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



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David Parker

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Manuscripts, reports and communications

should be addressed to the Editor and sent to Dr David Parker,
17 Disraeli St, Indooroopilly, 4068, Qld, Australia

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Editorial: ‘The Whole Gospel’ : Lausanne reflects on its own vision

‘THE WHOLE CHURCH taking the whole gospel to the whole world’. This is the phrase with which the Lausanne Covenant (1974) sums up the meaning of evangelization. It is a resounding triplet that has become an unofficial motto of the Lausanne movement, capturing as it does that holistic commitment that has always been at the heart of Lausanne’s understanding of mission. Fine words, but what exactly do they mean?

The Lausanne Theology Working Group, in association with the WEA Theological Commission, held a meeting in Limuru, Kenya, in February 2007, seeking to set an agenda for theological and missiological reflection in the years leading up to the planned Lausanne III Congress in Cape Town in October 2010. The theme of the Limuru consultation was “Following Jesus in Our Broken World”. The papers of that consultation were published in a special issue of ERT (31:4, October 2007).

We then decided to explore theologically each of the three phrases of the Lausanne slogan. Accordingly, the group of about 30 from all continents met once again in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in February 2008, to consider what we mean by ‘the whole gospel’. The phrase suggests that there might

be something that is only a partial or incomplete gospel. But would that be gospel at all? Certainly, we are aware that there are many presentations of what is claimed to be the gospel that seem to fall short of the comprehensive good news of all that the Bible says God has done and will do for the restoration of his broken creation and the redemption of humanity.

So, in the papers that follow, participants wrestled with the meaning of the whole gospel in the whole Bible; the fullness of the achievement of the cross; the power of the Holy Spirit; the ethically transforming demand and promise of the gospel; the wholeness of the gospel as seen down through its historical reception and across the range of human cultures. These main papers were illustrated with a variety of case studies, which unfortunately cannot find space here, though it is hoped to publish all our materials on the Lausanne website in due course.

We trust that the glory of the gospel will shine more brightly as you read, and motivate us more strongly as a whole church (our theme in 2009) to demonstrate it to the whole world.

Chris Wright
Chair, Lausanne Theology Working Group

'According to the Scriptures' The Whole Gospel in Biblical Revelation

Chris Wright

KEYWORDS: *Canon, witness, missionary, story, creation, redemption, salvation, sin, world*

I Introduction

Our purpose in this meeting of the Lausanne Theology Working Group (LTWG) is to reflect on the meaning of the phrase: 'The Whole Gospel'. I have undertaken to lead our thinking on what it means in relation to the revelation of God in the whole Bible. I want to do this because too often, it seems to me, evangelicals when they speak the word 'gospel' have in mind one or two key texts, or a particular articulation of what they assume the 'good news' is. And when they think about evangelization as 'spreading the gospel', again, it is often a single concept of what 'the gospel' means that they have in mind.

I want to urge the Lausanne movement as a whole to be fully biblical (in line with its own DNA from the Lausanne Covenant). By this I mean three things: Firstly, the Bible as a whole *conveys* the whole good news. God has

revealed himself through this complex phenomenon we call the canon of Scripture. We must allow all of it to inform and govern what we understand the gospel to be and what we then commit ourselves to live out and proclaim.

Secondly, the Bible as a whole, in all its canonical parts, *contributes* to the good news. It is not something to be found in only the New Testament, or just the Gospels. All that God has spoken in his word is relevant to the good news we have heard and are to pass on. Thirdly, the Bible as a whole must function to control the *criteria* by which we are able to discern what makes the good news truly good, and what is actually bad news disguised as good, ie, to distinguish the true gospel from the many popular but false alternatives.

So, if we are to be the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world, we absolutely must go to the whole Bible for the comprehensive truth of the good news. In this paper, for reasons of space, I have been able to survey only the first two points above. My hope is that as Lausanne

engages in the necessary task of defending the biblical gospel and exposing and rejecting all false gospels, it will indeed turn to the whole counsel of God in all the Scriptures to do so.

II The Bible as a Whole Conveys the Whole Gospel

In what ways does the whole Bible convey good news? I suggest at least three: by its existence, by its story, and by its central witness.

