

The response to postmodernity within evangelical Christianity is not uniform.<sup>9</sup> It ranges from those who are convinced that it is no friend of the gospel considering its epistemological bankruptcy, its tendency towards nihilism and its moral relativism,<sup>10</sup> to

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<sup>9</sup> For a survey of the various responses to postmodernity within evangelicalism, see Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) and Myron Penner, ed., *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> See for instance David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Millard Erickson, Paul K. Helseth and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004); Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000); and D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

those who agree essentially with its critique of the Enlightenment project and seek to reconfigure theology to fit the anti-foundationalism of postmodernity.<sup>11</sup> Also representative of this positive stance are leaders of the 'emerging church' movement who seek to 'do church' in a way that resonates with the postmodern temper.<sup>12</sup> Straddling between cautious antipathy and hearty endorsement are those who seek to engage critically with postmodernity, acknowledging the validity of its critique of various aspects of the Enlightenment project while steering clear of its more egregious ramifications. This critical engagement faces up honestly to the rapid changes that characterize life today and is ready to seize oppor-

tunities to present Christ in our post-modern world.

It is not our purpose to assess the validity of the postmodern case against modernity, or to critique the proposals of postmodernity as a whole.<sup>13</sup> Our concern is with the challenge of following Jesus as Truth at a time when the concept of universal truth is in question. With the failure of modernity to deliver on utopia and the disenchantment with the promises of 'Reason' and 'Science' come new opportunities for evangelism. The postmodern assumption that all voices have a right to be heard in the marketplace of ideas means that the church can without apology make her voice heard in the postmodern world. Pluralism cuts both ways. Postmodernity may have made commitment harder, but it is, in this sense, more amenable to the communication of the gospel. How then should we proceed?

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11 E.g., Stanley Grenz & John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy and Mark Nation, eds., *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996); James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

12 E.g., Philip Kennison, 'There's No Such Thing As Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too', in Timothy Philips and Dennis Okholm, eds., *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 155-72; Brian McClaren, *A New Kind of Christians* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

## 1 Jesus Christ as revealed Truth

The Bible is unapologetic in speaking of truth. Jesus claims to be the truth (John 14:6), and the early Christians boldly insist that 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven...by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). The gospel message about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is described as 'the

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13 Suffice to say that the pronouncement on the demise of foundationalism in postmodern philosophy is premature and fails to take into account the fact that a foundationalist structure of epistemic justification remains a useful and productive framework for many, particularly within Anglo-American analytic philosophy.

word of truth' (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; Jas. 1:18), and Christians are said to be those who 'belong to the truth' (1 John 3:19) and are instructed by the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:17; 1 Jn. 5:6). So there is really no getting around the truth!

Christians are not untouched by the relativism of our age, and the work of bearing witness to the truth must begin with the induction of believers into the truth of Christ given in Scripture. To follow Jesus as truth is to refuse to fudge the dividing line between truth and falsehood. This ability presupposes an acquaintance with what truth is, without which one cannot accurately identify what is false. The grounding of believers in the truth is the first step to mounting a credible apologetics in our (post)modern age. This is a prelude to witness in the world. It is not enough to get believers to share the gospel with their neighbours. We need to pay attention to the catechizing of these same believers, imparting to them the deposit of apostolic faith, and helping them to grow in the knowledge of biblical truth.

## 2 Contextual, winsome, and persuasive witness

The truth to which Christians give their allegiance is not merely a body of teachings but the person of Jesus. When Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (Jn. 14:6), he is not just claiming to speak the truth; he is claiming to *be* the truth. He *is* the truth, for only in him does one come to know the truth about his or her sinful condition; and only in him can one be saved from damnation to eternal life. This focus on the person of Christ must not be obfuscated as the church mounts an

apologetic for truth in dialogue with postmodern ideas and ideologues. The goal of philosophical engagement is for the sake of pointing to Christ.

The church's truth-claims concerning Jesus are, like all human expressions, necessarily made from somewhere in time and space. But so is the truth-claim of postmodern relativism. The Christian is entitled to ask gently why one should take postmodernism's claim of relativism as incontrovertible truth since its emergence can be traced to the particular sets of circumstances in the later part of the twentieth century. Instead of it being a liability, the historical situatedness of Christian truth and witness means that the message of Jesus, rather than being an otherworldly abstraction, is historically engaged and contextually relevant.

The confirmed postmodernist will say that it is arrogant and intolerant to claim Christ alone is the way to God. Ironically, such 'intolerance' is not tolerated in postmodernism. We must not confuse *social* tolerance with *intellectual* tolerance. Intellectual tolerance argues that all truth-claims are valid and true. This typical postmodern stance contradicts the truth of the uniqueness of Christ and is obviously unacceptable to the Christian. Social tolerance on the other hand simply says that people have a right to their own beliefs without necessarily saying that all beliefs are valid. One can respect the religious and philosophical views of people without necessarily agreeing with them. As this pertains to evangelism, we need to distinguish between behaving in a disagreeable and offensive manner, i.e., failing to practice social tolerance, and facing up to the intellectual intolerance of rela-

tivists. If there is any offence, it ought to come from the particularity of truth in Christ and not the Christian witness.

Postmodernity's insistence on respecting and honouring human differences reminds the Christian witness to be sensitive to the many genuine differences that exist between people. We can also take to heart resources from postmodernism on the unmasking of power interests, such as Foucault's stricture against reason as an instrument of oppression. His call to recover the discourse of the marginalized may be seen as an echo of the Old Testament prophets in their concern for the poor, the oppressed and those without a voice. When we acknowledge that the church has not always been innocent of oppressive practices, we add to the authenticity, honesty and humaneness of our witness.

Winsome witness to the truth means seeking to commend the gospel and humbly persuading people to make an informed decision to commit their lives to Christ. This entails the use of reason in making the case for Christ. Despite postmodernism's pronouncement on the demise of reason, we maintain that interpersonal persuasion of a reasonable sort continues to be practiced in everyday life. Sellers seek to persuade potential buyers that their products are superior to those of their competitors. Schoolteachers appeal to the reasoning faculty of students, while government leaders defend the rationale for their policies. Even enthusiastic relativists who are out to convince others of the superiority of their philosophies of life do so by turning to the tools of persuasive speech, reasoning with their listeners or readers. There is therefore room for the use of

the mind in a 'humble apologetics'<sup>14</sup> that furnishes a reasonable commendation of the gospel. While we acknowledge the limits of reason, it does not mean that there is no room for enlisting reason in the service of the gospel.

As we commend the truth of Christ in a postmodern world, we do so knowing that the final outcome does not rest with us but with God's Spirit in bringing the truth to bear on the hearts and minds of people. The truth, like Aslan in C. S. Lewis's *Narnia*, is capable of defending itself. The truth will prevail in the end. We can be bold in testifying to Christ because there is something coherent and persuasive about the truth that rings true to life. Regardless of the sophistry and rhetorical prowess of relativists, God's truth is more powerful yet. In the final analysis, persuading relativists to the truth of Jesus is the work of God's Spirit. Winsome witness and humble apologetics must be joined by prayerful intercession.

### 3 Ecclesial embodiment of the truth

The verbalization of the truth of Christ is most powerful and effective when it is accompanied by the visualization of the gospel in the sense of seeing its salvific effects embodied in the lives of Christians. To bear witness to the truth, Christian witnesses must be truth-centred and truth-defined in their lives. Christian communities need to embody the truth of the gospel both in

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<sup>14</sup> John Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

terms of personal and corporate holiness. Whatever their religious persuasion or ideological positions (or the lack of it), people everywhere are looking for congruence between what is professed and what is practised. As congenital believers, people are on the lookout for signs that would either confirm them in their current beliefs, or cause them to shift or change. Christians are walking invitations for the world to come and inspect the viability and cogency of the Christian faith. The unbelieving world is watching. What are we showing them? Are we giving grounds for misconceptions by what we say and do? Or are we demonstrating the plausibility and truth of the gospel by our lifestyle?

The greatest apologetic for the gospel and the only hermeneutic of the gospel is, in the view of Lesslie Newbigin, a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.<sup>15</sup> The credibility of our witness depends on it. Transparent holiness and the authenticity of holistic love go a long way to support our claims to know the truth. The call to proclaim Christ and make disciples is at the same time a call to authentic Christian living within Christian communities. In this sense, passionate evangelism takes off from sound ecclesiology. In situating our evangelistic presentation within the social structure of Christian community and tradition, we are certainly doing something that coheres with the postmodern preference for the communal and collective over the kind of

atomistic individualism that is so characteristic of modernity.

#### 4 Telling the story in love

It is often said that postmodernity prefers narratives to propositions, real life stories over grand but abstract theories. Reaching our postmodern generation entails investing time and effort to listen to their stories and share our stories. It is in the context and process of the sharing of stories that we introduce God's story, a story of the divine love and search for lost humanity. It is only befitting that God's love story should be communicated in a loving manner. And learning to speak the truth in love is crucial in commending Christ to the postmodern.

Postmodernity often regards the assertion of uncompromising truth as a manifestation and a reinforcement of intolerant fundamentalism. Very often this comes out of the failure to differentiate between the convictions themselves and the way convictions are expressed. What is right can be expressed wrongly, and what is truthful loses its appeal because of the unworthy manner in which it is presented. It is important to learn how to speak the truth in Christian love, for it will make the invitation to step into God's story (the grandest of grand-narratives) all the more attractive.

Whatever their philosophical assumptions, people have an instinctive yearning for connection and relationship. This is constitutional to the human psyche on account of our being created in the image of God. Even the most radical champions of deconstructive postmodernity need people they can trust. Evangelism in a postmodern

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<sup>15</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 222ff.

age has to be done up close and personal. By building bridges of trust and authentic love, the church weaves for people a plausibility framework in which the truth of Christ may be understood and the prospect of a personal relationship with Christ desired. Providing opportunities for unbelievers to draw close has the added advantage of addressing misconceptions. For instance, the failures of Christians and the established church may have left a bad taste on the part of non-Christians and raised barriers in their minds. Depending on how entrenched the mistrust is, it takes investment of time and tender love to overcome these barriers. Prejudices and misconceptions cannot be dealt with from a distance; it requires people to draw near.

The postmodern mood values experiences, and those who have grown up in a postmodern milieu cherish and are very open to real life experiences, especially experiences of a spiritual kind. Head knowledge is not enough; spirituality in a postmodern world wants something that works in real life. It craves relationships that are real. It seeks a spirituality that encompasses the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, volitional and spiritual. This is simply a manifestation of the holism that God has created humans to be. The church as a fellowship of people committed to holistic love already has in its communal life a point of contact for postmodern seekers. Having said that, it does not mean that in focusing on experiential engagement with the truth we do away with biblical theology. Experience and sound theology are not mutually exclusive. What it does mean is that when we engage the world of the postmodern, we need to do

so in a manner that welcomes and actively enlists their participation in discovering and experiencing the truth of the gospel for themselves.

The overarching paradigm of the kingdom of God serves as a powerful framework for postmodern activists to be inducted into a purpose larger than themselves. The New Testament description of the kingdom of God as the coming of 'the age to come' into this 'present evil age' (Lk. 18:30; Gal. 1:4) and the ushering in of the contrast between life 'in the flesh' and the 'new life of the Spirit' (Rom. 7:5-6; 8:5-9) is not an other-worldly reality confined to the realm of the spiritual. On the contrary, the kingdom of God is about the redeeming and transforming of this world. This is attractive to those within the postmodern family who value social justice and want to get their hands soiled in order to build a better world.

Postmodernists tend by and large to be impatient with holy-huddles; they pride themselves as activists seeking to engage and even transform the world. The message of the kingdom, with its emphasis on the renovation, restoration, and realignment of all aspects of earthly life after God's redemptive design for creation, offers a vision of life that is potentially appealing to postmodern activists. The gospel is not about getting people ready for heaven; it is about changing this world. And relativists who are activists may well find participation in doing the works of the kingdom a good starting point for coming to faith in Christ.

## 5 Reference points and areas of commonality

That people are different and have different philosophies of life should not overshadow the fact that people do have much in common. Without minimizing the real differences between people, there is much that they share that can be appealed to in evangelism. Religious and ideological differences notwithstanding, people everywhere are all part of the same human race. Whether one is a devout Christian or a convinced relativist, we both share many of the same human aspirations and foibles, and face many of the same challenges. Natural disasters and national crises, for instance, do not discriminate between those who believe in truth and those who do not. They are indiscriminate in apportioning woes and sufferings. Whatever the religious or philosophical persuasion of the parents of children lost in a disaster, the pain is unbearably real and the longing for solace and support dearly needed by all who are affected. Learning to meet people of all faiths at the level of our common humanity is a good place to start in sharing the truth of Christ.

## 6 Affirming truth and sowing seeds of subversion

Learn to affirm signs of the human quest for God. There are instincts in the human soul—and the confirmed relativist is no exception—that point in the direction of God. These intimations and inclinations, or what sociologist Peter Berger calls ‘signals of transcendence’, are signs of a spiritual wistfulness that yearns after a God people do not yet know and cannot quite

describe.<sup>16</sup> Even in the midst of errors, there are always glimmers of the truth because man the sinner is still in the image of God. Calvin refers to this as a *divinitatis sensum* (sense of deity, or seed of religion) in man.<sup>17</sup> Affirm these God-given instincts wherever they are found; they are excellent points of contact for conversations about the truth.

The multiplying of options and the loss of faith in institutions result in an inner disquiet on the part of people as they seek some solid ground to stand on. The unlimited choices available to people today and the disconnectedness that comes with it have only intensified people’s quest for connection. David Brooks maintains,

The life of perpetual choice is a life of perpetual longing as you are prodded by the inextinguishable desire to try the next new thing. But maybe what the soul hungers for is ultimately not a variety of interesting and moving insights but a single universal truth.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the denial of truth does not make people less needy of the truth in the depth of their being.

Learn to discern underlying beliefs, assumptions and frameworks. As we relate with non-Christian friends, learn to read between the lines and listen for that which lies behind their words. Without coming across as prosecutors in a courtroom, we can sensitively

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<sup>16</sup> See Richard Mouw’s helpful discussion in *Distorted Truth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> *Institutes*, I, 3.1.

<sup>18</sup> David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 239-40.

probe for their operating assumptions and discern their fundamental beliefs. What sort of mindset stands behind their views? What is unsaid in what is said? Even misconceptions about Christianity arise from some underlying conceptions. Look at their actions. They tell a lot about their basic commitments.

Cultivate the art of gentle subversion. Learn to sow seeds of doubt in the field of unbelief and pray that God's Spirit will cause the inadequacy of all ungodly belief-systems to be revealed. This is spiritual warfare, is it not, when we tear down strongholds of argumentative unbelief by bringing the truth of God to bear on mistaken and misguided views?

Evangelism entails challenging the assumptions of postmodern relativism and presenting the gospel as a viable alternative. Part of this involves probing the adequacy of the postmodern view of life. Take for instance postmodernity's distaste for meta-narratives. Even if we grant (for the sake of argument) that totalizing discourses or meta-narratives can be oppressive and violent, it does not mean that all meta-narratives are of this nature. Even if one chooses to jettison a meta-narrative framework and opts for a local meta-narrative, i.e., community-based and tradition-bound set of operational guidelines, the question remains as to the adequacy of the assumptions entailed in this localized framework. The question that we all need to ask is this: 'Can you really live and build your life on these premises?'

Furthermore, the appeal to local meta-narrative does not save one from the violence and oppression that a universal and overarching meta-narrative

supposedly causes. Arguably, local meta-narratives can be shown to cause more violence than a single meta-narrative. The inter-tribal atrocities in Rwanda, the genocide in the Balkans, the acts of terrorism by British-born radical Muslims, etc, are examples of how local meta-narratives can be used to legitimize violence. Thus when opportunities arise, raise questions about the adequacy of absolute moral relativism as a guide for life.

### III Conclusion: There are no Nonbelievers

All people are believers because all people believe in something. No one is a 'free thinker' in the sense of being completely free from beliefs and fundamental commitments. Even people who say they do not believe in anything believe that there is nothing to believe in! Even the hardened postmodernist who loudly proclaims, 'There is no such thing as universal truth!' subscribes to the truth that there is no truth! One may not want to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, but one cannot *not* believe in something. A person may be an *unbeliever*, but she cannot be a *non-believer*, for there are strictly speaking no non-believers. The question therefore is not so much *whether* people believe, but *what* do they believe.

Embedded in all human beings is a natural tendency to measure their lives against some greater scheme outside of themselves. The Bible suggests that this is how our Creator has wired us. We are by default seekers of meaning because we are created to be seekers of God. That is why there are no non-

believers. We are made to believe. It comes with being created in the image of God. Just as an image has no independent existence apart from the object it images, our identity is inalienably wrapped up with our relationship with God. There is a fundamental God-relatedness at the core of every human being.

This God-relatedness remains true even after the devastation of the fall. Sin may have opened a chasm between God and humankind, disobedience may have severed humans' relationship with God, and people may 'suppress the truth in unrighteousness' (Rom. 1:18), but they remain inescapably God-related. The runaway sinner continues to be related to God, just as the prodigal son continues to be related to his father, even when he goes gallivanting in 'the far country'. The nature of that relationship may have been altered, but the fact of relatedness remains.

Humans made in the image of God are ontologically constituted such that they cannot but yearn for God and the truth. All people have an awareness of God from creation (Rom. 1:20) and they know right from wrong innately (Rom. 2:14-15). We do not need to be unnecessarily alarmed or rattled by media-savvy evangelists for atheism who ridicule our belief in God. Whether

a fish denies the existence of water or not will not make an iota of difference to the reality that without water the fish simply cannot exist! We evangelize on the basis of what we know from the Bible about the human person.

That is why people who have not yet been reconciled to God through Christ have a deep sense of restlessness in their soul. They may try to flee from God, but they are incapable of shaking off that inner restlessness. People may try and suppress that but they cannot eradicate this divine haunting of the soul. For this reason, even an atheist can define himself only in relation to God, for atheism is by definition parasitic on theism. That is the irony at the heart of human existence. People cannot run from God without running into God at every turn because they have been stamped with the image of God; and this God is actively seeking out and drawing them to himself. Relativists may insist that there is no such thing as universal truth, but they live instinctively on the assumption of the reality of truth despite protestation to the contrary.

To use the language of business, there is always a market for the gospel since people never run out of their need for God. Of this we can be confident: even in the relativistic climate of our postmodern times, the gospel remains perennially relevant.

# Following Jesus in the Globalized Marketplace

Chris Wright

**KEYWORDS:** *Creation, fall, stewardship, evangelism, social justice, accountability, market forces, ministry, new creation, politics, integrity, worldview, prophetic witness.*

beings engage together in productive projects. The Old Testament word was 'the gate'—the public square where people met and did their business together, of whatever kind.

THIS PAPER IS NOT the practical wisdom of a seasoned veteran of the modern secular workplace, but some biblical and ethical reflections from the margins. They come from one who has taken the coward's route of a life-time working in Christian pastoral and teaching contexts and who has profound and genuine admiration for those who struggle daily to be followers of Jesus in the rough and tumble of 'the world at work'.

I am using the term 'marketplace' to mean 'the public arena' in the widest sense. That is, I am not thinking only of 'the market' in a purely economic sense, but the whole world of work—trade, professions, law, government, education, industry—wherever human

## I God and the Marketplace

Is God interested in the marketplace? Many Christians seem to operate on the everyday assumption that he is not. Or at least, that God is not interested in the marketplace for its own sake, as distinct from interested in it as a context for evangelism. God, it would seem, cares about the church and its affairs, about getting people to heaven, not about how society and its public places are conducted on earth. The result can be a rather dichotomized Christian life in which we have to invest most of the time that matters (our working lives) in a place and a task that we think does not matter to God, while struggling to find opportunities to give some left-over time to the

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only thing we think does matter to God—evangelism.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the Bible clearly and comprehensively, in both Testaments, portrays God as intensely interested in the human market place—interested, involved, and in charge.

### 1 He created it

Work is God's idea. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 give us our first picture of the biblical God as a worker—thinking, choosing, planning, executing, evaluating. So when God decided to create humankind in the image and likeness of God, what else could humans be but workers, reflecting in their working lives something of the nature of God? Specifically, God laid upon human beings the task of ruling the earth (Genesis 1), and of serving and keeping it (Genesis 2). This enormous task required not only the complementarity of our male-female gender identities, for mutual help, but also implies some other fundamental economic and ecological dimensions to human life.

God has given us a plane with vast diversity of resources scattered all over its surface. There is, therefore, a natural necessity for trade and exchange between groups living in different places, to meet common needs. That task in turn necessitates economic relationships, and so there is the need for fairness and justice throughout the social and economic realms.

There needs to be justice both in the sharing of the raw resources with which we work, and in the distribution of the products of our work. The biblical witness is that all of this great human endeavour is part of God's intention for human life on earth.

Work, then, is not the result of 'the curse'. Of course, all work is now affected in myriad detrimental ways by our fallenness. But work itself is of the essence of our human nature. We were created to be workers, like God, the Worker. The so-called 'cultural mandate', then, is a valid concept. All that we are and do in the public sphere of work, whether at the level of individual jobs, or of the family, or whole communities, right up to whole cultures and civilizations over historical time, is connected to our createdness and is therefore of interest to our Creator. The marketplace is of course polluted and distorted by our sinfulness. But then that is true of all spheres of human existence. It is not a reason to excuse ourselves from the public arena, any more than the fact that sickness and death are ultimately the results of sin is a reason for Christians not to enter hospitals or funeral parlours.

*So the first question we need to ask those who seek to follow Jesus in the marketplace is: Do you see your work as nothing more than a necessary evil, or the context for evangelistic opportunism, or do you see it as a means of glorifying God through participating in his purposes for creation and therefore having intrinsic value?*

### 2 He audits it

We are all familiar with the function of an auditor, who provides independent,

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<sup>1</sup> Darrel Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006) provides an excellent critique of this dichotomized and, frankly, unbiblical viewpoint, and a fine theology of work in the process.

impartial and objective scrutiny of a company's activities and claims. The auditor has access to all documents and evidence. To him all books are opened, all decisions known, and from him no secrets are hidden. That, at least, is the theory. According to the Bible, God is the independent judge of all that goes on in the marketplace. The Old Testament speaks repeatedly of Yahweh as the God who sees and knows and evaluates. This is true in the most universal sense, and of every individual (Psalm 33:13-15).

But it is specifically true of the public square. Israel was reminded repeatedly that God calls for justice 'in the gate', which is in contemporary terms, the marketplace (Amos 5:12-15). Furthermore, God hears the kind of talk that would go on either in the hidden places of the greedy heart, or in the confidence of a business deal. Such exploitative talk is condemned by the prophet (Amos 8:4-7). And for those who think that God is confined to his temple and sees only what goes on in religious observance, comes the shock that he has been watching what goes on the rest of the week in public (Jer. 7:9-11).

God is the auditor—the independent inspector of all that happens in the public arena. What he therefore demands, as auditors should, is complete integrity and transparency. This is the standard that is expected of human judges in their exercise of public office. The case of Samuel is revealing, as he defends his public record and calls God as witness—as his divine auditor (1 Sam. 12:1-5).

Samuel said to all Israel, 'I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am

old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right.'

'You have not cheated or oppressed us', they replied. 'You have not taken anything from anyone's hand'.

Samuel said to them, 'The LORD is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.'

'He is witness', they said.

*The second question we need to ask then, of all those who seek to follow Jesus in the marketplace is: Where, in all your activity, is the deliberate acknowledgment of, and submission to, the divine auditor?*

### 3 He governs it

We often speak of 'market forces', and of the whole realm of business and politics, as if they were all independent as 'a law unto themselves'. 'The Market', often with a capital M, is objectified and almost given a kind of divine autonomous power. At any rate, at a personal level, we feel we are at the mercy of forces beyond our individual control, forces determined by millions of other people's choices.

The Bible has a more subtle view. Yes, human public life is made up of human choices, for which human beings are responsible. So in that sense, all that happens in the marketplace is a matter of human action,

choice and moral responsibility. Yet at the same time, the Bible puts it all under God's sovereign government. By stressing the first as well as the second, the Bible avoids sliding into fatalism or determinism. It affirms both sides of the paradox: humans are morally responsible for our choices and actions and their public consequences; yet God retains sovereign control over final outcomes and destinies.

Many Bible stories illustrate this. The story of Joseph oscillates between the sphere of the family and the public arena at the highest level of state power—in relation to political, judicial, agricultural, economic and foreign affairs. All actors in the stories are responsible for their own motives, words and deeds—whether good or evil. But the perspective of the author of Genesis, through the words of Joseph, is that God mysteriously governed the whole sequence of events (Gen. 50:19-20).

The stories of Esther and of Daniel would affirm the same perspective. In all three cases, believers in the living God are at work in a public arena that is 'pagan'—in the sense of, outside the covenant community. The human political authority in all three cases bears no intentional allegiance to Yahweh the God of Israel. Yet in all three cases, it is the will of Yahweh that governs the outcomes of their lives and decisions.

Moving from narrative to prophetic texts, it is significant that when prophets turn their attention to the great empires of their day, they affirm Yahweh's government as much over them as over his covenant people Israel. Furthermore, all their public works are included, the marketplace as much as the military.

Isaiah 19:1-15 puts the whole of Egypt under God's judgment, including its religion, irrigation, agriculture, fisheries, textile industry, politicians and universities. Ezekiel 26-28 is a sustained lament for the great trading city of Tyre, while chapters 29-32 pour similar doom on the great imperial culture of Egypt. In both cases, the public marketplace of economic and political power is in focus.

Daniel 4 portrays the arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar gloating over his city: 'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?' (Dan. 4:30). But the verdict of God was that his whole building project was on the backs of the poor and oppressed, as Daniel pointed out. 'Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue' (Dan. 4:27). But, having refused to humble himself, Nebuchadnezzar found himself humiliated into a more sober frame of mind. And the lesson he had to learn is the one we are pressing here: God governs the public square, along with all else. Or, in Daniel's more graphic words, 'Heaven rules...the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes' (Dan. 4:26, 32).

*So the third question we have to ask of those who follow Jesus in the marketplace is: How do you perceive the governance of God in the marketplace (which is another way of seeking the kingdom of God and his justice), and what difference does it make when you do?*

#### 4 He redeems it

A common Christian assumption is that all that happens here on earth is nothing more than temporary and transient. Life here is nothing more than the vestibule for eternity, so it doesn't really matter very much. To this negative comparison is added the idea, drawn from a mistaken interpretation of the language of 2 Peter 2, that we are headed for total obliteration of the whole earth and indeed of all the physical creation. With such a prospect, what eternal value can possibly attach to the work we do in the world's marketplace here and now?<sup>2</sup>

But the Bible presents a very different prospect. God plans to redeem all that he has made, and included within that will be the redemption of all that we have made with what God first made—that is, our use of creation within the great cultural mandate. Of course, all that we have done has been tainted and twisted by our sinful, fallen human nature. And all that flows from that source will have to be purged and purified by God. But that is exactly the picture we have in both Old and New Testaments. It is a vision of redemption, not of obliteration.

Isaiah 65:17-25 is a glorious portrayal of the new creation—a new heaven and a new earth. It looks forward to human life that is no longer subject to weariness and decay; in which there will be fulfilment in family and work; in which the curses of frustration and injustice will be gone for-

ever; in which there will be close and joyful fellowship with God; and in which there will be environmental harmony and safety. The whole of human life, private, family and public, will be redeemed and restored to God-glorifying productiveness.

The New Testament carries this vision forward in the light of the redemption achieved by Christ through the cross, and especially in the light of the resurrection. Paul comprehensively and repeatedly includes 'all things' not only in what God created through Christ, but what he plans to redeem through Christ. The whole of creation is to be redeemed through the cross (Col. 1:16-20).

Because of that plan of redemption, the whole of creation can look forward to the future, just as we look forward to our resurrection bodies (Rom. 8:19-21). Even the text often used to speak of the destruction of the cosmos (when in fact, in my view, it is actually portraying redemptive purging, not total obliteration), immediately goes on to the expectation of a justice-filled new creation (2 Pet. 3:13).

And the final vision of the whole Bible is not of us escaping from the world to some ethereal paradise, but rather of God coming down to live with us once again in a purged and restored creation, in which all the fruit of human civilization will be brought into the city of God (Rev. 21:24-27). The 'splendour', 'glory' and 'honour' of kings and nations, of which this text speaks, are constituted by the combined product of generations of human beings whose lives and efforts will have generated the vast store of human cultures and civilizations. All this will be purged, redeemed and laid at the feet of Christ,

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<sup>2</sup> Particularly helpful on this theme of the eternal significance of human work accomplished in time is Darrel Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*.

for the enhancement of the life of eternity in the new creation.

All human history, then, which takes place in the marketplace of human public interaction, will be redeemed and fulfilled in the new creation—not just abandoned or destroyed. All human work, then, in that marketplace, has its own value and eternal significance, not just because of our understanding of creation and the mandate it laid upon us, but also because of the new creation and the eschatological hope it sets before us. With such a hope, we can heartily follow Paul's exhortation, knowing that 'the work of the Lord' does not mean just 'religious' work, but any work done for as unto the Lord, which includes even the manual labour of slaves: Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

*And so a fourth question arises for the follower of Jesus in the marketplace: In what ways is my daily labour transformed by the knowledge that it is all contributing to that which God will one day redeem and include within his new creation?*

## II Saints and the Marketplace

If that, then, is God's view of the public life and work of the marketplace, what ought to be the attitude, role and mission of God's people in that sphere? Certainly not one of disengagement.

### 1 We are called to engagement

This is not to deny that there may be particular callings that require individuals or communities to pursue a distinc-

tive devotional, pastoral or missionary calling. But even they are not on some other planet. They participate in the global marketplace simply by being human in God's earth. Monastic communities farmed land, tended the sick, and brewed beer. Even the Amish utilize the human invention of the wheel.

The Old Testament, as we have seen, contains notable examples of believers engaged in the public arena, and in the service of 'pagan' powers, especially Joseph and Daniel. But the New Testament also urges Christians to be good citizens and good workers, *and thereby* to be good witnesses. Work is still a creational good.

It seems that some people in the churches Paul planted had come to the view that ordinary work was no longer of any value, and so they became lazy, spiritualizing their idleness with fervid expectations of Christ's return. Paul shared their convictions about Christ's return, but not their work-shy opting out of normal human responsibilities. He urged them to go about their normal daily work to earn their living (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14). Paul had no hesitation in appealing to his own example in this regard, as one who had supported himself from his own labour in the marketplace (2 Thess. 3:6-13).

Paul's frequent exhortations to 'do good' should not be construed merely as 'being nice'. The term also carried a common social connotation of public service and benefaction.<sup>3</sup> Christians should be among those who bring the greatest public good to the marketplace, and

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

thereby commend the biblical gospel.

And we do so, fully aware of the task of creation which we share with all fellow-human beings. Thus, we serve our Creator in serving all his creatures. There is a pressing need in the church today to recover a more biblical understanding of service, or in its more 'religious' sounding equivalent, of 'ministry'. Sadly, we still suffer from the legacy of pietism and a dichotomized worldview, in which 'ministry' is confined to that which is full-time paid work within the church, as pastor, evangelist or missionary. But ministry, or servanthood, is what we are all called to in all of life.

In Romans 13 Paul speaks of governing authorities as 'God's servants'. He uses both the words that are otherwise also used for ministers in the church—*diakonos* (twice in verse 4) and *leitourgos* (in verse 6). Political service is service of God. In Acts 6, the same word is used both of the service of the word, to which the apostles were called, and the serving of tables, for which the Seven were appointed (*diakonein, diakonia*). One was a teaching ministry, the other a social ministry. Both were ministries—one was a priority for apostles, the other a priority for those selected to do it.

And in the letters of Paul, one does not get the impression that new converts suddenly left the occupations they had in the secular world. On the contrary, Paul seems to envisage most of them still there, working and earning, paying their taxes and doing good in the community. One imagines the Philipian jailor back at his post; Lydia carrying on her textile business; and Erastus somehow combining his job as director of public works with helping Paul.

## 2 We are called to distinctiveness

So we are to be engaged in the global marketplace. But we are to do so as saints in the marketplace. We are those who are called to be holy, which means different or distinctive. The calling to distinctiveness is an essential part of the faith of Old Testament Israel. Israel was to be different from the empire they had left and the culture they were entering (Lev. 18:3-5).

This essential distinctiveness is what holiness actually meant for Israel. It was grounded in the holiness (i.e., the distinctive otherness) of Yahweh, and it was to be worked out ethically in everyday, ordinary, social life. Leviticus 19, beginning with the demand that Israel should be holy as the LORD their God is holy, goes on to articulate a whole range of contexts in which that holy difference is to be seen—contexts that include personal, familial, social, judicial, agricultural, and commercial realms.

### a) Moral distinctiveness

The distinctiveness of God's people in the Bible is not merely religious (we happen to worship a different god from most other people), but ethical (we are called to live by different standards). The twin sayings of Jesus about being salt and light in the world (Mt. 5:13-16) are still crucial insights into what it means to follow Jesus in the marketplace. At least four implications can be discerned.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I know that I owe these points to having heard John Stott preach from this text on many occasions, but cannot at the moment pin-point the book in which he has written them up.

First, if disciples are to be salt and light, then the world must be corrupt and dark. The whole point of the metaphors depends on this contrast. Jesus compares the world to meat or fish that, left to itself, will very quickly become putrid. The primary use of salt in his day was to preserve meat by soaking it in brine, or rubbing salt thoroughly into it. And Jesus compares the world to a room in a house after the sun goes down. It is dark. Lamps have to be lit to avoid damage and danger. So, the world in which we live—the world of the global marketplace—is a corrupt and dark place. That is our starting point, and not terribly surprising in view of all the rest of the Bible's story so far.

Second, disciples have the power to make a difference. Salt and light are active things. They are applied to relevant situations (meat and rooms) in order to change something: to stop putrefaction, to dispel the darkness. Similarly, disciples are intended by God to make a difference to the contexts in which they live and work. Things ought to be less rotten and less dark in any situation where Christians are present. That includes the global marketplace.

Third, both salt and light are penetrative. That is, they have to be 'released' into the environment where they are to make a difference. Salt has to be rubbed vigorously into the meat in order to stave off decay. Light has to be put on a stand where it can confront the darkness. Similarly, disciples must be closely involved in society in order to make any difference to it. We are meant to penetrate, not merely to preach.

Finally, Jesus applies his metaphor

explicitly to practical living, not merely religious devotion or evangelistic witness. The light that is to shine before men is 'your good deeds' (v. 16). So, just as in the Old Testament (where light also has a distinctly ethical dimension, cf Isa. 58), the way disciples are to function as salt and light in society is through ethical distinctiveness.

The Old Testament echoes remind us immediately of Daniel who, we are told, had a 'spirit of excellence' (Dan. 6:3, literally). This is then expanded to include the testimony that he was 'trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent' (6:4). In other words, he was a man of integrity in his public as well as his private life. This surely has to be the key distinctive mark of saints in the marketplace: truth, honesty, trustworthiness.

David, a man after God's heart, knew what was closest to God's heart: 'I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity' (1 Chr. 29:17). God himself, reminding himself of why he had chosen Abraham, states this as the purpose of election and the agenda for mission to the nations.

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him (Gen. 18:19).

And Paul, speaking even to slaves whom one might have thought could be spared any duty of honesty towards their masters, urges them in exactly the same way.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when

their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men (Col. 3:22-23).

Moral integrity means that there is no dichotomy between our private and public personas; between the sacred and the secular in our lives; between what we say and what we do; between what we claim to believe and what we actually practise. This is a major challenge to all believers who live and work in the non-Christian world, and it raises endless ethical dilemmas and often wrenching difficulties of conscience. But it is a struggle that cannot be avoided if we are to function with any effectiveness at all as salt and light in society.

If a piece of meat goes rotten, it is no use blaming the meat. That's what happens when the bacteria do their natural work. The question to ask is, where was the salt? If a house gets dark at night, it's no use blaming the house. That's what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, where is the light?

If society becomes more corrupt and dark, it's no use blaming society. That's what fallen human nature does, left unchecked and unchallenged. The question to ask is, where are the Christians? Where are the saints who will actually live as saints—God's different people—in the marketplace?

### 3 Worldview distinctiveness

But why are Christians supposed to be ethically distinctive in the marketplace? The answer is that we operate from a different worldview—a world-

view based on the biblical revelation of the biblical God. Basically we refuse to idolize the marketplace itself, because we recognize the ultimate, highest reality—God himself. We live by the biblical story, which sets the whole of human life, work, ambitions and achievement (all of them valid and intended) within the context of God's creation, redemption, and future plans. We actually live as if all the points in section 1 above were true—not just philosophical concepts, but life-determining realities.

The Bible is well aware of the temptation to turn work and achievement into an idol—especially when linked to our natural greed (remember that Paul twice equates covetousness with idolatry: break the tenth commandment and you also break the first). As early as Deuteronomy, we hear the yuppy capitalist boast articulated in one verse, and pricked in the next.

You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today (Dt. 8:17-18).

So, in line with all above, we affirm that work has its value and its integral place in what it means to be human. But we also affirm the Sabbath—the climax of God's creative work, by which all our work is intended to find its rest and fulfilment in the enjoyment of God. Work is not the primary fact about life, nor the totality of life. Only God is. With this worldview, God is not an escape from our work, nor a crutch to help us endure it. Rather God is actively involved in all our work in the

marketplace, functioning in all the ways outlined above.

Daniel is our inspiration once more. In the same chapter we are told that he prayed thrice daily with his windows open towards Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10). I believe this was not mere nostalgia. It was not that he was longing to waft away on the wind and go home to Jerusalem. It was rather that he was orientating his life in Babylon by his awareness of the God of Jerusalem. The key to Daniel's worldview lay not in the city that Nebuchadnezzar had built but in the city he thought he had destroyed. He would not be co-opted by the gods or masters (or work colleagues) of Babylon, but, while serving them in the best way possible, he would actually serve the living God of the covenant people. Those windows were open, not to let the prayers of Daniel out, but to let the God of Israel in—into the Babylonian marketplace where Daniel lived the whole of his working life.

*We must ask Christians in the global marketplace: Where does your worldview come from? Not the one you consciously adopt in church, but the one you unconsciously take into the working week? What story are you living out of? What are the temptations that you face of the idolatry of work, greed, envy, ambition and power; and what are you doing to resist them?*

### III The Church and the Marketplace

So far we have been thinking of saints as individuals in the marketplace. But the church, as a corporate entity, has its own role there too.

#### 1 The prophetic task

We are called to the role of the prophet, not just of the chaplain. The marketplace often asks for 'chaplaincy'. That is, they want to hear the comforting sounds of God's assumed approval. So there can be all kinds of Christian equivalents of the old pagan priests and augurs who could check the auspices, and do all the needful rituals to keep the gods happy. Public life can then gleam with the veneer of socially acceptable religious approval. It can be a very thin veneer however. Amos had a thing or two to say about social wrongs that were going on beneath the façade of religious rites.