1 By its existence

The Bible is the record and product of the God who has chosen neither to remain hidden from us, his human creatures, nor to approach us only in anger at our rebellion and disobedience. God reaches out to us in love and grace, with words of promise and acts of redemption. The Bible is where we find these, and so, in and of itself, it is good news. Here is what I have written in relation to this point, in relation to the Bible being missional by its very existence.

A missional hermeneutic of the Bible begins with the Bible’s very existence. For those who affirm some relationship (however articulated), between these texts and the self-revelation of our creator God, the whole canon of Scripture is a missional phenomenon in the sense that it witnesses to the self-giving movement of this God towards his creation and towards us, human beings in God’s own image, but wayward and wanton. The writings which now comprise our Bible are

themselves the product of, and witness to, the ultimate mission of God.¹

The whole Bible, then, actually constitutes good news by its existence as proof of the loving self-revelation of God intended for our redemption.² There would be no good news if God did not love us; there would be no knowledge of that good news if the story of God’s love and its redemptive achievement were not recorded for us in the Scriptures.

2 By its story

The reason the Bible as a whole conveys good news is because it tells the whole story of what God has done to save the world. This narrative nature of the gospel is of utmost importance, especially in relating to other religions, since the only reason we can say that there is no salvation in other religions is *not* because they are inferior as religions (as if our religion were better; as if religion were the thing that saves anybody, when the Bible says religion saves nobody—only God saves), *but* because other religions do not tell this story, the story that constitutes the saving good news.

Once again, here are some extracts from what I have written elsewhere:

When the Bible talks about salvation, God is the key, the centre, the prime actor. Because salvation, according to the Bible, is the prop-

1 Christopher J.H. Wright, *Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 48.

2 Charles R. Taber, ‘Missiology and the Bible’, *Missiology* 11 (1983), 232.

erty of God, then this means that salvation can never be a matter of *human* initiation or human achievement. Salvation is not something that we human beings can accomplish or earn by any means, *even including religion*. Salvation is in God's hands. It is not something that any human religion can offer as a reward for doing this or that ritual, or following this or that practice. Salvation belongs to God, not to any religion.

According to the Bible, salvation is initiated by God's grace, achieved by God's power, offered on God's terms, accomplished by God's Son, secured by God's promises, and guaranteed by God's sovereignty.

Salvation is fundamentally a story—*The Story*. Salvation is constituted within the all-encompassing biblical meta-narrative that forms the biblical worldview. The Bible is fundamentally a grand narrative with four major parts or sections: **creation, fall, redemption in history, and new creation**. And salvation, as biblically defined, is all that is contained in the third and fourth parts of that great story: redemption in history and the future hope of new creation. Salvation spans the great arch of history from God's covenant with Abraham to the second coming of Christ.

The story of salvation is what fills the gap between the scattering of the nations in Genesis 11 and the healing of the nations in Revelation 22. The Bible is, above all else, the story of salvation....The gospel is not somebody's theory. It is not

somebody's *good idea*. The gospel is the *good news* about what the biblical God has done, is doing and will finally do, within the history of the world. That is why it is so important, as I have repeatedly emphasized, that we use our whole Bible in coming to an understanding of salvation, and not rely solely on a few isolated verses of doctrinal teaching from Paul's letters.³

3 By its central witness to Christ

It is a truism that the whole Bible bears witness to Christ. There are, of course, all kinds of hermeneutical alligators lurking in the placid waters of that affirmation—not to mention homiletical traps as well. But still, inasmuch as the good news of the gospel is essentially what God has done in Christ, it is to the whole Bible that we must go to find out the comprehensive richness of what that is.

For us, as for Jesus himself, it is from the scriptures of the Old Testament that we learn the rich contours of Jesus' identity and mission: who he was and what he came to accomplish. It is the Old Testament story of Israel that declares the mission of the God of Israel—for them and through them for the world of nations. That was the mission that Jesus came to see to its fulfillment. From the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament we understand the fullest significance of his life, death and resurrection. All that he said and did, in life and death, must be received

³ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 39-40.

within the total context of the biblical world historically and the biblical revelation theologically.⁴

III The Bible as a Whole Contributes to the Whole Gospel

As I pondered how best to explain what I mean by that affirmation, the following two questions came to mind. Firstly, what makes the good news good? And, secondly, what do all the major parts of the Bible contribute to the good news being good?

I worked my way mentally through the Bible, and the list grew longer and longer. Many of the points below need little elaboration. But the cumulative effect is quite stunning (at least to me!). There is just so much good news in the Bible! And so many ways in which it is *good* news. When I finished my list, I felt like singing the doxology, and indeed there may be the seeds of some very powerful liturgy here. With the example of Psalm 136, we need not fear a bit of repetition!

Now at this point I should correct a false impression that might arise from the following survey. I am well aware of the danger of etymological fallacy combined with invalid reverse logic. That is to say, just because the word ‘gospel’ translates *evangelion*, which means ‘good news’, I do not imagine

that one can make any kind of ‘good news’ the equivalent of the biblical gospel. To say, ‘the gospel is good news, therefore all good news is gospel’, would be like saying ‘dogs have four legs, therefore all four legged creatures are dogs’.

So although I do want to show the great variety of ways in which the Bible brings us good news, I do not imply that every one of these is in itself capable of being equated with ‘the gospel’, certainly as the New Testament uses that term. However, what I certainly do want to affirm is that, were it not for the fundamental gospel truth that the whole Bible conveys to us, of God’s grace and love and redeeming actions in history climaxing in the work of Jesus Christ, there would be no other good news of any sort to tell in the universe.

The same kind of point could be made about the many examples we might give of love, goodness or beauty in human history generally. Ultimately all of these flow from and depend upon the fact that God himself is the origin and sustainer of all that is loving, good and beautiful. He is the ontological source of any such particulars in human life. It is because of the love, goodness and beauty of God that we can experience such things.

Similarly, it is because there is good news rooted and grounded in the character and redemptive action of God, that human life can have multiple and ordinary examples of good news—such as the Bible portrays in great variety and richness.

Having made that point clear, let us survey the many dimensions of the good news the Bible conveys to us, all of which are fundamentally good news in and through and because of Christ.

4 For an extensive discussion of how we are to understand the centrality of Christ to the whole Bible, or how the Old Testament relates to him, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1992), reprinted by Monarch Books and InterVarsity Press (USA), 2005.

1 Torah

a) Genesis 1-11

It is good news that we know our Creator: Too many versions of ‘the gospel’ begin only with Genesis 3 (and end only at Calvary). In such versions, the good news is confined to the solution to our problem of human sin. Now there is no doubt that this is at the heart of the story, and indeed constitutes the longest part of the biblical narration. But when confined to that, we lose the beginning and the ending, Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22, which are universal in scope, encompassing the whole creation.

It is good news that we live, not in a chaos but a creation, that we are not the product of blind chance, but of benevolent purpose; that we are made in the image of the one true living personal God, not the spawn of competing malevolent gods.

It is good news that we know the depth and breadth of our sin: The value of any remedy depends on the seriousness of the sickness it cures. And the seriousness of the sickness can be known only by accurate diagnosis. False diagnosis leads to false or inadequate prescription, with fatal results. The Bible tells it as it is. Part of the good news that the Bible offers is its radical, comprehensive and uncompromising analysis of the bad news.

From Genesis 3 onwards, the nature of our human predicament is portrayed with ruthless simplicity and candour. If there is to be good news at all, it will have to be a very big answer to a very big problem, which involves every human person, every dimension of the human person (spiritual, physical,

intellectual, emotional, relational, social), and every culture throughout the rolling ages of history. The Bible’s portrayal of the scale and scope of our sin contributes to the scale and scope of the gospel’s remedy.

It is good news that God is committed to life on earth: The primal history from Eden to Babel includes several indications of God’s merciful commitment to human well-being, in spite of the evil in which we wallow and revel. Genesis 3:15, sometimes referred to as the ‘proto-evangelium’ (the first declaration of good news), promises that the serpent will not have the final victory but will be crushed by a son of Eve. The story of Enoch shows that God’s power is greater than the otherwise universal reign of death. But especially the story of the flood and its aftermath in the covenant with Noah explicitly declares God’s commitment to life on earth.