The people of God are called to maintain a critical distance and to speak on behalf of the independent Divine Auditor. This does not mean we adopt a posture of superiority, for we know our own sinfulness. But it does mean we must offer the voice of evaluation, of critique or approval, according to the standards we learn in God's own revelation. We are to renounce evil and hold fast to what is good, and that calls for minds and hearts attuned to recognize the difference. The church collectively can still perform this prophetic function, though it will also always suffer for doing so—sometimes from the co-opted chaplains of the marketplace themselves.

#### 2 The pastoral task

It is also the function of the church to support those who live their lives daily as saints in the marketplace. Paul tells us that God has given to his church pastors and teachers 'to equip the saints for works of service' (Eph. 4:12). I believe that 'works of service'

here does not just mean Christian activity (ie., church-based ministry or evangelism), but all and any form of service within society as a whole, including the church.

This turns right upside down one of the commonest misconceptions that sadly still permeates the church and cripples its effectiveness. Believe it or not, God did not invent the church to support the clergy. Rather, God gave pastors and teachers to the church in order to equip the saints. People don't go to church on Sundays to support their pastors in their ministry. Pastors go to church on Sunday to support their people in *their* ministry—which is outside the walls of the church, in the world, being salt and light in the marketplace.

The challenge to pastors (and those who train them), therefore, is: are they helping ordinary working Christians to understand the world they live and work in (or just dangling before them the prospect of a better world when they die)? Are they providing biblical teaching, a biblical worldview, for sustaining Christian ethical witness? Are they helping working Christians to wrestle with the ethical issues they face in the workplace, encouraging faithfulness, integrity, courage, and perseverance? In order to exercise such supportive ministry, pastors and teachers in the church themselves need to know the problems and temptations their people face. They need to keep up to date with the realities of the

marketplace and not live in an isolated spiritual bubble.

I remember with sadness the time I spoke to a conference of graduate Christians in India—all of them professional 'lay' people. In the context of teaching about Old Testament ethics, we were discussing the multiple complex problems, of ethics and conscience, which face Indian Christians daily—from bribery and corruption to exploitation and violence. I asked if they were able to talk such things over with their pastors. There was hollow laughter. 'Our pastors never talk, or think, or preach about such things', they said. 'Some of them are involved in that kind of thing themselves anyway.'

#### IV Conclusion

As I said, I speak as a coward, for my working life is not in the secular global marketplace. But I have great admiration and great concern for those who do. They are the Daniels of the present world—or at least, they can and should be. They are the salt and light of the world. What would the world be like if all the millions of Christians who do earn their living in the marketplace were to take seriously what Jesus meant by being salt and light? And what would be the impact evangelistically? These are questions that I hope some others will turn into practical and theological reflection, within the overall ethos and passion of the Lausanne movement.

# Following Jesus as his Community in the Broken World of Ethnic Identity

Dewi Hughes

**KEYWORDS:** *Culture, language, religions, migration, globalisation, urbanisation, ethnic diversity, nation state, unreached people, ethnicity*

## I Defining Ethnicity

This paper arises from a deep conviction that the relationship between the community of the church and the ethnic community has been neglected in evangelical ecclesiology and missiology to the detriment of the church's life and mission. It is a pity that there is no noun such as the French *ethne* so I am going to adopt *ethne* as an English noun for this paper. The following definitions reflect current thinking in the academic world:

a) *Ethne*: This term refers to a type of community that has a majority of the following characteristics: (1) a common proper name; (2) a myth of common ancestry; (3) memories of a com-

mon past; (4) elements of a common culture<sup>1</sup>; (5) a link with a homeland; and (6) a sense of solidarity. Ethnic groups that for various reasons, such as migration, are dispersed in a state that is remote from their homeland are called 'ethnic minorities'.

b) *Nation*: A 'nation' is a 'territorially concentrated' ethnic group. Where nations have been oppressed or marginalized in their ancestral territory they are called 'national minorities' or 'indigenous peoples'.

In light of these definitions, the term 'nation state', implying a state ruling over an individual nation, is almost a complete misnomer. Korea (North and South) and Lesotho are rare examples of states that are almost coterminous with an individual nation.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes language, material culture, customs and religion.

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The overwhelming majority of the world's states have a plurality of ethnes/nations. In many of these multinational or multi-ethnic states one nation or ethne is dominant. The simplest way to illustrate what the definitions mean for an individual state is to look at an example. Since the consultation was in Africa I shall take an African example.

c) Uganda: Fifty ethnes or nations in four major divisions are represented in Uganda. The largest division is the Bantu of the southern half of the country who make up over 60 per cent of the population and represent almost half the ethnes in the country. The largest ethne, Baganda, dominates the area around the capital, Kampala, although they represent less than a fifth of the population of the country. The Bagandans are more than twice as numerous as any other single Bantu ethne although some of them, such as the Bankole, Bakiga and Basoga, number between one and two million.

The second largest division is the Nilotic who are concentrated in the northern half of the country and have around a quarter of the population divided among 18 ethnes including the Iteso, Acholi and Karamajong. The third division, representing only five percent of the population, is the Sudanic ethnes of the northeast but even they are divided into eight ethnes. The final division of around two percent is made up of immigrants from neighbouring countries and also a growing Asian community once again.

Uganda is a fairly typical example of a post colonial state established on the basis of modernist political philosophy under which ethnic identity is considered, at best, a nuisance to be tolerated

and English, the language of the former oppressor, has become the official language of the state.

## II Ethnes in Modern Thought

Modernist historians and political philosophers believe that nation-states emerged in the eighteenth century when Enlightenment political philosophy was put into practice in the formation of the United States of America and post-revolutionary France. But the freedom and equality that these new nation states offered was equality to engage in the political process and freedom to engage in economic activity. Abandoning ethnic diversity, it was believed, was part of the price that had to be paid for this freedom and equality. In the United States, native Americans were denied freedom and equality. In France the Bretons and Basques, for example, who had preserved their identity within the monarchical French state were brutally suppressed by the brotherhood of revolutionaries. The same pattern was adopted as other European states adopted the Enlightenment philosophy. In the United Kingdom there was a renewed move to suppress Irish, Scottish and Welsh identities.<sup>2</sup>

The elimination of ethnic diversity was believed to be altruistic. Diversity was believed to be a hindrance to the development of a democratized and industrialized society that would lead to greater prosperity and happiness for a greater proportion of citizens. Under-

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<sup>2</sup> The suppression of these identities predated the eighteenth century but was given new impetus by modernist political philosophy.

lying this belief was the conviction that people's primary needs are physical and that once people received the material benefits of uniformity they would be more than happy to jettison their ethnic identity. Many succumbed to the pressure but others experienced it for what it really was—oppressive ethnocentric nationalism. This modernist political creed in its left and right manifestations confidently predicted the demise of ethnic identity in the wake of material prosperity. In light of what is happening in the world at the moment both sides are open to the charge of false prophecy.

This was the political creed on which the post-colonial states of the twentieth century were established and that came to dominate the political philosophy of the nineteenth century post colonial states as well. So Uganda's independence was premised on the elimination of ethnic diversity and its failures are often blamed on its ethnocentrism or tribalism. I believe that it is high time to challenge this unbiblical and unchristian philosophy that has caused so much suffering in the world.

### III Contemporary Explosion of Ethnic Consciousness

The need for a critical assessment of the perception of ethnic identity is becoming acute because it is a reality that is showing no signs of going away despite predictions to the contrary. In fact, as globalisation surges ahead, so does the rediscovery of ethnic identity. This is because there are aspects of the culture that is being globalised that encourage the appreciation of diversity.

One aspect is the extreme individualism and relativism of post-modernist culture, which says that there is no religious, political or any other creed that can make universal claims. The individual's freedom to choose any 'creed' is the creed of post-modernity. It is debatable what freedom of choice can mean in the light of genetic and historical endowment or if an individual chooses to identify with a strong collective identity that limits the freedom of others, but this approach undoubtedly opens the door to affirming ethnic diversity. If someone chooses to emphasize their Yoruba or Karen identity then their choice must be respected. People can be what they want to be.

Another aspect is the spiritual-ecological manifestation of post-modernist culture, which has strong links with New Age religion. Having rejected the materialistic meta-narrative of scientism, it has gone on a quest for spiritual reality to the exotic East and the 'primitive' jungle. As a result, the defence of Tibetan identity from the assimilationist policy of China, or of indigenous tribal peoples in the Amazon basin from logging companies, have become popular causes in the part of the world that is driving globalisation. This manifestation of post-modernity sees the preservation of the identity of at least some ethnic groups as essential to the future spiritual and physical well being of humanity.

Thirdly, globalisation is also about a revolution in communications, which is not just about Coca Cola, McDonald's, MTV and Hollywood. When coupled with the growth in education worldwide it makes possible the empowerment of ethnic groups through dissem-

ination of information about their struggles to survive. Knowing that others are facing the same problems is a great encouragement but the communications revolution also makes possible the formation of networks of ethnic groups to defend themselves from the threats against them. An example of this is the way a network of indigenous peoples successfully lobbied the United Nations to begin a process of formulating international law to defend their rights. The drive behind this effort came from Latin American indigenous peoples and Native Americans but the movement could impact the future prospects of the so-called tribal peoples of countries like India, Myanmar and Thailand.

So while globalisation is unquestionably a powerful force for uniformity, the post-modernist view of freedom, the New Age and ecological movement and the communications revolution create a current that is flowing in the opposite direction and makes the climate much more amenable than it was, compared to even ten years ago, to a reassertion of ethnic identity.

The collapse of the communist 'empire', especially in the former USSR and Eastern Europe, has also pushed ethnic identity to the fore. Once Russian domination had been removed, the ethnic consciousness that must have been simmering under the surface is bursting into life again. Moldova, which was seized by Stalin from Romania in 1940 and divided between the Ukraine and a new Moldovan republic, has descended into chaos, which is largely driven by old tensions between its majority Romanian and minority Slavic peoples. The united Russian Federation that

remains faces an uncertain future as a number of its republics demand independence with Chechnya in the forefront. In Eastern Europe Czechoslovakia divided peacefully along ethnic lines into the Czech and Slovak republics but there is continuing tension between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania. Yugoslavia exploded in terrible ethnic conflict that continues to simmer and the Gypsies (Romany) suffer persecution and discrimination throughout the area. The heightened sense of ethnic identity seems set to be a significant factor for the foreseeable future.

#### IV Ethnes in the Biblical Story of God's Mission

The biblical 'book of origins' (Genesis 1-11) ends with an account of the origins of ethnicity in Genesis 10-11:9. Here the existence of ethnic identities is presented as a direct result of the outworking of God's command to the original human beings to multiply and fill the earth.<sup>3</sup> The fulfilling of this command is twice interrupted but God's purpose eventually prevails. The first interruption was the flood that destroyed most of humanity. After the flood God, in his covenant with Noah, reasserts his command to 'be fruitful and increase in number' and 'to multiply on the earth and increase upon it'.<sup>4</sup> The evidence that this command was effective is found in Genesis 10. As the families of Noah's sons became more numerous a process began which has

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<sup>3</sup> Gen. 1:28

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 9:7

persisted ever since. Greater numbers created economic pressure that drove some clans to go in search of a new place where they would be better off. Very early in the history of humanity some even crossed the sea in this search.<sup>5</sup> Distance and geography led to the development of an identity different from that of the place of origin. Consequently, in time distinct peoples come into existence 'spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language'.<sup>6</sup>

The impression that we get from Genesis 10 is that the development of ethnic identities as a result of the spread of human beings over the earth was simply the fulfilment of the divine mandate to Noah and his family after the flood. There is no hint of evil in this development. Then, as soon as the genealogies are finished, we have the story of the Tower of Babel that many have understood to be teaching that the formation of ethnic identities was a judgement of God. But the story of the Tower of Babel is primarily not about the origin of languages, which is one of the features of ethnic identity, but about human wickedness and pride and God's judgement upon it.

The building of the Tower of Babel is the second interruption in the story of the God who ordained the scattering of humanity. We find humanity early in its history after the flood, with one common language, moving east from Ararat until they come to the broad and fertile plain of Mesopotamia. There

they settle down and multiply in numbers and skills as they establish the world's first civilization. Soon they feel that they can usurp the prerogative of God so they set about building a tower reaching to heaven in order to make a name for themselves. In this first attempt to establish an empire, one city seeks to dominate the whole of humanity and in the process usurp a position that belongs only to God. The city and its tower were to be a magnetic centre of power that would keep people from moving apart from each other and filling the earth as God had intended they should.

Seeing that a united humanity with one language would have an endless capacity for rebellion, God confuses their language. This linguistic confusion renders collaboration impossible, so the tower is abandoned and the people scatter 'over the face of the whole earth'. The final outcome is precisely what God had intended for humanity in the first place and the process which we saw at work in Genesis 10 continues. The only conclusion we can draw from reading Genesis 10 and 11 together is that the formation of different ethnic identities is a part of God's providence but, like everything else since the fall, that process is marred by sin.

The rest of the Bible witnesses to God's sovereignty over the destiny of the communities of peoples with common names, history, culture, homeland and sense of solidarity which, in English translations, are called 'nations'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 10:5 'From these the *maritime* peoples spread out....'

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 10:4, cf. vv. 20, 31, and 32.

<sup>7</sup> These biblical 'nations' are usually what modern English would call 'ethnic groups' rather than political communities as is implied in the modern understanding of 'nation'.

Deuteronomy 2:9-12, 19-23 contain what, on first sight, seem like obscure notes about the movements of nations in the area east of the Jordan which the Israelites passed through on their way to the promised land. Chris Wright comments:

These notes unambiguously assert Yahweh's multinational sovereignty. The same God who had declared to Pharaoh that the whole earth belonged to God (Exodus 9:14, 16, 29) had been moving other nations around on the chessboard of history long before Israel's historic exodus and settlement. This universal sovereignty over the nations mattered a great deal to Israel in subsequent centuries as they themselves joined the ranks of the dispossessed. Later prophetic understanding of Yahweh's 'use' of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians as agents of Yahweh's purposes in history is in fact consistent with this deeper theme of God's ultimate, universal direction of the destiny of nations (cf. Deuteronomy 32:8; Jeremiah 18:1-10; 27:1-7).<sup>8</sup>

Two further points need to be made on the basis of passages like Deuteronomy 2. First, it is clear that in the long view nations are not permanent entities. They begin, grow, flourish, decline and die like human beings.<sup>9</sup>

There is no room for the idolatrous totalisation of the nation as happens in ideological nationalism. Second, God has a moral purpose in his dealing with nations. For example, repentance can save a nation from oblivion (Jeremiah 18:7-10; Jonah 3) and one nation can be used by God to punish another nation for its sin. As Deuteronomy 9:4-5 states, the wickedness of the Canaanite nations was a key reason for their expulsion and destruction by the Israelites. Later on the Persians drove the Israelites themselves out of Israel as punishment for their sin.

This does not mean that any nation can adopt a position of judge over other nations on the grounds of inherent moral superiority. All nations are 'bent rods'.<sup>10</sup> There is no biblical justification whatsoever for ideas such as 'manifest destiny', which justified the terrible treatment of native Americans in the United States, or apartheid, which justified the horrible abuse of blacks in South Africa.

In the New Testament two major themes emerge. On the one hand there is the theme of the nations being offered and welcoming the good news of the kingdom of God. This is a continuation of the Old Testament prophetic theme that in the last days the nations would flock to Zion to present their gifts to God.<sup>11</sup> The climax of this process is seen in John's vision of heavenly glory in Revelation 21:24-26. On the other hand, there is the counterpoint theme of the nations conspiring together to destroy the kingdom of God. In Revelation, again echoing Old

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Wright, *New International Biblical Commentary, Deuteronomy* (Carlisle: Pater-noster, 1996), p. 36. Some other passages that make the same point are Deut. 26:19; Job 12:23; Ps. 22:27-8; 47:8; 86:9; Dan. 12:1; Acts 17:26-28.

<sup>9</sup> Paul affirms this in Acts 17:26.

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<sup>10</sup> Wright, *Deuteronomy*, p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> Is. 60:1-11.

Testament prophecy, this is pictured as the battle of Armageddon that ushers in the end of the world. Reconciling these two themes seems impossible. All we can say is that while wars and rumours of wars abound we are yet free to invite the nations to bring their treasures to Zion. The day of the redemption of nations is not passed.

Something needs to be said at this point about the collectivist view of humanity in the Bible that is so alien to our individualistic western culture. The Bible teaches that the meaning and purpose of human life is worked out in the relational context of collectivities—of family, tribe, people, nation, and humanity. In the Old Testament ‘all nations’ is probably the commonest phrase for expressing the whole human race beginning with the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed in Genesis 18:18<sup>12</sup> and ending with the prophecy of the coming of the ‘desired of all nations’ in Haggai 2:7. In the New Testament humanity is divided between the people of God—meaning Israel first and then the church—and *ethnoi*, which is translated by ‘Gentiles’ more often than not but really means ‘nations other than the nation of God’. It follows that Christians have dual citizenship. On one hand, they belong to the heavenly kingdom which is already manifested in Jesus but which is yet to be revealed in all its glory. On the other

hand, they also belong to earthly nations and have a responsibility to ensure that when the kingdom is revealed those nations will be able to make a worthy contribution to the praise of the Lamb.

## V Ethnes in Modern Evangelical Missiology

It is surprising that with the heavy emphasis on unreached people groups in the last few decades there is hardly any evidence of thinking about the significance of the collective identity of the groups that need to be reached with the gospel. Even the deep thinking in evangelical missiology about contextualisation and the significance of culture that could be very helpful in developing a theology of ethnic identity does not seem to have penetrated very deeply into the lifeblood of this movement. There is some evidence of more positive interest in indigenous peoples in the Coalition on the Support of Indigenous Ministries and the World Christian Gathering on Indigenous Peoples. The latter held its sixth meeting in the Philippines on 11-17 September 2006. The following encouraging affirmation of ethnic identity was in the description of the gathering:

Indigenous roots are part of the identity of Filipinos. God will use his church to redeem the Filipinos’ calling to the world, but they need to be free. In many ways Filipino churches are still enslaved to other cultures and ideas. The World Christian Gathering on Indigenous People will make Filipinos look back to their indigenous roots and reclaim their identity and true

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12 Interestingly when this promise was first made to Abraham in Gen. 12:3 it was all the ‘families’ of the earth that would be blessed through him. The term used here could be translated ‘clan’—a collective unit that was bigger than a ‘father’s household’ but smaller than a ‘tribe’.

virtues as Filipinos. This gathering of cultures will provide a venue for all peoples in celebrating their oneness in Christ and rediscovering their uniqueness as a people.

However, there is no coherent biblical view of ethnic identity/nationhood in current evangelical missiology. What I observe is an uncritical acceptance of modernist political philosophy that is contradicted by some missionary practice. The persistent, though not universal, condemnation of 'tribalism' by evangelical leaders in Africa is evidence of acceptance of modernist political philosophy and the continuing drive to translate the Bible into all languages is the key example of missionary practice that cuts right across this philosophy.

In a modern nation state ethnic diversity is supposed to melt away in the warmth of material prosperity. It is not surprising, therefore, that even many Christians see 'tribalism' as the reason why the economic miracle of industrialisation has not happened, resulting in the fact that most African states remain mired in poverty. But the cause of the problem may be modern political philosophy rather than ethnic identity. To say this is not to affirm ethnocentrism but rather to reject it. Ethnocentrism is at the root of the modernist nation state. That is why even in a country like Uganda the state can function only by retaining English as an official language because it finds the residual ethnocentrism of the colonial oppressor more palatable than the ethnocentrism of any one of the Ugandan ethnics.

The evangelical Protestant mission strategy of Bible translation cuts right

across this modernist view of the nation state. This strategy asserts that communicating the gospel in a person's heart language is vital to effective evangelism. Even if pragmatism is the driving force for some missionaries, the act of learning a person's language in order to be able to communicate an important message is recognition of the dignity and significance of a key characteristic of ethnic identity. Committing a language to writing and translating the Bible is incredibly ennobling of ethnic identity. Grammars, dictionaries and books have played a vital part in the formation and survival of ethnics/nations. What Bible translators do is give ethnics, however small, an enhanced possibility of survival and growth into full nationhood!

## VI Globalisation, Urbanisation, and the Ethnic Cauldron of the Contemporary World

The modernist idea that the growth of industrialism will inevitably erode ethnic diversity does contain some truth. Industrialism leads to urbanisation and the city is always a cauldron for mixing ethnic identities. This urban mixing is now happening at an unprecedented rate within states and on an international scale.

A question that arises in view of this reality is whether as Christians we should be committed to preserving the identity of ethnic minorities in cities. By choosing, for whatever reason, to leave their ancestral territory for the industrial city, people are prepared to contemplate a new identity in co-operation with many others who have taken

the same step. That is not to say that, at first, they will not try to preserve their ethnic identity. In fact, historically, people who migrate into the city begin by recreating something of their own community within it. However, as time goes on, the ethnic dividing lines become weaker as a new identity is fashioned in the context of the city.

From a Christian point of view, to respect the difference of ethnic minorities is important from the perspective of mission even in the city. It has been an axiom of evangelical mission strategy for centuries that people are reached more effectively with the gospel in their heart language. The problem in the city, where a variety of ethnic identities live in close proximity to each other, is how to express unity in Christ if diversity is respected.

True reconciliation in Christ will provide opportunity to express difference and unity. One way of doing this would be to encourage ethnic congregations in one church that meets regularly for worship in a common language—which is likely to be the state language of the country where the city is found. Such a policy will have obvious implications for Christian development work as well. There will be a need to understand the ethnic composition of a city and the way groups interrelate to each other generally and as church. Marginalisation, oppression or deprivation may be found to be ethnic issues that need to be tackled in a similar way to the way the marginalisation of an indigenous people is tackled.

With the increasing ease of communication that is leading to an unprecedented movement of people, often across very large distances, there is a growing number of people in the world

who find it difficult to identify with any of the key characteristics of ethnic identity. How can they name the people to whom they belong if their parents and grandparents are from different ethnic roots? Which history is their history? The situation for people of mixed parentage can be further complicated if they are brought up in a country in which neither their parents nor grandparents were brought up. If this is the case, even language and custom become problematic. They may feel that they belong to the country in which they were brought up, although their mother tongue may not be the language of that country. To further complicate matters, some people spend a considerable period of their life in more than one country. It is not surprising that feeling solidarity with any ethnic group becomes a problem. Some people in this situation have come to the conclusion that they have no dominant ethnic identity, that they are citizens of the world and that it is enough to have the name of human being. Some even claim that this is the best way to be human.<sup>13</sup>

Multiethnicity often occurs as a result of inter-ethnic marriage following migration. Such marriages are more common today than they have ever been; in the United States in particular the progeny of such marriages is increasingly resistant to being categorised into one of the five official categories of racial origin—Euro-American, Asian American, African American,

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<sup>13</sup> I suspect that this type of person is strongly represented among evangelical missiologists, which could go some way to explaining the lack of interest in ethnic identity among them.

can, Hispanic and Native American. They want to be Pakistani/African American; Colombian/Scottish/Irish American; Filipino/Italian/Russian American etc.<sup>14</sup> From a biblical perspective this is not at all surprising because migration into a new place is one of the key reasons for the development of new identities. The picture that we have of people scattering in the early history of humanity was more a case of families, clans or tribes moving and growing a different identity. But in a world with a vastly bigger population, there is no reason why people from different families, clans and tribes should not gather to the same place to establish a new identity. It is such a process that can be observed happening in the United States, although 'American' in each identity listed above indicates that what happens in the United States is assimilation into a dominant 'American-English' identity.

However, the long hand of ethnic history continues to have quite a hold over a great many people. Every year many Americans make the pilgrimage to Europe in search of their roots and rejoice when they find them. In fact it can be argued that ethnic memory has a significant impact in many of the trouble spots in the world. So North Americans of Irish extraction provided substantial support for the IRA, immigrants of Indian extraction in various countries are generous supporters of

the BJP in India, the Sikh separatist movement is largely funded by Sikh's living in Europe and the Tamil Tigers receive financial support from Tamils in Norway. Our ethnic past is not something that is easy to deny. Of course, this can be used to a beneficial as well to a maleficent end. This is precisely what western organisations are seeking to do as they encourage people of Asian origin living in the West to support holistic Christian mission in their countries of origin.<sup>15</sup>

## VII Ethnicity, Mission and the Church: Suggestions for Further Discussion

1. If the modernist view of ethnic identity is biblically inadequate, the way in which the church is viewed in multi-ethnic states (i.e., the overwhelming majority of nation-states) may need to be revised. Particularly in centralised churches there may be the need to affirm ethnic diversity by giving more autonomy to churches in ethnically defined territories. Ethnic bias will need to be taken into consideration when making church appointments. An ethne's language may need to be promoted as the language of worship and Christian education. The church may need to put pressure on government to educate children generally in their mother tongue. Church development departments will need to be con-

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<sup>14</sup> These are real examples. See S. Cornell and D. Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks/London/Delhi: Pine Forge Press, 1998), p. 240.

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<sup>15</sup> Though I did not use it in writing this section, parts of the following volume cover the same ground and come to similar conclusions: Stephen Castles, *Ethnicity and Globalization* (London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000).

scious of the fact that there is often an ethnic element to poverty.

2. The unreached people group movement is to be commended because its brief embraces the aim that every ethne should have a church. But the movement needs a more adequate theology of ethnic identity because establishing a church in an ethne can have a profound impact on the way in which an ethne perceives itself. If establishing a church in an ethne helps to create a greater sense of nationhood, what should (a) the church and (b) the mission agency do when that leads to a desire for greater political self determination on the part of the ethne? The desire for greater self determination may initially be expressed in a desire to have a voice where decisions are taken that affect their lives.

3. Ethnicity is a portable social reality. Migration has always been a human reality but colonialism and urbanization—linked to industrialisation—have made it a defining characteristic of our time. Every large city will have a number of ethnic minorities. There are a number of issues that need to be considered arising from this multicultural and multiethnic situation:

- a) Where there are enough people from a particular ethne that are already Christian, it is common for them to want to live and worship within their own identity. This raises the question of how they are to relate to other Christians even in the same denomination.
- b) How to balance the affirmation of unity and diversity in multiethnic churches. Should a church encourage worship in different languages and if so how?
- c) How to manage the very strong

feeling towards the territory/country of origin among migrant communities? This could be a great asset in integral mission.

4. There is a global dimension to the antipathy towards ethnic diversity that is found in the modernist concept of the nation state. Both the right (free market capitalism) and the left (Marxism) see a uniform world culture as desirable for the wellbeing of humanity. Free market capitalism is in total ascendancy at the moment and its globalisation is daily making cultural uniformity a greater reality. This domination of the world by the Anglo-American ethne is undoubtedly the most powerful expression of empire since Babel. What is the church to make of it? As with the early church and the Roman Empire, it provides an opportunity to spread the gospel message. But it is important to remember that in doing this we are riding a tiger that can easily turn on us and devour us. I would say that prosperity teaching, especially as it manifests itself in Africa, is an example of what it means to be devoured by the tiger.

The church must not buy into the philosophy that diversity is bad. We must remember that God's people were the least of all the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:7), and that our Lord belonged to that nation and probably spoke Aramaic only, although some have argued that he may have had some Greek. What is undeniable is that he belonged to a marginalized ethne that had very little significance in the world power structures of his day. This fact alone should spur us on as Christians to preserve the little ethnics of the world so that their wisdom can be released for the blessing of all.

# Following Jesus in Contexts of Power and Violence

Jonathan Bonk

**KEYWORDS:** *Christendom, globalization, culture wars, warfare, defence, military spending, nationalism, missionary church, suffering, democracy*

## I Followers of Jesus and Christendom.

Any traveller knows that in order to get to a given destination, one must know one's present location. To be 'lost' makes arrival at any desired destination a matter of highly implausible chance. I begin the task at hand, then, by locating North American Christianity and its missionary expressions within the terra firma of Christian history. Much of what passes for 'Christianity' in the West issues from *Christendom*—the religious-political mutant conceived when the Body of the *self-giving Christ* became conjoined with the power of the *self-serving state*.

From its Jewish and Gentile genesis as related in Acts of the Apostles, the church engaged in spontaneous and aggressive proclamation, with a view to converting men and women to belief

in the risen Lord, and to a new way of life described by Luke in Acts 2:42-47. In its earliest days as a Jerusalem-based Jewish sect, the church offered converts teaching, fellowship, prayer, miracles, and a common life, and—in the words of St. Luke—'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved' (Acts 2:47). From the end of the first century the church grew by half a million in each generation so that by the time of Constantine's conversion in 312 AD, Christians constituted a demographically significant proportion of the imperial population.<sup>1</sup> In the words of McMullen, 'No other new cult anywhere nearly approached the same success. It can only be called extraordinary.... [The Christian credo] was presented in sharply yes-or-no, black-and-white, friend-or-foe terms; and those were

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 86, 109-110.

unique.... Belief in no other God but Yahweh entailed an obligation to speak in his praise and win over other worshippers to his service.... Urgency, evangelism, and the demand that the new believer deny the title of god to all but one, made up the force that alternative beliefs could not match.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, this growth occurred in the face of often formidable disincentives. Alan Kreider—mindful of the sporadic, sometimes lethal persecution that awaited converts to the Christian faith—observes that ‘if one wanted a soft life, or to get ahead in respectable circles, one did not become a Christian’.<sup>3</sup> Conversion to Christianity was the sure road to marginality.<sup>4</sup>

With the conversion of Constantine, however, *Christianity* mutated into *Christendom*—the great-grand sire of what is today known as ‘The West’—a civilization in which Christian religious dominance was achieved by social, legal, and violent compulsions.<sup>5</sup> Between the Edict of Milan in AD 313 and Justinian’s edict of AD 529, Christianity’s status in the Empire evolved from being one among several equally legitimate religious options, to being the only legal public cult in AD 392. Pagan worship was increasingly marginalized, stigmatized, and finally for-

bidden. Having moved from the margins of society to its centre, the *other* way became the *only* way.<sup>6</sup>

It is to Christendom that the missionary movement from the West must trace the still prevalent assumption that Christian mission is ‘out there somewhere’—anywhere but in Europe or in its cultural-political progeny, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>7</sup> This notion—despite deeply regrettable flaws, lapses, self-serving wars, and various genocides that were and continue to be such a conspicuous dimension of the western story—is implicit and even explicit in many contemporary western evangelical churches, which find it well nigh impossible to disentangle their *Christian identities* from their deep *nationalistic conditioning*.

That economic, political, and military domination should generate self-confidence, assertiveness, and illusions of superior virtue on the part of those whom they most directly benefit is a truism. A mere century ago, Europe dominated all of Africa, the entire Middle East except for Turkey, and most of the Asian subcontinent. The 35 percent of the earth’s surface controlled by Europeans when Carey sailed for Serampore had grown to 84 percent by 1914. The British Empire, encompassing 20 million subjects spread over 1.5 million square miles in

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2 MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, pp. 109-110.

3 Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1995), p. 6.

4 Eduardo Hoornaert, *The Memory of the Christian People*, trans. R. R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 81.

5 Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 8, 47.

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6 Alan Kreider, ed., *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh and New York: T & T Clark, 2001), pp. 22-24. See also Robert Lewis Wilkin, *Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

7 Kreider, ed., *The Origins of Christendom in the West*, p. x.

1800, engulfed 390 million people inhabiting 11 million square miles one century later.<sup>8</sup> All of this was accomplished and sustained through violence. Yet in missionary thinking, this domination was both inevitable and happily providential, despite its regrettable brutality.

If the agendas and outspoken confidence of nineteenth century missionaries grates on our twenty-first century sensibilities, any newfound western modesty seems to be largely cosmetic, a façade fashioned from sheer forgetfulness, selective memory, and self-delusion—materials requisite to the fabrication of the flattering wardrobes of national mythologies. The fact is that many of the impulses that motivated nineteenth century missionaries continue to animate modern secularized societies. Western society is, it seems, intrinsically missionary, absolutizing its way of life and its institutions and driving globalization by proclaiming the good news of Mammon to the uttermost parts of the earth—especially to those parts with commodities and markets deemed useful in sustaining the steadily escalating, consumption-driven entitlements of its ageing populations.

The conflict between Islamic fundamentalism and the West, Samuel Huntington rightly observes, is rooted in irreconcilable values at the very heart of two civilizations. ‘The problem for Islam,’ he says, ‘is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose

people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world.’<sup>9</sup> It was western missionaries who would be the first to realize and point out the deeply flawed nature of their own Christendom civilizations, as I have elsewhere observed:

The Great War of 1914-18... plunged the ‘Christian’ nations into one of the bloodiest and most meaningless paroxysms of state-sanctioned murder in humankind’s history.... for European missionaries, the war exposed the naïveté of missionary apologetics. Missionaries were unable to offer any credible rejoinder to the charge that the West neither believed nor practiced what the Bible actually taught....

.... Although old Christendom’s claim to moral superiority had been exposed as a farce, it would take some time before U.S. missionaries began to reach similar conclusions about their own nation. But within the fifty years following the Second World War, profound uncertainty arose concerning the moral legitimacy of America’s global economic and military modus operandi, fueled by the nation’s ethically indefensible and militarily disastrous escapades in Central America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Only now, when it may be too late, have Christians on this continent—for long seeing nothing amiss in the

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 51.

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<sup>9</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, pp. 217-218.

unholy union between personal piety and blind nationalism—begun to sense the nation's precarious position. U.S. Christians, at least in some quarters, seem increasingly troubled by the thought that their nation may be on its way to joining the long list of expired empires, each blinded by hubris, deluded by self-absorption, addicted to exploitation, and—if need be—determined to wreak destruction on those who stand in its way.<sup>10</sup>

The challenge for Christians in general, and for missionaries in particular, continues to be how to follow their Lord faithfully in their time and contexts, resisting the siren allure of human systems so fatally addicted to self-interest, frequently to the point of shedding the blood of those who stand in their way. The foremost and seemingly intractable issue that confronts and may well engulf many churches and missions throughout the third millennium is the *clash of civilizations*.

## II The Clash of Civilizations

The 'clash of civilizations' to which I refer is not the incessant current preoccupation of our fear-driven western media. Since God's people are primarily obligated to speak *to* and *about* the sins and moral failures of *their own* peoples, rather those of strange peoples in far away lands, let me propose that the mortal struggle engaging western Christians today is not between Islam

and old Christendom, or between theocracy-oriented societies on the one hand, and commercially-driven secular oligarchies, on the other, although these are indeed struggles of tectonic proportions in our contemporary world. The greater struggle by far is between the followers of Jesus—whatever the nation state or kingdom in which they happen to have been born—and their own cultures.

### 1 Old Christendom's habitual recourse to violence

Since Christendom has from its earliest beginnings been so ethically and morally antithetical to the spirit and teaching of Christ, it would be a simple matter to do nothing more than provide a catalogue of its short-comings, a brief summary of which can be found in Paul's letter to the Colossians 3:5-10. Behaviour forbidden to individuals typically characterizes nation states. Even something as rudimentary as an apology is all but impossible in the discourse of nation states. But in this essay I will focus on only one of the most conspicuously anti-Christian characteristics of the society that still sends out more missionaries than any other.<sup>11</sup> The nation that is more con-

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Bonk, 'Edinburgh 1910: Friendship and the Boundaries of Christendom,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (October 2006), pp. 1-2.

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<sup>11</sup> According to the latest numbers available, full-time foreign mission personnel in 2007 number approximately 453,000. A great majority of these still come from the old and the new lands of Christendom. Eleven countries send out more than ten thousand foreign missionaries each. See David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, 'Missiometrics 2007: Creating Your Own Analysis of Global Data,' in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 25-32.

spicuously, self-consciously, and professedly 'Christian' than any other—sending out almost a third of all Christian missionaries in the world today—is a violent nation. This is not to suggest that the United States is the most brutal nation in the history of empires! Even if that were true—and a plausibly convincing case could be made, given the scientific and technological amplification of violence in the form of nuclear and hydrogen bombs that have only ever been used to obliterate civilian populations—that is not the point of this paper. The question under consideration has to do with the clash of civilizations: How do followers of the *self-giving King* live faithfully in the world's *self-serving states*?

Ever since Cain murdered Abel, human beings have been unable to resist the siren call of violence—particularly the lethal violence called war, sanctioned and pursued at every known level of human political and ethnic organization—as a means to accomplishing a greater good. That the last century has been the bloodiest in humanity's long history of violence is commonplace knowledge. *War is a force that gives us meaning*, war correspondent Chris Hedges concluded,<sup>12</sup> echoing ethicist Jonathan Glover in *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*.<sup>13</sup> Glover shows on a case-by-case basis how human moral integrity can be and apparently always has been systematically and inexorably eroded,

enabling and even compelling ordinary, decent men and women to abandon objective truth and slide into self-deception and brutality, with bogus ends serving to justify murderous means. Christians since Constantine—when following Jesus was no longer essential to self identification as a Christian—have been as susceptible to this as anyone else. Followers of Jesus who are closely associated with power and privilege have almost always rejected—practically speaking—their Lord's calling to *endure* suffering, rather than *inflict* it.

In 'Wars and Genocides of the 20th Century', Piero Scaruffi estimates that 160 million people died in wars during the 20th century alone.<sup>14</sup> Having deliberately precipitated the world's most savage civil war since 1945, the United States now serves as an unwilling metaphor for the ultimate impotence of brute power. Blinded by their own hubris when they launched the war that was to bring 'democracy' to the Middle East, America's political leaders now look on helplessly as the mightiest military power in the history of the world tries to muddle its way out of a Kafkaesque nightmare that threatens to spread chaos and carnage throughout countries in the region.<sup>15</sup> In Iraq today, a country of some 29 million people, more than one hundred Iraqis are dying each day from

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<sup>12</sup> Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

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<sup>14</sup> See also 1900: A century of genocides: <http://www.scaruffi.com/politics/massacre.html> and <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/NOTE5.HTM>

<sup>15</sup> See Niall Ferguson, 'A War to Start All Wars', in *The Atlantic* (January/February 2007), pp. 27-28.

internecine violence. As Christian Caryl observed in a review, ‘In a country of America’s population, the equivalent losses would be a little more than 1,000 per day—or roughly two September 11 massacres per week.’<sup>16</sup>

## 2 Violence and neo-Christendom

I write as a follower of Jesus living in the United States, a nation whose economic reach and military power is unparalleled. I write as a deeply compromised beneficiary of this nation’s militaristic self-absorption, ostensibly a ‘Christian’ nation, a majority of whose citizens attend church and believe Jesus to be the resurrected son of God. Christians in this nation both contribute to and directly benefit from a way of life that was born in violent resistance to God-ordained authority, expanded in the genocidal occupation of a continent, enriched through the forced labour of tens of millions of enslaved Africans, and maintained by both use and the threat of lethal violence—including nuclear—against civilian populations.