It is good news that God has not abandoned the nations: The ethnic diversity of human nations is a creational good, which Genesis 10 implies was God’s way of enabling the creation mandate of ‘filling the earth’ to be fulfilled. It ended up in arrogant stasis at the tower of Babel, in Genesis 11. But God’s answer was not to destroy the nations, but to confuse their language such that they could not unite in schemes of totalitarian self-aggrandisement. So the scattering of the nations across the face of the earth continues; the redemption of the nations from the curse of sin and separation from God still awaits.

b) Genesis 12-50

It is good news that God has promised to bless the nations: When we come to

God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, we know we are on ‘gospel’ territory, because Paul actually refers to this promise as the Scripture ‘proclaiming the gospel in advance’ (Gal. 3:8). It is a good way of talking about this promise, since the rest of the biblical story of redemption which constitutes the gospel begins here, and does not end until the promise is fully realized in the great assembly of the redeemed from all nations in Revelation. In fact, just as the promise of Genesis 12:3 needs to be seen against the background of the ‘tribes, languages and nations’ of Genesis 10, so does the picture of the fulfilment of that promise when people from ‘every nation, tribe, people and language’ in Revelation 7:9 gather in worship of the Lamb of God. The gospel is for nations.

As evangelicals we easily neglect this dimension of the gospel, by reducing it to a message of individual salvation. The biblical story of salvation that constitutes the gospel begins and ends with God and the nations, not just God and individuals.

It is good news that God has called his people to be a community of righteousness and justice: God’s answer to the problem of human sin was not to whisk individual sinners off to heaven every now and then. It was rather the much longer-term project of creating a community, starting with Abraham, through whom God would bring blessing to the nations. This is to say that at one level, the gospel of God is inextricably linked to the people of God. Our doctrine of salvation cannot be severed from our doctrine of the church.

But what is also clear from the beginning is that this was to be a distinctive community, not only in reli-

gious commitment, but in ethical behaviour. Genesis 18:19 is a key text on this point. It expresses the very purpose of Abraham’s election in terms of an ethical community walking in the way of the LORD (instead of the way of Sodom), and doing righteousness and justice, *so that* the LORD could bring about what he had promised Abraham, namely, blessing to all nations.

Herein lies the source of a trajectory in which election, mission and ethics are integrally linked within the meaning of the gospel itself, a trajectory that stretches ultimately to the way Paul speaks of the gospel as an ethically as well as a redemptively transformative message.

It is good news that God works sovereignly for good in the midst of human evil: The book of Genesis begins and ends with the goodness of God, the goodness of creation, and the goodness of God’s sovereign planning. The words of Joseph in Genesis 50:20 echo the good creation of chapter 1, and point forward to the good plans of God for his people (eg, Jer. 29:11), and the eternal perspective of God’s total gospel goodness in Romans 8:28-30.

There is good news fundamentally because God is good and plans good. The cross is the supreme demonstration of the truth of Genesis 50:20, universally applied.

c) Exodus to Deuteronomy

It is good news that Yahweh is the God whose character is both justice and compassion: Genesis illustrated the justice and compassion of God, in stories such as Sodom and Gomorrah (cf Gen. 18:25), or Hagar (Gen. 16, 21). But Exodus provides both the paradigmatic

historical demonstration of the liberating justice of God, and the definitive articulation of the character of Yahweh that it proved. Exodus 34:6-7 becomes a theme text in the Psalms and Prophets for the merciful and redemptive character of God, and of course it also underpins the way Paul describes the gospel as the work of this God, accomplishing precisely and simultaneously the perfect demonstration of God's compassion and God's justice.

It is good news that Yahweh is King and not Pharaoh: The first significant mention of the kingdom of God comes in the wake of God's great liberating act of justice in the exodus. Up to that point, the only king in the story is the Pharaoh, and his kingship is the model of human empire, blasphemously arrogant and oppressive. The climax of Moses' song after the crossing of the sea is that it had now been proved who was the real king. 'The LORD will reign, for ever and ever' (Ex. 15:18).