That this nation has ever since been deeply and tragically complicit in many of the world’s recent wars is not surprising, since its entrenched economic, political, military interests and institutions are served and preserved by violence. Were the United States to halt all weapons-related research, manufacturing, and sales; were it to close

down its 750 plus military bases around the world;<sup>17</sup> were it to withdraw its advisors and resources from the proxy-wars and insurgencies being waged here and there around the world; millions of ordinary American families, communities, businesses, and research centres would be ruined, the nation’s economy would slide into recession, and social calamity would be assured. History is like a lobster trap. There is no escape from a national DNA that is violent at its very core. Self-righteous posturing provides only the thinnest, tragic-comical, façade for the troublingly stark underlying reality.<sup>18</sup> At over one trillion dollars in annual expenditure—an incomprehensible figure that continues to rise—global military spending and arms trade surpass all other categories of global spending.<sup>19</sup> The figures are astounding:

- 2005 global military expenditure reached \$1,118 billion, fully 2.5 per cent of world GDP or an average of \$173 per human being;
- World military expenditure in 2005 increased 3.4 per cent over 2004, and 34 per cent since 1996;
- Accounting for 43 per cent of global military expenditure, the USA is

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<sup>17</sup> See Chalmers Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> See David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> The summary is from chapter 8 of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SPIRI)’s 2006 *Year Book on Armaments, Disarmament and International Security for 2005*.

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<sup>16</sup> Christian Caryl, ‘What About the Iraqis?’ a review of four recent books on the war in Iraq in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. LIV, No. 1 (January 11, 2007), pp. 36-39.

the principal determinant of current world trends;

- American military spending, at \$420 billion, dwarfs that of other high spending countries, including China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Japan, and France—each ranging from 6 to 4 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

### 3 Neo-Christendom's grand illusion<sup>21</sup>

Of course, like all empires before it, the United States will not endure beyond God's sovereign purposes. Indeed, some believe that the nation may now be on a collision course with economic, social, and perhaps military, disaster.<sup>22</sup> The figures provided by the U.S. Department of Defense, above do not include: (i) \$16.4 billion spent on nuclear weapons by the Department of Energy in 2006; (ii) \$41 billion in outlays by the Department of Homeland Security for the defence of the country; (iii) or \$68 billion spent by the Department of Veterans Affairs for lifetime care of seriously wounded soldiers. Nor do they include the billions of dollars spent each year by the Department of State to finance foreign arms sales and militarily related 'development', or the undisclosed amount spent by the

Treasury Department on pensions to military retirees, widows, and their families. Economist Robert Higgs estimates that in 2002 the Treasury spent \$138.7 billion in interest payments alone to cover past debt-financed defence outlays—a figure likewise missing from the tallies above. More recent figures—bound to be significantly higher—are not available.<sup>23</sup> Economist Joseph Stiglitz and public affairs specialist Linda Bilmes estimate that the five year cost to America of running its wars around the world, today most notably in Iraq and Afghanistan, is \$2 trillion—or an average of \$18,000 per household. Virtually the entire amount is borrowed.

The Bible makes it clear that when it comes to nations and empires, *the writing is always on the wall*. Once a powerful nation has served God's divine purposes, it inevitably suffers the consequences of its delusional pride and self-serving obsessions. America's self-projection as innocent redeemer nation is no more delusional than the self-congratulating myths common to all empires. America's reliance on brute military power as a legitimate means to global domination is now conspicuously playing out, with tragic short-term results and disastrous long-term inevitabilities. Seemingly equating absolute destructive power with supreme virtue, America's self-serving goals have for the last fifty years been increasingly pursued 'by means of internationally illegal, unilat-

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<sup>20</sup> Source: U.S. Military Spending vs. the World, *Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation*, February 6, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Dorrien, 'Grand Illusion: Costs of war and empire', in *Christian Century* (December 26, 2006), pp. 26-29.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of America's perennial involvement in violence, see James Carroll, *House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006).

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<sup>23</sup> See Chalmers Johnson, 'Republic or Empire? A National Intelligence Estimate on the United States', in *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. 314, No. 1880, p. 66.

eralist, and preemptive attacks on other countries, accompanied by arbitrary imprisonments and the practice of torture, and by making the claim that the United States possesses an exceptional status among nations that confers upon it special international responsibilities, and exceptional privileges in meeting those responsibilities'. Given this deeply engrained national conceit, 'It is something like a national heresy to suggest that the United States does not have a unique moral status and role to play in the history of nations...'<sup>24</sup>

This, then, is the civilization with which faithful followers of Jesus in the west must quietly but determinedly clash. Whatever their nationality, Christians should mark the ease with which personal identities blend with competing nationalisms to produce 'Christianized' but thoroughly idolatrous mutants that wrap both faith and fate in a nation's flag. The United States is not an exceptionally evil nation, but as an extraordinarily powerful one, its share of the manifest evil resident in all nation states is hugely amplified and globally conspicuous. Furthermore, as a fundamentally oligarchic 'democracy', touting and imposing itself as an exemplar of virtue among the nations, its predominantly 'Christian' citizenry must be held to the higher judgment of the One whom they

publicly laud as King of kings and Lord of their everyday lives.

#### 4 New Testament context of domination and coercive violence

Most of the New Testament's books and letters were, it is helpful to recall, written by persons who were at the mercy of the irresistible brutality of Imperial Rome. Philo of Alexandria describes Pilate as 'a man of inflexible, stubborn, and cruel disposition', whose tenure was characterized by 'venality, violence, robbery, assault, abusive behavior, frequent executions without trial, and endless savage ferocity' (*Leg* 30102).<sup>25</sup> It is safe to assume that Pilate was neither better nor worse than his peers. We can be reassured, therefore, that Jesus and New Testament authors offer trustworthy guidance to Christians the world over who either suffer from violence, or who are tempted to advocate, support, or excuse violence because of its imagined short-term or long-term benefits. If there is one overarching emphasis within the biblical accounts of the nations and kingdoms scattered across the several millennia represented in its pages, it is that God is sovereign in the affairs of kingdoms and nations.

Given our enlightenment-conditioned sensibilities, and our deep thrall to the self-flattering myths of our western nations' formations in violence and genocide, it is oddly disquieting that New Testament writers appear to be

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<sup>24</sup> William Pfaff's essay, 'Manifest Destiny: A New Direction for America', in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. LIV, No. 2 (February 15, 2007), pp. 54-59 provides a helpful overview and assessment of the way 'manifest destiny' is used to justify American intervention and interference in the affairs of other nation states.

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (OUP 2005), pp. 60-61, citing Helen K. Bond.

uninterested in advocating violent insurrection against undesirable regimes, or in making the survival of Rome a cause worth either living or dying for. What is clear, however, is that followers of Jesus, like their prophetic predecessors in the Old Testament, regarded God's absolute sovereignty as a given, with *all* nations and kingdoms owing their existence and duration solely to God's providential will. This left them free to get on with the unique work to which they had been called and for which they had been equipped as Kingdom citizens.

Devout Jews in first century Judea and Galilee could respond to Roman rule in one of four ways, none of which needs be either idealized or stigmatized: (a) acceptance of and full cooperation with Roman rule; (b) acceptance of Roman rule, with the prerogative to question or even challenge the justice or appropriateness of its actions; (c) nonviolent rejection of Roman rule; and (d) violent rejection of Roman rule. Those electing for full cooperation with Roman rule could cite Joseph, Ezra, and Nehemiah as faithful examples; those whose cooperation with Rome was tempered by a willingness to challenge or question its policies could cite Queen Esther and Daniel as their exemplars; both of these could be seen interpreting and applying to their own situation the teaching of Jeremiah for those who found themselves in continuing exile; still others, choosing the path of nonviolent resistance, may have invoked Eleazar and the mother with seven sons—all of whom died, rather than obey Antiochus Euphrosyne—as their example; and finally, those electing for violent resistance could find easy

inspiration in the examples of Judith and of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers.<sup>26</sup>

Biblical teaching does not concern itself with the shifting forms of human political systems, but is always concerned with the purposes for which those power structures have been divinely ordained. All human powers and superpowers, whether they acknowledge it or not, are under the judgment of God, and operate within God's timetable. It is the obligation of God's people to remind their own political rulers of this overlooked or ignored fact—*implicitly*, by how they live, and *explicitly*, by how they speak. 'Powers and superpowers are allowed to exist, and may even be approved, but they are always on notice. Biblical tradition is utterly opposed to the absolutizing of governmental authority (Dan. 3:4-6!) or to the exercise of that authority without concern for those who are subject.'<sup>27</sup> The governing authorities have a job to do, and the writers of the New Testament expect them to do it.

Even the book of Revelation is not so concerned with the evils of a despotic regime, as with the *idolatry* that is advocated in the name of the regime. The object of John's attack on Rome is not the idea of empire, but the claim by empire or emperor to be ultimately sovereign. The sin of idolatry is what John is concerned about, and it is a sin to which all human beings caught up in self-absorption of ethnic identity or the furies of nationalism are prone. Such preoccupations lead inevitably to reductionist anthropologies that place

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26 Bryan, *Render to Caesar*, pp. 34-45.

27 Bryan, *Render to Caesar*, pp. 125ff.

oneself and one's own kind at the centre, with everyone else—especially enemies—on the margins. This is not the spirit of Christ, but of anti-Christ.

### III Following Jesus in a World of Violent Conflict.

Can followers of Jesus today—including both citizens and beneficiaries of neo-Christendom—be faithful to their primary identities as citizens of God's kingdom? Is there any difference between Christians and atheists who kill at the behest of their political or military leaders, from the standpoint of the men and women and boys and girls whose lives they destroy? Does a baby or its parents care whether the pilot who drops napalm is a devout Sunday school teacher or an agnostic? Does it really make a difference that it was Christians rather than atheists who designed, manufactured and deployed the bomb that slowly incinerated its infant victims?

After Israel's phosphorus bombing of a hospital in Beirut, for example, several babies in the blasted maternity ward had to be put into a big bucket of water in order to douse the flames. When the nurse took them out half an hour later, they were still burning.<sup>28</sup> Should care givers be thankful that this injury was done by a son of Abraham? How can Christians deliberately injure or kill others—especially their enemies—given what Jesus taught his

disciples? Is it possible for Christians to defy the usually irresistible magnetism of ethnicity and nationality in contexts of war and violence? Given what we know about our Lord, and about his followers in the first and second centuries AD, and his persecuted post-Christendom followers around the world today, the answer to both questions must be a resounding 'yes!'

## IV Case Studies

### 1 Mizoram—A missiology of the state

In these politically-charged times, it is instructive to note how church leaders and members reacted when, on February 20, 1987, following twenty years of rebellion spearheaded by the Mizo National Front (MLF), Mizoram was formally absorbed into greater India as the country's twenty third full fledged state. The story of the key role played by the churches in negotiating the eventual political settlement is instructive indeed, ensuring both the cultural integrity and the missionary dynamism of Mizo churches. So thoroughly have the Mizo churches incarnated their Lord's missionary impulse that they have interpreted their political subservience to a predominantly Hindu nation as God's way of bringing the gospel to India, since they now require neither passports nor visas to freely evangelize anywhere in the sub-continent.<sup>29</sup> One can only imagine what

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), is a book filled with the horrors of modern war. See also Chris Hedges, *What Every Person Should Know About War* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2003).

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<sup>29</sup> The key role played by the Presbyterian Church is related by Lalngurauna Ralte in his chapter, 'The Church and Political Developments in Mizoram', on pp. 33-39 of *The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram*.

would happen if the demons of nationalism to which we humans are so susceptible were displaced by such a missionary spirit in all Christians!

In 2004-2005, the Overseas Ministries Study Center was home to three Mizoram missionaries, representing some 1,355 fully supported workers serving with the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod Mission Board (SMB), which in turn is supported by the 445,303 member-strong Mizoram Presbyterian Church.<sup>30</sup> Given the state's annual per capita income of approximately 6,000 Rupees (\$132 dollars), how can such a small, relatively poor church provide for so many missionaries? The short answer is that the entire church is 'missional'. If 'the church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning', as Emil Brunner famously insisted, then the Mizoram church is very much alive, sparing neither effort nor ingenuity in pursuing its mission mandate. Indeed, they 'consider the task of proclaiming the Gospel as their responsibility as a nation'.<sup>31</sup> In 2003, Mizoram Presbyterians gave Rs. 154,120,823 (\$3.4 million U.S.) to mission work.

How could this be possible? Since 1913, in a practice known as *buh-fai tham*, mission-minded women set aside a handful of rice when they prepare morning and evening meals. This rice is regularly collected from each

household and sold at an auction, with proceeds going to the SMB. In 2003, the 'handful of rice' offerings raised almost \$1,000,000 for missions. Similarly, sticks of firewood are set aside from each load that is delivered to a home, and children are encouraged to forage for firewood. The wood is then contributed to the 'mission firewood pile' on Sunday mornings.

Churches in rural areas frequently dedicate entire gardens, farms, and teak plantations to missions, while their urban counterparts open small shops and tea stalls. The human time and effort necessary to run such enterprises is provided by volunteers, with all profits going to support missions. Some churches construct buildings, with rental revenues going entirely to the mission fund. A high percentage of church women practise imaginary field visits, praying and collecting the amount of money that it would take to actually travel to the selected mission field, with resulting monies going to SMB mission funds. A significant number of churches have even sacrificed their lavish Christmas feasts, celebrating, rather, the joy of diverting the money towards missionary support. Some church members, especially women, miss one meal a week, donating the value of that meal to the mission fund. And, finally, church members practise tithing, giving a minimum of 10 percent of their monthly income to the church. Tithers designate their offerings for one of four options, two of which are mission-related.

One of our residents, Mrs. Vanlal Thalmi, had served as headmistress of the Mizoram Presbyterian synod's Karimganj mission high school in Assam for the children of middle-class

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30 The 2003 report of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod Mission Board is available on CD-ROM from Rev. Zosangliana Colney, Secretary, Synod Mission Board, Synod Office, Aizawl, Mizoram 796001. Email: zosangc@yahoo.com

31 Zari Malsawma, 'The Mizos of Northeast India', p. 3.

Hindus and Muslims since 2000. Unabashedly Christian, each year the school features a Christmas pageant by the students. The event attracts parents and relatives of the performers, who gather to watch the re-enactment of the advent of our Lord. In December 2003, more than 10,000 people attended the final night of the pageant, watching, spellbound, as their Hindu and Muslim children played out the drama of Mary, Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, and the wise men on a stage at the front of the huge circus tents that had been procured just for this occasion, the local civic centre having several years ago become too small. Since seating had been provided for only 8,000 people, thousands had to stand. Following the play, Rev. D. K. Sarkar of Calcutta, a forceful Bengali-speaking evangelist, preached for almost an hour, concluding with an appeal to which more than 1,000 people responded by coming forward.<sup>32</sup>

## 2 Sokreaksa Himm—Cambodia: A theology of forgiveness

Four years ago a small paperback book, *The Tears of my Soul* (Monarch Books 2003), arrived in my mail. The story begins in the town of Siemreap in Cambodia, where Reaksa (the more familiar form of the author's name) pursued a happy childhood together with his large middle-class family. His

father, a teacher, provided a high standard of living for his family, and all was well until the country was taken over by communists.

When the Khmer Rouge came to power in Cambodia in 1975, they instituted a program to remove all western influences from the country, killing all political and military members of the former regime, and evacuating all cities and towns. Urban areas had been the last to come under *Khmer Rouge* control, and they believed that all city dwellers had been corrupted by western capitalists, so they moved them into the jungles to 'purify' them by hard physical work. Intellectuals, teachers, and professional people were particularly at risk. Reaksa was eleven years old when his family was forcibly moved out of their home and his happy childhood ended.

What he lived through in the next two years is unimaginable to most North Americans. His family endured near starvation and a lack of medical help as they attempted to learn how to subsist in a jungle encampment. Members of his family were tortured almost to death, living in continual fear for their lives. Finally, in 1977, the entire family was marched out to a mass grave and murdered with hoes, axes, and knives. Reaksa survived by lying still under the bodies of his brothers and sisters until the killers went to find more victims. Climbing out of the grave, he escaped into the jungle where he was eventually befriended by a local villager and managed to survive until Vietnam defeated the *Khmer Rouge* in 1979. Only one sister who had married and moved to a different town survived the ordeal.

Having been forced to endure the

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<sup>32</sup> The pageant is performed annually on three successive nights, December 22, 23, and 24. During the day, teams of Christian evangelists and musicians fan out into the villages and countryside, singing, preaching, and inviting people to the event. (Source: Mizo missionary Mrs. Vanlalthawmi).

prolonged torture of his ten-year-old brother, the abuse and slaughter of his family, and having suffered this himself, he was broken and disfigured emotionally. How could he escape the recollection of all this, and of the mass grave into which they—and he, seemingly dead—had been dumped in 1977? After spending five years in a Cambodian refugee camp in Thailand—where he first encountered Christians—he was rejected by American immigration officials. Deeply discouraged, he prayed, ‘God, if you exist, take me to Canada and I will believe in you.’ His prayer was answered, and in May of 1989 he arrived in Toronto, where he was taken to the World Vision Reception Center. Deeply impressed by the practical goodness and kindness of the World Vision staff, he was converted, and baptized in June 1990. Following graduation from Tyndale College in 1993, he came to Providence Seminary, graduating with his MA in 1996. While at Providence Seminary, he would sometimes come into my office and would sit, speechless, and cry.

In 1999, Sokreaksa returned to Cambodia as a missionary. Over the years, his insatiable lust for revenge miraculously metamorphosed into a deep longing to forgive his family’s killers. He wrote to those of us who knew him, asking us to pray that he might find his family’s killers, so that he could meet each one of them and forgive them, in the name of Christ.

In a June 7, 2003 email he reported his discovery that three of his family’s murderers had been killed; one was psychologically deranged; and the others resided in villages some distance from where he lived. He made preparations to visit one survivor, and on June

14 made the journey to complete the hard work of forgiveness. ‘I met one of my family’s killers’, he wrote; ‘I gave the man the Bible and I read Luke 23:34 for him, and told him that I have forgiven him. He was so nervous, but then, he felt the joy of hearing the message of forgiveness.... I gave him my shirt as a symbol of my forgiveness, a scarf representing my love for him, and a Bible, representing the message of hope and forgiveness for him.’

Attached to the email were photographs of Sokreaksa embracing his family’s mortal enemy. ‘I thank God for giving me a spirit of peace to forgive my family’s killers’, he wrote five days later. ‘He was trembling when he first saw me. But after that he was filled with joy. I am feeling great now. After the rain, the sky becomes clear.... I have done a difficult job that not many people can do. I thank God for giving me strength to face this difficult task. I am now finding a way to help dig two wells for the people there.’

## V Following Jesus as victims of power and violence: lessons from the case studies.

- Both are reminders of who we are, why we are here, and how we should live out our days in relationship to our friends and our enemies.
- Both in their own way remind us that Christian treatment of others—especially enemies—is unique, and that suffering for the sake of the gospel is an integral element of our calling. Followers of Jesus—even those who are citizens of powerful militaristic nations—

are nowhere encouraged by their Lord to *inflict* suffering, but are everywhere called to *endure* suffering. This is God's way for his people in the moral universe created and redeemed by him.

- The story of Mizoram reminds us that expending human life in pursuit of political self-determination is not what the Christian life is ultimately about.
- The story of Sokreaksa reminds us that although the way of forgiveness is neither easy nor natural, it is more powerful than revenge, retribution or brute military force. While it is unimaginable to a self-serving nation state, the way of forgiveness is not surprising for followers of the One who created the universe and who prayed, as he hung on the cross, giving his life in order to free the universe from bondage to the one who knows only death and revenge, 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do'.

### 1 Inflicting or enduring violence?

The apostle Paul learned that the special calling of Jesus' followers is not to *inflict* suffering, but to *endure* it. A follower of Jesus caught up in his or her nation's efforts to inflict violence must reflect carefully on a number of questions: Should a follower of Jesus play an active role in the lethal violence advocated by the state? Can participation in the general killing of enemies glorify Jesus Christ? Can lethal violence be a positive witness to our Saviour's self-giving love? Can it be an evident and indisputable expression of one's imitation of and loyal obedience

to Jesus? Can it be an incarnate, living testimony to the Son of God crucified and resurrected so that all persons might have life? Can it be an evidence of the fruit of God's Spirit within us?

From the beginning we humans have sought security through violence. The evolution of weapons, from clubs to longbows, from chariots to tanks, from slings to nuclear missiles, each calculated to deter aggressive neighbours, demonstrates the impotence of worldly power in curbing violence. Violence breeds hatred, resentment, and more violence, never peace or love. The law of the harvest applies also to violence: we reap not only what we sow, but more than we sow (Galatians 6:7); grapes are not gathered from thorns (Matthew 7:16). The cross is the only way of victory over the power of evil. The way of the cross is not for cowards. But Jesus called 'weak' men and women to follow this path in fighting evil (Mt. 10:16, 38; 16:24-25; Luke 9:23, 24; Mark 10:39-45; John 10:15-16). The ultimate, though not immediately apparent, potency of any Christian action lies in the cross, where our Lord's life found its most complete expression.

### 2 Resisting reductionist anthropologies

Followers of Jesus described in the three stories cited above shared the unique perspective of the earliest believers, so helpfully outlined by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. In contexts of neo-Christendom power and violence, Christ's followers must resist the temptation to regard other human beings—especially enemies—'from a worldly point of view'. Through the

ages, people everywhere have tried to make themselves and their societies healthier and more secure. Science, education, religion, laws, threats, imprisonment, executions, and wars have all been brought into the service of human betterment. Yet the problems remain intractable, and social, political and economic degeneration—if not actual pandemonium—remains alarmingly, persistently imminent.

Even in something as relatively simple as our interpersonal relationships, we find it almost impossible to measure up, even to our own flexible, self-accommodating standards. We know that we should be gentle, kind, patient, forgiving, generous, self-giving, and helpful, but we find ourselves being just the opposite—harsh, mean, impatient, unforgiving, stingy, and self-absorbed—often with the very people for whom we care the most, our children, our spouse, and our neighbour. Paul describes the root problem in Romans 7:14-25: just as our physical bodies are genetically programmed to deteriorate and die, so we are spiritually programmed to sin.

What God offers us through Christ is a 'spiritual stem-cell' transplant, so that we can be *spiritually* and *relationally* renewed, with both the inclination and the potential to become the kinds of people that God has called us to be. 'If any one be in Christ', Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' The love of Christ, as Paul understood it, makes it illogical for his followers to regard themselves or anyone else *from a worldly point of view*. Followers of Jesus are *compelled*, not because there are no other options, and not because they are

filled with feelings of gratitude to God, but because if Christ went to such extremes to reconcile the world unto himself, other options no longer make any sense, no longer fit with actual reality. It no longer makes sense to live for ourselves (v. 15).

Such an outlook represents a major perspectival shift that impacts one's orientation to everything and everyone. It is as earthshaking as the Copernican revolution that shook the physical sciences; as radical as Louis Pasteur's notions about the relationship between germs and infection that underlies modern medicine. Such an outlook sets us free from the tiny, dark dungeon of our egos, from the self-absorption that is promoted, celebrated and rewarded in our own society—the siren allure of 'me first' to which we so easily give credence and support.

What is 'a worldly point of view'? It is the utilitarian view of other persons, ethnic groups, nations. Love your friends, hate your enemies, live as safely and as comfortably as you can, avoid conflict if possible, but if not, make sure your enemy suffers more than you do. Essentially, my life and the lives of those who define me and support me are worth more than your life and the lives of those who define you. If push comes to shove, you are expendable.

Each of the stories above reminds us that those in Christ work hard to resist such reductionist anthropologies. In 'The Weight of Glory'—a sermon preached originally on June 8, 1942 in the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford—C. S. Lewis addressed this point in his inimitably lucid fashion:

...It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dulllest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. **There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours....** Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ *vere latitat*—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.<sup>33</sup>

One cannot but be struck by the stories of young men and women who respond to this deeply rooted human impulse to risk their security, their careers their mental and physical health, their very lives for the sake of a noble cause—whether it be the democracy of the West or the theocracy of Islam. It is this impulse that is at the heart the selective, self-flattering memories and myths that serve as the histories of human families and nations. It is this impulse that partly accounts for my own adolescent absorption in the far-fetched adventures of Odysseus and his rough gang of adventurers, Jason and his Argonauts, King Arthur and his chivalrous but relentlessly violent knights of the round table.

How meaningless our lives can be. How wretchedly, banal the details of our destiny! How we yearn to be part of something bigger, grander, more enduring!! There is something in our human natures—a vestige of the image of God, I think—that instinctively prefers to die *for* something than to merely die *of* something. It is this that makes the great epics *epic*! The key to following Christ in a broken world—a world in thrall to violence and power—is conversion to God's perspective on who we are, who they are, and what our unique calling as Jesus' followers is:

So from now on we [can] regard no one from a worldly point of view.... God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and.... has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are... Christ's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:16, 18, 20).

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33 C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1965), p. 15.

# Following Jesus in a World of Suffering and Violence

Isaiah M. Dau

**KEYWORDS:** *Natural disaster, discipleship, obedience, self-denial, holocaust, compassion, theodicy, human responsibility*

## I Introduction

Suffering is a fact of life for many people in our world. With advances in our time of global communication and information technology, countless stories of horror, pain and suffering are brought daily into our living rooms. Whenever we switch on the television or radio or read the newspapers, we come face to face with millions of people who are either actual or potential victims of suffering and disaster in our world. We are constantly made to realize that ours is a dangerous world, a place prone to disaster, war, famine and natural tragedies.<sup>1</sup> We live in a world in which tsunamis, hurricanes, wars, HIV/AIDS and death are possible realities.

But it is into this world that Jesus Christ commands us to go and follow him as his disciples and servants. He asks us to share the good news of his love and grace with suffering humanity. However, Jesus clearly warns that we will have tribulations in the world and yet he comforts us and calls us to be of good cheer because he has conquered the world. Though we are his and not of the world, Jesus has sent us into the world to be his witnesses and followers, knowing very well we may suffer.<sup>2</sup>

Keeping this in proper perspective, we still groan inwardly as we try to maintain our faith in him as a loving saviour in the face of the glaring reality of suffering and disaster in our world. In this tension of faith and suffering we ask questions: what does following Jesus mean if and when suffering and disaster strike us? How can we keep the balance between his grace and love and the reality of suffering? Since we as his disciples are also sub-

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1 Isaiah M. Dau, *Suffering and God* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2002), pp. 13-117.

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2 Mt. 10:17-42; Jn. 15:18-16:4; Rev. 2:10.

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ject to suffering and disaster, what difference does it make to follow and serve him?<sup>3</sup>

## II A Realistic Look at Our World

A realistic look at our globe reveals that there is much suffering. Suffering, from the beginning of time, seems to be an inseparable part of human existence. The biblical record has it that from the fall of humanity, sin and suffering entered the world. Consequently, we are born, we live, we suffer and we die. Our life begins, grows, ails and ends. In recent times, wars, famines and natural disasters have caused immense human suffering. The tsunami tragedy in southeast Asia in 2004, the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 and in London on 7 July 2005, the genocide in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s, are but a few in a long list of examples.

Among the many ongoing crises in Africa, I know from firsthand experience that the Sudanese region of Darfur remains a bastion of death and suffering. When I visited Darfur in 2006 I witnessed the immense suffering inflicted by the ongoing conflict. As has been the case for centuries in this

region of rich resources contested by dominant Arab tribes and African indigenous people, the people have suffered horrifically. Land and pastures, water resources and lately unexploited oil lie at the heart of the conflict. It is estimated that two hundred thousand people have died and three million others have been displaced since the conflict began five years ago. The Janjaweed<sup>4</sup> militias, allegedly funded by the Sudanese government, continue to violate human rights, destroying properties and committing rape and murder with impunity.

Efforts by the United Nations to send peacekeeping forces to the region have been repeatedly rejected by the Sudanese authorities. The Sudanese government insists that the situation is under control and that only African Union peacekeeping forces should be the ones to maintain peace in the region. However, recent pressure from the international community, particularly the United States, has forced the Khartoum government to allow the United Nations to act as a mediating force in Darfur. The Darfur region remains volatile, a place of suffering and violence, contrary to Khartoum's insistence that all is well.

When we consider all this, we can say the following regarding suffering and disaster in our world: in the first place we acknowledge that suffering and disaster are normal human experiences. Although we try to avoid suffering, it still overtakes us, one way or the

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3 As I write this paper, we have had serious sickness in our family. Our third boy, 13-year-old Joseph, has been unwell for most of the year 2006, suffering from a mysterious nerve disease, attacking his muscles and making him unable to stand or even walk. All the medical tests performed on him yielded nothing. Although he is a little better now, he has suffered a great deal. My wife Lydia also had a thyroidectomy operation in December 2006.

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4 Janjaweed means 'devils on horsebacks'. They are merciless. They kill with no mercy. They rape women and then kill them. They loot and burn down villages.

other. Jesus himself tells us that we should expect suffering if we are his followers. He warns the disciples that if the world persecuted him they should know it will persecute them as well (John 15:18-21 and 16:2-4). No human being escapes suffering even if they do not follow Christ. In reality, suffering and disaster are going to happen to all those who come into this world.<sup>5</sup> It seems that life and suffering are inescapable. They are unpleasant but normal human experiences.

Secondly, suffering and disaster are natural. They are natural in the sense of being universal. This understanding prepares the disciples and gives them courage to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus. This must be what concerned the apostle Peter when he exhorted the believers not to be surprised at the painful trials they were experiencing as though something strange was happening to them (1 Pet. 4:12). Simply put, Peter seems to say that suffering and disaster are natural and should not surprise us. Instead, Peter underscores the fact that we should view them as transitory means that lead us to glory (1 Pet. 4:14).

Thirdly, suffering and disaster are neutral. The basic idea here is that though suffering and disaster will wreck souls and cause damage to untold millions of people, one thing remains clear: it is how you take it. One might choose to learn valuable lessons from it or to learn absolutely nothing from it. Suffering may embitter some but ennoble others. Our choice determines whether the ramifications of the same are negative or positive. But we

all have to struggle with suffering at one point or another in our lives. It is how we take it that makes the difference.

The example of Job amplifies this truth. Though he suffered from things beyond his control, the way he took it made him a legend and an example of patience in suffering. He chose not to go the way of cursing God as his wife suggested,<sup>6</sup> or to explain it away simplistically as his comforters tried to do.<sup>7</sup> Rather, he 'refused to buy into the retributive theology of his friends and maintained his right to plead with God to remember him in his suffering'.<sup>8</sup> What a powerful example! Following Jesus within the frailty and wretchedness of human life accelerated by suffering and disaster demands a heart ready to wait for the 'self manifestation of God which ultimately leads to self surrendering adoration'.<sup>9</sup>

### III Following Jesus

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Following Jesus in a world of suffering and disaster first means a call to discipleship. In Mark 1:16-17, Jesus calls Simon and his brother Andrew to follow him. It was a call to discipleship. This call is not short-term or based on instant gratification but on a lifelong walk with God.<sup>10</sup> David Watson<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Job 2:9.

<sup>7</sup> Job 3-31.

<sup>8</sup> Dau, *Suffering and God*, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> Dau, *Suffering and God*, p. 210.

<sup>10</sup> Oswald J. Sanders, *Spiritual Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> David Watson, *Discipleship* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), pp. 19-33.

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<sup>5</sup> Dau, *Suffering and God*, p. 202.

explains that this is a call to a person (Jesus), a call to obedience and submission to his will and plan for our lives, a call to serve, and more importantly, a call to suffer. Following Jesus in a world of suffering and disaster requires following the way of Jesus, that is, the way of the cross. Life for Jesus ended, if you like, in suffering and disaster, rejection and pain and agonizing death. We should not be surprised if following Jesus demands that we walk the same way.

Let us take the example of some of Jesus' followers to illustrate this call to suffer: Peter and John were imprisoned and beaten for their boldness in witnessing to Jesus and the resurrection. Stephen was stoned to death and by the sword James was killed (Acts 8:1ff). The apostle Paul, an ardent follower of Jesus immediately after the Damascus road experience and subsequent ministry, catalogues his sufferings: beaten five times with 39 lashes, three times with rods and stoned once and shipwrecked once, often going hungry, sometimes misunderstood and many times falsely accused (2 Cor. 11:25-29). For Paul, his call to follow Jesus involved emotional pain and constant grief and deep concern for fellow unbelieving Jews and co-workers in ministry (Rom. 10:1-10; 2 Tim. 4:10, 14).

Secondly, following Jesus means a continuous and unceasing carrying of the cross as we follow him on the road of obedience. Jesus made it crystal clear that following him demands that we take up our cross and follow him (Lk. 14:27, Mk. 10:38). According to Sanders, this involves a willingness to accept ostracism and unpopularity

with the world for his sake.<sup>12</sup> Commenting on the bearing of the cross, Keener says:

In those days a condemned criminal would 'carry the cross' (i.e. the horizontal beam of the cross) out to the site of his crucifixion, usually amid a jeering mob. No one would choose this fate for himself but Jesus calls upon his true followers to choose it and hate their own lives in comparison to their devotion to him.<sup>13</sup>

Carrying our cross demands that we give up our own desires and live according to Christ's desire.<sup>14</sup> This includes such things as our comfort, pleasure and rights. We live for ourselves before we come to Christ. When we become his followers we live for him. In other words, a follower of Jesus 'turns around from his own way and starts going Jesus' way'.<sup>15</sup>

Thirdly, following Jesus means surrendering our 'heart affections, life's conduct and personal possessions'.<sup>16</sup> It is what Jesus means when he says whoever would follow him must give up everything (Lk. 14:33). This is quite a task in our materialistic world where we hold the things we own with clenched fists, claiming that we got them by the sweat of our brow. This

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12 Sanders, *Spiritual Discipleship*, p. 22.

13 Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 231.

14 Thomas Halle, *Applied New Testament Commentary* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1996), p. 150.

15 Halle, *Applied New Testament Commentary*, p. 150.

16 Sanders, *Spiritual Discipleship*, p. 22.

sort of bragging ignores the fact that we are only stewards and not owners of all that has been entrusted to us. Jesus desires that his followers exhibit an attitude which acknowledges the ownership of God over who we are and what we have and demonstrates a willingness to say, 'Lord, if you want any of them back again, tell me, and I will let them go'.<sup>17</sup>

Fourthly, following Jesus means loving one another as a direct result of the love he has shown us. Establishing love as an authentic badge of discipleship, Jesus teaches that when we love one another all people will know that we are his disciples (Jn. 13:34-35). Such love is agape. William Barclay describes this love as the spirit that says, 'no matter what any man does to me, I will never seek to do harm to him; I will never set out for revenge; I will always seek nothing but his highest good'. Hence, it is the love *that is unconquerable benevolence, invincible goodwill*<sup>18</sup> (my italics).

This love which Christ demands from his followers is essentially a 'selfless, forgiving and sacrificial love'.<sup>19</sup> It should be selfless in the sense that it does not have personal interest or strings attached when it is shown; forgiving in the sense that in it we can let go of those who have betrayed, hurt, or committed offences against us; and sacrificial in the sense that we are ready to meet the cost involved as Jesus did.

We all concur that the call to love is

not easy. It is always a challenge to walk in the highway of love with difficult people. However, following Jesus demands that we show the love of Christ to the most undeserving of all and to the most hurting. Only then will we be able offer it to the broken world around us.

Fifthly, following Jesus means continual adjustment. This is because Jesus determines the agenda and sets the pace for discipleship. Many people want to follow leaders who adjust to their needs. But it is not so with following Jesus. There is a need for 'unconditional spiritual submission to Jesus' leadership in our lives'.<sup>20</sup>

Matthew 8:19-20 presents a case of the teacher of the law who was willing to follow Jesus wherever he went. Jesus, discerning the inner motives and his unspoken conditions, revealed to him that sometimes the destinations would not be reasonable and accommodations would not be appropriate. Unwilling to adjust to Jesus' stipulations, the man retreated! How many times have we hesitated to follow Jesus because we try to fit God in our plans and not vice versa? Following him is tough but it is worth it. Willingness to adjust our lives is pertinent if we are to follow him.

Sixthly, following Jesus is a relationship. Following Jesus entails developing an intimate relationship with him. This is what elevates Christianity beyond all other religions, philosophies and worldviews.<sup>21</sup> Mark 3:14-15

17 Sanders, *Spiritual Discipleship*, p. 23.

18 William Barclay, *More New Testament Words* (London: SCM, 1958), p. 16.

19 Sanders, *Spiritual Discipleship*, pp. 28-30.

20 John Kramp, *Getting Ahead by Staying Behind* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), p. 43.

21 Kramp, *Getting Ahead by Staying Behind*, p. 50.

says, 'He appointed the twelve—designating them as apostles, that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority over demons'. A closer look at this scripture—'that they might be with him'—reveals that endeavouring to do anything for Jesus is linked with desiring and developing a relationship with him. Christianity in general and discipleship in particular is based on a relationship with Jesus, not on spiritual directions and rules. Once we decide to let him have control over our lives, he will show us the way and teach us. This entails all the directions we need as we deepen our relationship with him'.<sup>22</sup>

Seventhly, following Jesus is a change process. Following Jesus means enrolling ourselves in the school of change. Looking at the twelve disciples, it is amazing how they were transformed when they followed him. As our interests and philosophies of life change, we may mess up and fail Jesus just like the disciples, but their transformation stories become ours at that very moment. A disciple should never give up because they fail or miss the target for even the first disciples of Jesus were not exceptional. 'Because of their struggles, the positive changes that took place in their lives hold promise for all of us'.<sup>23</sup> Peter and Paul are supreme examples of change through following Jesus. Peter in the gospel accounts is not the same Peter in the book of Acts (Acts

4:8-12). Paul is emphatic about the undeniable change within him after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-15; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:11-24). Encountering Jesus transformed these individuals. Following Jesus means answering the Master's beckoning hand that lovingly declares, 'Come and follow me and I will make you...' Following him is an appointment with change, one that makes us what he always wants us to be or become.

#### IV The Cross—Its Message and Implications

In this section, I will examine the message of the cross and its implications for following Jesus in a world of suffering. I will do so in dialogue with Elie Wiesel's *Night* which recounts his Nazi camps' experiences and his struggles with suffering.<sup>24</sup> As we know from this influential novel, the suffering and death of a child on the gallows caused Wiesel to conclude that God himself was dead on the gallows. Theologians of the cross agree, further arguing that God, who was present at Auschwitz, suffered and died with its inmates. The cross and the gallows are thus viewed not only as instruments of God's presence in Auschwitz but also of his identification and suffering with the victims of the holocaust.

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<sup>24</sup> The implications for theology and suffering arising from my dialogue with Wiesel's *Night* will be presented in greater detail in an article entitled 'God on the Gallows: the image of God in Elie Wiesel's *Night*' with publication pending in the *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*.

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<sup>22</sup> Kramp, *Getting Ahead by Staying Behind*, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Kramp, *Getting Ahead by Staying Behind*, p. 58.

But in what way, if we may ask, does the cross differ from the gallows? If it is granted that both the gallows and the cross are instruments of death, what makes the cross more meaningful than the gallows in a situation of suffering? From the perspective of Christian theology, the cross conveys the following.

First, the cross speaks of God's presence and participation in human suffering. As Martin Luther King has noted, God does not leave us alone in our agonies and struggles, but he seeks us in dark places and suffers with us and for us in our tragic prodigality.<sup>25</sup> In other words, God does not observe our suffering from a safe distance, but he comes down to us and participates in it. Consequently, the cross is the supreme demonstration of God's solidarity with humanity in this world of suffering. In the cross, we see God allowing himself to suffer as we do, not because he was obligated or pressurised to do so but because he willingly chose to do so out of love for humanity.

Thus, the cross of Christ will always stand as a powerful reminder that God was prepared to suffer in order to redeem the world and that he expects his people to share the same commitment as they participate in the task of restoring the world to its former glory.<sup>26</sup> The gallows as experienced at

Auschwitz and other Nazi death camps negates all this and puts all other gods except the *crucified God* on trial. Only the suffering God would have been present at Auschwitz and could therefore have helped its inmates transcend and transform the holocaust. He participated in the pain and suffering of Auschwitz.

Second, the cross directs our gaze from the lonesome and morbid contemplation of our own anguish and suffering and redirects our gaze to the suffering and transforming God who shares in our pain.<sup>27</sup> When we look at the cross, we realize at once that God gave his very best so that we might live. In that way, God demonstrated his love for us. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross brings us face to face with the wonder of God's love and grace, so much that we are strengthened to deal with our suffering with courage and determination. Thus, by directing our gaze to the cross, we find incredible power and courage to face the fear and terror of suffering.

Suffering possesses what Alister McGrath has called 'a double cutting edge: the sheer pain of experiencing it and the unbearable intensity of what it means or implies'.<sup>28</sup> The prospect of facing suffering intimidates and freezes us. But the cross reminds us that its power has been broken and its sting has been blunted. Similarly, the cross points to the future ultimate defeat and elimination of suffering

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1981), p. 16. Much of what I say from this point on is taken from Isaiah M. Dau, *Suffering and God: a theological-ethical study of the war in Sudan* (Diss. U Stellenbosch, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> McGrath, *Suffering and God*, p. 15, 26.

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<sup>27</sup> Tyrone Inbody, *The Transforming God: an Interpretation of Suffering and Evil* (Louisville: Westminster, 1997), p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> McGrath, *Suffering and God*, p. 68.

even if its presence and reality are still pertinent in this life. The gallows in the Nazi concentration camps did not only symbolize the death of God but also the death of humanity. If there was ever a god who did not die at Auschwitz, it was the suffering God of Calvary, not the human god that the Nazis purported to believe in or the god that Wiesel rightly rebelled against and rejected.

Third, the cross tells us that because God responded to our suffering, we need to respond to the suffering of others. The cross spurs us on to alleviate the suffering of others. Because the suffering of any of God's people grieves the heart of God, the believer needs to reach out to those who suffer with love and compassion. Meeting the practical needs of those who suffer clearly demonstrates the message of the cross. Our presence with and provision of the spiritual, emotional, and material needs of those who may be hurting assures them that God has not abandoned them in their pain and misery. In that way the cross powerfully conveys that suffering can be transcended and transformed by the practical love and compassion of God through the community of faith.

That the suffering God of the cross participates in and shares the suffering of humanity is a message that the gallows of Auschwitz could never convey. Only the cross can emphatically affirm Wiesel's assertion that God was on the gallows. This is because the God of the cross is the only God who abides with the suffering and the weak of Auschwitz and of our day.

Fourth, the cross is God's victory over sin, suffering and death. By his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus

defeated these enemies. Furthermore, the cross tells us that God has done something about suffering and other evils that plague us in this life. On the cross, Christ won the victory over evil and suffering. He conquered the kingdom of this world and inaugurated the kingdom of the Father. Yet the full consummation of his victory is incomplete; it waits until the future. Meanwhile, living in the 'time between the times', we shall continue to face suffering as a defeated evil, which, paradoxically, is still present with us.

Thus a genuine response to the presence and the love of God as mediated by the cross has the power to release humanity from its chains and produce healing in suffering. In addition, as we noted earlier, the scriptures teach us that the suffering we now face prepares us for the glory, which awaits us when suffering and evil shall ultimately be defeated. For now, however, 'we must each share in Calvary and the cross, for only so can we share the glorious victory of the resurrection'.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, and from a distinctively Christian perspective, the cross reminds believers that discipleship involves suffering. For the followers of Christ there is such a thing as '*the koinonia of His suffering*' in this world. Not only is the disciple called to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him. There is therefore a sense in which both joy and suffering are integral parts of the Christian experience in the same manner that summer and winter

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<sup>29</sup> Desmond Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: sermons and speeches*, ed. Mthobisi Mutloatse and John Webster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 74.

are seasons of the year.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the Bible makes it clear that the believer is not excused from suffering with the rest of humankind just because he or she is a follower of Christ. If anything, the believer is promised additional suffering just because the believer is a follower of Christ.

Returning to the question we presented at the outset of this section (ie., in what way does the cross differ from the gallows?), we see that the theology of the cross contends that God shares and participates in our suffering, enabling us to transform and transcend it. Because God in Jesus Christ experienced suffering on the cross, he is the only one who can help us through suffering. While the gallows and the cross are in many respects similar they are not the same. The gallows speaks only of death, humiliation and suffering. The cross also speaks of death, humiliation and suffering but also of victory and hope. It speaks of the resurrection, redemption and glorification. It holds out the great hope that death itself cannot destroy.

But where exactly does all this leave theology and theodicy in practical terms? What are the implications of the theology of the cross for theodicy? To these implications we now turn our attention.

## V Conclusion

The first implication of the theology of the cross for theodicy is that the problem of evil and human suffering con-

stantly challenges faith, yet it is also a problem that reveals the dark side of humanity. As a haunting reality, despite the valuable lessons learned from the holocaust, the problem of suffering reveals the seemingly inexhaustible human potential to perpetrate evil. 'Nothing has been learned', Wiesel admits. 'Auschwitz has not served as a warning. For more detailed information, consult your daily newspapers.'<sup>31</sup>

Wiesel is right; nothing has been learned more than sixty years after the holocaust. If that had not been the case, the genocides in the Balkans and Rwanda in the 1990s would not have occurred. But it has, starkly reminding us that the holocaust is after all very much alive in our world, in our hearts. As a matter of fact, there is no guarantee that it will never recur.

For more detailed information, examine your own heart, not merely your daily newspapers. The potential is frighteningly there in our hearts and minds, regardless of whoever we may be or wherever we come from. For the people who committed the holocaust were just like us. As morally free agents, we have an inescapable part in the problem of evil and suffering. We have an incredible potential to perpetrate evil and inflict suffering.

Second, and as a direct consequent of the first, a fundamental admission has to be made to the effect that suffer-

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30 A. E. W. Smith, *The Paradox of Pain* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1971), p. 92.

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31 Elie Wiesel, *One Generation After* (New York: Avon Bard, 1972), p. 15, quoted in Alan Rosenberg and Paul Marcus, 'The Holocaust as a Test of Philosophy', in Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E Myers, eds., *Echoes from the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 201-222.

ing and evil are indications of something terribly wrong with us as human beings. Why do we do evil and inflict suffering on one another? It is one thing to protest against God or even heap all the blame on him when evil assails, but it is quite another thing to critically look at ourselves and ask why we are killing one another. Who perpetrated Auschwitz and the genocides in Rwanda and the Balkans? Who makes weapons of destruction, poison gases and other fatal instruments of death?

Humanity can hardly escape its responsibility by indicting God. That is why Wiesel is quite right to say that 'at Auschwitz, not only man died, but the idea of man'.<sup>32</sup> Wiesel is consistent in his thought because if God was murdered at Auschwitz, humanity was murdered too. The only question that we must answer is: Who committed the murder? Was it God or humanity or both?

Whatever way we choose to answer this question, we cannot eliminate human responsibility and choice in perpetrating suffering and evil. To reemphasize, we must admit that there is something terribly wrong in our nature, there is something that moves us to inflict evil on ourselves. We must admit and confront this. From the perspective of the Scripture and Christian theology that thing is called sin, an irresistible force capable of alienating humanity from God and itself and so to miss the mark or the goal of life.

We need to be set free from sin and its consequences if we are to refrain from inflicting evil on one another. We

desperately need to be delivered not only from the evil that may be visited upon us but also from the evil that we have the potential to visit upon fellow humans. Only God by his grace can do this. The Scripture clearly and repeatedly teaches that he has already done it through the cross of Christ. As Alan Richardson explains,

The ultimate solution to the problem of evil (and suffering) must lie in the fact that the God who created the world is also the God who has redeemed it; the creator is himself in Christ the bearer of all creation's sin and suffering as he is the bringer of the redemption that shall be. But only the Christian can know that Christ has explained evil in the act of defeating it.<sup>33</sup>

Redemption through a suffering theophany is the only truly Christian response to the problem of evil.<sup>34</sup>

Third, within the framework of the incarnation, the provision has been made to respond positively to suffering and evil. This provision contains the resources of community, character and hope from which the believer can draw to face suffering without being destroyed by it. God's coming to us in Jesus Christ and his identification with us in all that we may suffer are the grounds for our positive response to evil and suffering. Here we find the caring support and love of the community

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<sup>33</sup> Alan Richardson, 'The Problem of Evil', in Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 196.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Surin, 'The Impassability of God and the Problem of Evil', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 35 (1982), p. 114.

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<sup>32</sup> See Rosenberg and Marcus. 'The Holocaust as a Test of Philosophy'.

of believers to give us the capacity to transform and transcend suffering and pain.

The community absorbs our suffering and we practically experience what it means to have others carry our burdens. The shaping of a resilient character through suffering enables us to endure and to be steadfast amidst trials and suffering. The Christian is inspired by a living hope that suffering and evil will be ultimately defeated.

By suggesting this framework, we do not intend or attempt to explain suffering and evil but we argue that by positive action, beneficial to ourselves as well as other fellow humans, we can transform and transcend suffering and evil.

Finally, we must not be ashamed to acknowledge the mystery and insolubility of evil and suffering. If pressed to its logical conclusion, the problem of evil is actually insoluble. Its mystery is inextricably bound up with the mystery of God and of life itself. We can neither explain nor eliminate it. Its origin is inexplicable and its purpose is indefinable. To say this is not to resort to a

palliative or premature consolation or to dodge the problem altogether. To say this is to accept our finite and limited knowledge as creatures of time and space.

While we must continue inquiry into this existential problem and retain our best theological and philosophical findings on it, the truth remains that in the final analysis we cannot solve it. The problem of evil cannot be solved if by that we mean its total elimination so that we no longer suffer or die in this world. As Kenneth Surin acknowledges, evil in its root and essence is a deep mystery; how God deals with it and overcomes it is a mystery too.<sup>35</sup>

We must ponder over suffering in the context of God's infinite love, for it is therein that we have the assurance of victory. However, we cannot use the mystery and inexplicability of evil as an excuse for indifference in the face of suffering. Neither can we use this mystery as an easy consolation for the victims of suffering and tragedy.

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35 Surin, 'The Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil', p. 115.

## **The Wondrous Cross**

### **Atonement and Penal Substitution in the Bible and History**

Stephen R. Holmes

Stephen Holmes has been described as one of the bright lights of the new generation of evangelical theologians. In this book he offers an accessible and enlightening account of the way the saving work of Jesus is presented in the Bible, and has been understood throughout Christian history. In particular, the book offers background to the current debates about penal substitutionary atonement by looking at that idea in biblical and historical perspective. Holmes argues that we can, and should, continue to talk of the cross in penal substitutionary terms, if we understand this as one of many complimentary descriptions of the salvation we find in Christ.

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# Case Study: Overseas Filipino Workers

Athena E. Gorospe

**KEYWORDS:** *Migration, marginalisation, missionary, pilgrim, production, economy, consumerism, nurture, conversion*

GLOBALIZATION HAS engendered the phenomenal growth of transnational economic migration, with its opportunities and heartaches. The economic interdependence of countries has resulted not only in the exchange of goods but also in the exchange of services, in the form of the movement of migrant contract workers from poorer economies to more affluent ones. However, the need to maximize profit by factoring the least cost in production has brought about the massive importation of cheap labour.<sup>1</sup> In this case study, I will set out

the situation of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and their families, and explore biblical and theological themes relevant to their plight. Although I would reflect on the particular case of Filipino economic migrants, many of the issues discussed here apply to other labour migrants as well.

## I The Broken World of OFWs

With about eight million Filipinos residing overseas, comprising 10 percent of the country's population of 86 million, the Philippines has one of the largest proportion of migrant workers in relation to its total population of all countries. For many Filipinos, migration is a symbol of hope because it provides an alternative to being unemployed or underemployed, living in poverty, or having a life that is qualitatively less than one's aspirations. Remittances sent by a family member working overseas can give significant economic help to a household in the Philippines. On a national scale, migration is seen as necessary for national

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<sup>1</sup> Graziano Battistella, 'Transnational Mobility of People in Relation to Patterns of Industrialization and Impact on Individuals and Family in Asia' in *Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century* (Manila: Office for Human Development, Federation of Asia Bishops Conference, 1997), pp. 117-38.

survival. The remittances of OFWs make up 20% of the country's exports and 10% of GDP, which are a lifeline to a government struggling with a large external debt. Because of the OFWs contribution to the economy, the export of migrant workers has become part of national policy.<sup>2</sup> However, labour migration means also marginalization, social dislocation, downward social mobility, and family fragmentation.

Filipino migrants experience marginalization in two ways. First, they become socially and structurally invisible in relation to the host society. Even though they have college degrees and professional backgrounds in the Philippines, and may have prominent roles in their family and community, they disappear into other people's homes, hospitals, nursing homes, manufacturing centres in other countries. Second, they experience a subaltern existence. The pain of marginality is made acute by being regarded as mere instruments of policy and by being subjected to ethnic, economic, and social differentiation. Migrant workers are often seen as mere objects to advance the interests of both the country of destination and the country of origin, without regard to the personal and family fragmentation and disempowerment that this produces.

Those who work as domestic workers are vulnerable to abuse since, as live-in workers, they are dependent on their employers and have no private

spaces of their own or complete control of their time. As foreigners who are employed in jobs on the lowest rung of the economic and social ladder, they are also subject to prejudice. Moreover, as temporary residents, they do not have adequate legal and civil rights to protect them from being exploited. In addition, because migration holds the promise of economic advancement, some Filipinos have resorted to illegal means to be able to work and live overseas. This has given Filipinos the reputation of being law-breakers and has led to some humiliating deportations and imprisonment.

In addition, economic migration produces the phenomenon of transnational families, in which one or two parents are abroad while children are reared by one parent or by relatives. This arrangement brings a lot of emotional stress—guilt for parents, insecurity and loneliness for children, and emotional distance between parents and children.<sup>3</sup> This is especially the case when the migrant is the mother,<sup>4</sup> a common situation since women comprise more than fifty percent of OFWs. A conflict then results between the economic security of the family and its emotional and psychological well-being.

On a national scale, the migration of so many nationals means massive

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2 Graziano Battistella, 'Philippine Migration Policy: Dilemmas of a Crisis', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 14 (Apr 1999), pp. 229-48.

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3 Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp 82-88.

4 *Hearts Apart: Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children* (Joint Research Project by the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants, Scalabrini Migration Center, and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, 2004), pp. 3, 23.

brain drain as teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers move to other parts of the world. This is tragic, considering that in many villages in the Philippines, medical facilities are understaffed,<sup>5</sup> while vital infrastructures are needed for the development of the local economy.<sup>6</sup>

## II Biblical Themes and Texts

Christian responses to the OFW phenomenon are varied; thus, the theological themes and biblical texts used are varied as well. The following sets forth briefly the different views, with the themes and texts that are found to be relevant for each view.

### 1 The Migrant as Provider

Economic migration can be regarded as something God brought about in order to provide for the needy. The globalized marketplace is considered as an opportunity for economic betterment, while the migrant worker is viewed as a provider not only of the family, but also as a financial supporter of the local church and its missionaries. The texts that fit this position are the stories of the migration of Jacob and his family to Egypt, as well as the migration of Naomi and her family to

Moab because of famine. Like Joseph, the migrant is seen as a channel of God's blessings for the family and for the nation. The theological themes emphasized are God's sovereignty and providence, so that God is seen as working out a plan to provide for the family through the globalized environment. Anthropologically, economic migration is regarded as part of the outworking of the Genesis mandate for human beings to exercise dominion over the created order (Gen. 1:26-28). Concentrating on the economic contribution, however, has led to the neglect of the spiritual, emotional, and social aspects of migration.

### 2 The Migrant as Missionary

Another positive view sees economic migration as something that God allowed in order to advance the cause of global mission. Many evangelical groups espouse this view. God has a plan for the scattering of Filipinos all over the world because Filipinos have the qualities needed to become an effective 'tentmaker'. They are adaptable, can easily learn another language, and have penetrated almost all industrial sectors in over 180 countries, including those where traditional missionaries are not allowed to enter and share the gospel.<sup>7</sup> Thus, they are well placed to become witnesses by doing their jobs well and seeking for opportunities to share their faith.

The most relevant text for this view is Acts 18:2-4, in which Paul, along

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5 In 2003, 25,000 nurses left the country, three times more than the number of graduates that year. Nurses emigrating soon after graduation leave hospitals in the Philippines without quality medical care. See 'Filipino Take "Going Places" Literally', *Washington Post* (May 26, 2004).

6 The above section consists of excerpts from Athena E. Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity: An Ethical Reading of Exodus 4* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

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7 Jojo M. Manzano and Joy C. Solina, 'Worker to Witness: Becoming an OFW Tentmaker' (Makati: Church Strengthening Ministries, 2007), pp. 34-37.

with Priscilla and Aquila, are shown to be working on a trade as they preach the gospel. Other texts cited show God's people being forcefully brought to a foreign hostile culture, and being able to be a witness for God in that place: Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 41:14-49), the captive servant girl of Naaman in Aram (2 Kgs. 5:1-15), Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 2:24-48), and Nehemiah in Persia (Neh. 2:1-9).<sup>8</sup> The Jewish dispersion in Acts due to persecution is also used, since the scattering of the Jerusalem church resulted in a wider coverage for the proclamation of the gospel (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-21). A particular case is Philip who proclaimed the word in Samaria and to an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:5-13; 26-39).<sup>9</sup> Again, God's sovereignty and providence are the main themes, with the church's mission to 'make disciples of all nations' being given emphasis.

Many OFWs have become Christians while working overseas and have grown in discipleship through the ministry of other Filipino migrants. Many churches ministering to OFWs have been planted and are growing. However, only sporadic fruit has been seen among non-Filipinos, especially in Muslim countries. At the same time, since the contract of an OFW lasts only a few years, there is a rapid turnover of leadership in the migrant church. Many of those active in ministry while

overseas have become displaced upon their return home, sometimes becoming alienated from the local church. The missionary model can gloss over the negative effects of migration, extolling its virtues, without properly addressing its problems.

### 3 The Migrant as Sojourner and Pilgrim

Another view recognizes the reality of migration because of the economic need, but also sees the migrant's marginal status and vulnerability in relation to the host society. Catholic churches in the Philippines give emphasis to this view. What is highlighted is the gift that the stranger brings to the host society and the need to provide hospitality for them.<sup>10</sup>

Naomi loses her husband and two sons but she gains a faithful daughter-in-law in Ruth, who, as a migrant in Israel, becomes a source of blessing for Naomi through a son that would continue her husband's lineage.<sup>11</sup> In the

<sup>8</sup> Manzano and Solina, 'OFW Tentmaker', pp. 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> Narry F. Santos, 'Survey of the Diaspora Occurrences in the Bible and of Their Contexts in Christian Missions in the Bible', in *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence* (eds. Luis Pantoja et. al.; Manila: LifeChange Publishing, 2004), pp. 59-60.

<sup>10</sup> See Maurizio Pettená, *Migration in the Bible* (Exodus Series 2: A Resource Guide for the Migrant Ministry in Asia; Quezon City: Scalabrini Migration Center, 2005); Fabio Baggio, *Theology of Migration* (Exodus Series 3; Quezon City: Scalabrini Migration Center, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Ruth describes herself as a *nokriyah* (stranger), rather than as a *ger* (resident alien) (Ruth 2:10), emphasizing her oddness and perhaps indicating why people might not readily trust her. See Dianne Bergant, 'Ruth: The Migrant Who Saved the People', in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization* (ed. Gioacchino Campese and Pietro Ciallella; New York: Center for Migration Studies, 2003), p. 52.

NT, the acceptance of the stranger is equated with the acceptance of Christ (Mt. 25:34-45), in the same way that the reception accorded Christ's disciples in their mission also indicated the degree of their acceptance of Christ and his message (Lk. 10: 8-12, 16).<sup>12</sup> Thus, 'the presence of God in the foreigner is the foundation for the duty of hospitality'.<sup>13</sup>

In the OT, a high value is given to hospitality to strangers and travellers (Gen. 18:1-6; 19:1-9; 24:15-33; Ex. 2:15-22; 1 Kgs. 17:8-16). Hospitality is exemplified in the NT by the welcome that Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38-42) and Zaccheus (Lk. 19:1-10) gave to Jesus. Moreover, having experienced what it was like to be an alien, Israel is enjoined not to oppress the alien (Ex. 23:9; Dt. 24:17-22), to ensure that there would be food for them (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-13), and to be inclusive in their worship by allowing the alien to join in their celebrations and festivals (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 16:10-15).

The theological themes and images that are important for this view are the following: the welcoming God, the church as a pilgrim people (1 Pet. 2:11), the church as a welcoming community, and a theology of work that sees gainful employment as a basic human right.

Some churches in western countries have provided welcome to migrants, enriching not only the migrant but also their communities. However, the problems causing migration are not addressed. Moreover, there is also a

tension in host countries between providing welcome to strangers and protecting their own citizens. A more thorough theological response needs to be articulated regarding this issue.

#### 4 The Migrant as Victim

A more negative view of labour migration highlights its effects on the individual and the family, on national human resources, and on cultural values. Thus, migrants are presented as victims of global economic forces beyond their control. Individually, migrants acquire consumerist values and they dream of upward mobility while living overseas, thus making it difficult for them to return home permanently. Families become vulnerable and children are deprived of the nurturing presence of parents. The services of the country's skilled labour are not employed in helping the country's own people, but are exported to help those who are better placed to avail of competent medical help and educational resources.

Thus, what is advocated is structural change, both in the sending country and the receiving one. For the sending country, what needs to be addressed are the basic issues that lead to migration—unemployment, poverty, lack of opportunity, colonial mentality, government policies that encourage migration, etc. For the host country, what needs to be encouraged are policies that would see the migrant not solely as an instrument of profit, but as a total person with human needs and basic rights.

The following theological themes can be used to support this view: the God of justice and righteousness, the

<sup>12</sup> Baggio, *Theology of Migration*, pp. 15-18.

<sup>13</sup> Baggio, *Theology of Migration*, p. 19.

dignity of human beings made in the image of God and not just as instruments of production, the importance of the family in the faith community, and the incarnation as an example of downward mobility.

The focus on the victimized state of migrants, although addressing structural issues, can fail to recognize the migrants' own agency. Thus, instead of empowering them to make decisions for themselves, it can lead to greater dependency and hopelessness.

### 5 The Migrant as Liminal Person

This view sees temporary migration as a liminal experience, in which the migrant undergoes a rite-of-passage that would enable him or her to negotiate a successful return to the home country.<sup>14</sup> Although migration is a place of marginality, it can be also be a place of possibility, if the migrant moves from marginality to liminality and finally to reincorporation into the home community through reverse migration.<sup>15</sup> Because migrants are able to develop a 'plurality of vision', they can be a great resource to the home country upon their return.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Filomeno Aguilar has connected international labour migration with ritual passage, which partakes of the character of a pilgrimage, although not in a theological way. See 'Ritual Passage and the Reconstruction of Selfhood in International Labour Migration', *Sojourn* 14 (April 1999): 98-139.

<sup>15</sup> For this view, see Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity*, pp. 291-301.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Said calls this a 'contrapuntal perspective', that is, exiles become aware of simultaneous dimensions that make possible

The early chapters of Exodus focus on the marginal experience of migrants. On one hand, there is the account of Israelite migrants who were seen as threats to the security of their host society, and were therefore subjected to different forms of ethnic cleansing and subjugation. On the other hand, there is the depiction of Moses in Midian, who described himself as a 'stranger', and whose life as a shepherd in a foreign land was hidden and invisible. By using *ger* as a self-description, Moses acknowledged his marginal, dependent, and less privileged status as a foreigner living among the native-born inhabitants of Midian.<sup>17</sup> These two pictures capture the general experience of Filipinos who migrate to other lands.

Moses, however, did not remain in Midian. Through the call of God to return to Egypt, the marginal life in Midian became imbued with a transitional character, an in-between state

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an originality of vision, by virtue of their crossing borders and breaking barriers of thought and experience. See *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 185-86.

<sup>17</sup> Frank Spina proposes that *ger* be translated as 'immigrant', indicating those from another tribe, city, or country who must place themselves in a dependent relationship with someone else in the host country because they do not enjoy the customary rights or privileges. Also 'immigrant' calls attention to the original circumstances that impelled the move to a more favourable social setting. See Frank Anthony Spina, 'Israelites as *gerim*: Sojourners in Social and Historical Context', in Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor, eds., *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), p. 323.

between the Egypt of Moses' upbringing and the Egypt of his prophetic calling. It was in this liminal space that Moses was transformed, receiving a new identity that enabled him to fulfil his role as God's spokesperson to the Israelites.

The story of God's call to Moses can inform the experience of Filipino migrants. First, it shows that they need not be oriented by the global capitalistic consumerist mentality of success. There is an alternative 'journey of achievement' which is defined not by economics, but by commitment and service. Second, it shows that there are other claims in life than the claims of one's family and kin. The Exodus story helps to relativize the claims of the family in light of God's call and the claims of one's own suffering community, paving the way for return migration.

Again, structural issues may be glossed over in this view, although it gives a role to agency. Moreover, the question of whether to return permanently to one's country after migrating is not an easy one to answer, and theological and pastoral guidance must be given to those who are contemplating doing so.

### III Following Jesus in the Context of Global Economic Migration

The above models show that discerning how to follow Jesus in the context of global economic migration is not an easy path. In the first place, it involves several spheres: the migrant, the migrant's family and relatives, the migrant's employer, the church, the sending country, and the host country. It is the church, however, which is the locus of discipleship, since it is the church that oversees the formation and well-being of migrants and their families, as well as the one that exercises a prophetic role in calling both the sending society and the host society to policies that would reflect the values of God's kingdom. The challenge is to know the appropriate theological response to a particular situation, since it is possible to have the right theology but apply it to the wrong context.

What is clear, however, is that in forming a theology that relates to the globalized marketplace, one must take into consideration the plight of the migrant workers. This would involve recovering Jesus' concern for the marginalized, the invisible people who are often forgotten in today's market-driven world.

## Books Reviewed

Reviewed by David Parker

Larry W. Hurtado

*How on earth did Jesus become a God:*

*Historical Questions about Earliest*

*Devotion to Jesus*

Larry W. Hurtado

*The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins*

Reviewed by Tony Richie

Robin Parry

*Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*

Reviewed by Norman T. Barker

J. I. Packer & Carolyn Nystrom

*Praying: finding our way from duty to delight*

Reviewed by David Parker

David Killingray and Joel Edwards

*Black Voices: the shaping of our Christian experience*

Graham Beynon

*God's New Community: New Testament patterns for today's church*

## Book Reviews

ERT (2007) 31:4, 376-377

**How on earth did Jesus become a God: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus**

Larry W. Hurtado

Grand Rapids/Cambridge:

Eerdmans, 2005

ISBN 978-0-8028-2861-3

Pb., pp 234, Indexes

**The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins**

Larry W. Hurtado

Grand Rapids/Cambridge:

Eerdmans, 2006

ISBN 978-0-8028-2895-8

Pb., pp 248, charts, plates, index

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

The author, well known for his views about the very early development of devotion to Jesus as divine (ERT (2006) 30:3,

275-276), presents in the opening section of the first, provocatively titled book a 'compact' version of his argument.

Interestingly, this material was given as a series of lectures at the Ben Gurion University, Israel. The second part is a collection of previously published papers and lectures which give more detail in defence of his position. This means that there is some repetition, but overall the author's clear and lucid style and passionate conviction make for a cogently presented case. Essentially, Hurtado argues that there is good evidence to show that within a very few years after the first Easter, Christians, in their worship and other acts of devotion, were recognizing Jesus as divine. This happened without any sense of compromise to the strong exclusivist monotheism which was an essential part of their background as Jews of the Graeco-Roman period, and despite the severe difficulties and even persecution that they often endured at the hands of their contemporaries.

There is no complete analogy for this

remarkable development in Jewish belief or practice, nor was there any suggestion that this level of reverence took place during the earthly ministry of Jesus himself. Neither was it a late development (not even as late as the period of the writing of the Fourth gospel) or an evolutionary process under the influence of other religions. Instead, using rigorous historical method, Hurtado argues that the data from Paul (especially seen in an outstanding chapter on the christological hymn in Philippians 2) the gospels and other NT writings make it clear that this innovative development was the result principally of revelatory experiences of the earliest Jewish Christians which were focused on the deity of Jesus.

In the second book, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, Hurtado is on a crusade to show that much has been overlooked when biblical scholars pay attention only to the text of early biblical manuscripts (2nd and 3rd century especially), as in, e.g., textual criticism, but fail to take notice of their physical form and visual nature. This material, which forms the earliest physical evidence for Christianity constitutes 'a body of data that, when analyzed carefully, can yield potentially significant evidence that is relevant for various questions about early Christianity'.

With his clear and emphatic style and references to a large number of manuscripts with extensive statistical data, he effectively demonstrates that such matters as the material, size and shape of manuscripts and the nature of the writing, including the size of letters, columns and margins, when taken in context with other contemporary examples, are visual pointers to the social and intellectual characteristics of the early Christian community. Thus the existence of punctuation, spacing and other markers to signify paragraphs and other sense units gives

physical evidence of the ways the text was interpreted, thus contributing important data to the task of exegesis. Even the particular NT books which are found singly and in combination in the manuscripts, coupled with their geographical location and spread, give clues about the processes and attitudes involved in writing, circulating and canonizing of the NT, while the form of the manuscripts indicates something of their social and liturgical setting.

But most attention is given to early Christian interest in the papyrus codex (versus parchment and scrolls), and particularly to the way certain words were written—notably names for Jesus Christ which were identified with an abbreviation and a bar over them ('nomina sacra'), and the letters tau and rho in the words 'cross' and 'crucify' which, when referring to Jesus, were written in monogram form (staurogram), thus charting a very early development in devotion and theology.

Hurtado draws heavily on papyrologists and other relevant experts but at the same time makes his own unique contribution, although his suggestions about what might be inferred from the physical evidence which he is at such pains to highlight are more tentative than might be expected. Nevertheless, with his insights and robust analysis of the evidence, the author has certainly put this very early artifactual data on the map, making it necessary for it to be considered in any study of Christian origins and exegesis. An extensive chart of 2nd and 3rd century manuscripts and a large bibliography (including on-line material) add to the usefulness of the book, as do the nine plates of key manuscripts, although it would have much better had they been printed on better quality paper; the indexing is, however, quite limited.

ERT (2007) 31:4, 378-379

## Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship

Robin Parry

UK/Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster,  
2005

ISBN 1-84227-347-7

Pb, pp 202

*Reviewed by Tony Richie, Knoxville TN.*

Robin Parry's *Worshipping Trinity* is a sneaky book; reading it is so enjoyable one does not realize how much is being learned until it is too late to turn back. Primarily a biblical, practical, theological discussion of worship, Parry also effectively uses analogy, humour, and everyday experience to acquaint readers with the twists and turns of Trinitarian truth and its power. As the title tells us, the book is not only about the Trinity but about *worshipping* Trinity, a fact that often fills it with inspiring summits of divine fellowship.

Parry achieves an impressive balance of classic and contemporary concerns, here quoting antiquaries like Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Lady Julian of Norwich, there discussing the fate of Neo in the cult film classic 'Matrix Revolutions'. He also does delightful integrations of 'heart' and 'head' or affective and cognitive aspects, here connecting to charismatic experience and gifts and there drawing on the thought of theologians like Karl Rahner and Jürgen Moltmann. Most of all, however, Parry's *Worshipping Trinity* is a solidly scriptural book, basing every point on biblical texts and contexts, though without coming across as 'preachy' or falling into an all-too-common trap of 'proof texting'.

Parry begins by identifying problems in contemporary worship and laying out

foundational convictions directing the course of this writing. He admits his primary motivation stems from a sudden, somewhat shocking realization that much of contemporary Christian worship is 'seriously inadequate', due to its failure to grapple with and apply the role of the Trinity in public worship. He therefore straightforwardly states the basic idea behind the entire book: 'worship is about God and God is the Trinity, therefore worship is about the Trinity.' This simple but profound principle launches him onto a trajectory that makes studying the Trinity an exciting adventure relevant to every aspect of Christian faith, life, and truth. In fact, his most helpful achievement is effectively demonstrating Trinitarian faith is not some ivory tower intellectual issue but a vital verity related to all Christian belief and practice.

Next, using 'Trinitarian geography', Parry maps out how the Trinity fits in with the overall biblical story and Christian life. This is a surprisingly rich process as we are instructed in how our doctrine and experience of God intersect with our belief and practice in so many exciting ways. Then, Parry tackles early Trinitarian developments as expressed in the ancient creeds. He has a gift for summarizing complex concepts in simple language, entertaining, informing, and inspiring us all at once. These preceding sections, however, are preparatory for the upcoming task designed to apply directly to what happens at church. Parry pushes ahead, getting down to brass tacks by looking at how worship is appropriately offered to, through, and with each person of the Trinity (his teaching on participatory-representative worship is priceless), the place of singing and prayer (thinking theologically about singing and praying may be life-changing for many churches and churchgoers), and 'a herd of other

ideas' that includes sacraments, Scripture, preaching, spiritual gifts, and the arts. He further suggests refreshing ways of worshipping 'outside the box'. Obviously, for Parry Trinitarian worship is not a passing fad but a responsible way 'to bring God's church into a dynamic encounter with the Christian God—the Holy Trinity'. To that end he closes with practical pointers, helping the rest of us avoid Trinitarian faddishness as well.

One of *Worshipping Trinity's* main strengths is its success as a Charismatic but ecumenical book. Parry is upfront about his own charismatic approach to Christian life and worship, but nothing narrow or sectarian shows up in these pages. Valuable balance shows as he avoids extremes without toning down truth. His writing style is very accessible and readable. Whether he's comparing modern impressions of ancient sacrificial systems to 'a cauldron of magic potion in a hospital' or describing Paul's thinking as 'explosive, whirlwind-like theology-on-the-run', Parry has a real way with words.

Although I may challenge a few specifics, such as the somewhat circular way Parry approaches the authority of Spirit, Scripture, and Church—the Bible is authoritative only in the context of church tradition, which is the historical voice of

the Holy Spirit, but since tradition is humanly fallible only the Bible can finally judge its veracity—overall, there is little to quibble about in this fine volume. Even Parry's circularity on authority is understandable as an attempt to combat rampant individualism and subjectivism. In Pentecostal-Charismatic and Evangelical movements this is a most needful nuance. Yet did not we learn from Luther that a large crowd may be wrong and a lone individual right? The Protestant principle about the guidance of the Holy Spirit in individual conscience need not be discarded, though it does indeed need to be counterbalanced with Catholic convictions on community. Theologians may complain that Parry oversimplifies the Trinity and worship leaders that he overcomplicates worship. But if Parry responds that theology ought to be practical and worship profound I would agree.

Everyone (except Unitarians?) will enjoy this read. I highly recommend *Worshipping Trinity* both for those who have not yet begun serious study of Trinitarian worship and would like a non-intimidating introduction that touches all the main bases, and for those who have done in depth studies already but would not mind being reminded how inspiring—and just plain fun—spiritual reading can be at its best. Chalk one up for 'the sneak attack'!

J. I. Packer & Carolyn Nystrom: *Praying: finding our way from duty to delight* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006) ISBN-13: 978-1-84474-142-7: 319 pp. General and Scripture Indices.

Evangelical senior statesman, J. I. Packer, Board of Governors' Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, joins with freelance writer, Carolyn Nystrom, to challenge, teach and inspire Christians in their prayer life. Nystrom appears to serve as amanuensis for Packer's lectures on prayer, while adding her own contribution. Packer stands foursquare in the Evangelical/Puritan tradition. Nystrom is a soul mate. Other traditions make their own contribution. From Catholics we have much to learn about 'brooding' or meditating in prayer; from Charismatics, much about whole-hearted praise.

These are but two of the multi-faceted aspects of prayer they explore. They present gen-

uine Christian prayer as rooted in the biblical conception of God. 'True praying is an activity built on a theology' (p. 37). Evangelically, 'authentic prayer... issues from the authentically Christian heart of a born-again believer leading the authentic Christian life' (p. 47). Evangelically too, primary emphasis is on the individual life of prayer. At the same time, we are warned that the Christian life involves community, expressed in church worship, which is basically prayer in various forms. This is a rich book, challenging, instructive, humbling. All who echo the disciples' plea, 'Lord, teach us to pray', will be rewarded by reading, marking and inwardly digesting its insights.

Reviewed by Norman T. Barker, Taringa, Queensland

**David Killingray and Joel Edwards: *Black Voices: the shaping of our Christian experience* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007) Pb, pp 170, Bibliog., index, illus.**

This unusual but informative book consists mostly of a series of brief articles chronologically arranged (within topical sections), giving some biographical information about Christian people of African origin or descendancy in Britain and its colonies over the last 250 years, together with a piece of writing by them. The sections cover a wide range—conversion and evangelism, preaching and protest, and community services. There is an introduction by David Killingray, giving a valuable historical overview of black people and their presence in Britain. There are a few illustrations, but the main strength of the book lies in the quoted writings, which are all only very brief—usually no more than a page, often less—and chosen to reveal some aspect of the contribution made by the person or to offer an insight into the condition of black Africans in Britain. The authors range from the top of society (like Paul Boateng, the first black cabinet minister) to those of more humble circumstances, and indeed, some are anonymous. All of the entries are documented and an extensive bibliography affords more strength to this anthology which is more than welcome in today's world and especially at a time when the abolition of slavery is being remembered.

**Graham Beynon: *God's New Community: New Testament patterns for today's church* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005) Pb pp 139 index**

This small book, which is suitable for private reading and Bible study groups, deals with the important issue of the nature and life of the church as 'God's new community'. There are nine chapters, each one based on a specific passage of Scripture (except ch. 6) and its teaching on a particular aspects of the church, such as 1 Corinthians 12—living as a body; Ephesians 2—church as family; 1 Peter 2—defining the church as God's people. Following a brief introduction highlighting the point of the chapter under discussion, there is a loose but wide-ranging exposition of the text, with some reference to related passages as well, and extensive application to today's context. A set of study questions rounds off each chapter.

While the book does draw attention to many of the limitations and deficiencies of current church life, it is essentially positive and exhortatory in its approach, arising as it does from the author's experience as a pastor in discovering 'in a fresh way from Scripture God's plan for the church'.

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

# Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

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theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

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