Yahweh is king (and not Pharaoh), and that is exceedingly good news, which the rest of the Bible celebrates in another great trajectory that stretches through many Psalms affirming the same thing, prophets who longed for it to be demonstrated in history, and climaxes with the proclamation by Jesus that the kingship of Yahweh had been decisively inaugurated in his own ministry. The gospel of the kingdom of God is another of those great unifying biblical themes, stretching from Exodus to Revelation.

It is good news that God's redemptive action is comprehensive—socially, politically, economically and spiritually: Since the exodus stands as the classic biblical model of God in redemptive action (it called forth almost the first

metaphorical use in the Bible of the 'redeem' vocabulary with God as subject, Ex. 15:13; the only earlier one being Jacob's testimony in Gen. 48:16). It is highly significant that what God actually did in the exodus was so comprehensive. The people of Israel were suffering a form of bondage in Egypt that was political (they were an ethnic minority with no independent status); economic (they were being exploited as slave labour for the economic benefit of the host nation); social (they were suffering gross interference in their family life); and spiritual (their slavery to Pharaoh stood in the way of their worship of Yahweh—the same word is used for slavery and worship in the text).

The good news that God sent through Moses was not that they would eventually escape to heaven when they died, but that God intended to deliver them from all four dimensions of their bondage, which he spectacularly did. The exodus thus provides the biblical gospel with a holistic content that does not just evaporate in the New Testament, but needs to be included in the totality of our biblical understanding.⁵

It is good news that God's law was given in the context of grace, redemption and covenant: There is an ethical demand to the gospel, as we hope to make clear throughout, but it is founded upon the priority of the redemptive grace of God. This is as true in the Old as in the New Testa-

⁵ The exodus, of course, is a major text and theme in holistic theologies of the gospel and mission. I have explored the topic more fully in Wright, *The Mission of God*, ch. 8.

ment. When Israel reached Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, the good news Moses had brought them in Egypt has now become a historical fact. God had brought them out. And in the crucial hinge text of Exodus 19:3-6, God emphasizes that divine initiative of salvation before calling for the response of covenant loyalty expressed in obedience to the law. The law, in fact, was given only on the foundation of redeeming grace (cf Deut. 6:20-25).

It is good news that God called Israel to holistic obedience in every sphere of life: ‘This God thinks of everything’, was how a young Indian described to me his experience of reading the Old Testament law for the very first time, even before he became a Christian. He was from a Dalit background and encountered the Bible only when he got to his university hostel (it was a Telugu Bible put in his bedroom by Christian students). What he meant was that the whole of human life is represented in the covenant response that God called for from Israel on the basis of his redeeming grace—personal, sexual, parental, filial, agricultural, commercial, judicial, political, international.

This is good news because it meant (as the prophets saw very clearly) that people could not claim to please God through religious rituals while neglecting the social and relational dimensions of human life. The God of Israel would not accept the worship of those who oppressed the poor and needy. For a Dalit, this was very good news. ‘I never knew such a God existed’, he added, referring to the God of comprehensive compassion and justice that he found in the Old Testament. This understanding of the biblical God did not diminish or change when he was

introduced to Jesus Christ and received the gospel of personal salvation, as he later did.

It is good news that God chose to dwell among his people: In a world in which God had driven human beings from the garden of Eden, and from which (in a sense), humans had driven God by their sin and rebellion, it is good news that God chose to make a home among his people, through the tabernacle in the wilderness, and eventually the temple in Jerusalem. Fundamental misunderstandings of this reality could arise, as the prophets discerned and Stephen pointed out (Acts 7). But the essential truth of a God who chose to be present rather than distant is part of the gospel that the New Testament sees fulfilled in the incarnation, the indwelling Spirit, the metaphor of the whole church as the temple of God, and the hope of a new creation in which God once more dwells with his redeemed people.

Good news indeed, from a tent of cloth and skins, to a new creation that needs no such localized presence for God will be everywhere present with his people. Another trajectory stretches from God tabernacling with his people in the wilderness, to the incarnation itself, when ‘the word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us’ (Jn. 1:14).

It is good news that God provided means of atonement for the weak and sinful: The sacrificial system in itself was good news inasmuch as it took account of human failure and provided a God-given means for people to be restored to fellowship with God and inclusion in the community. But the particular good news for the poor was that those who could not afford the normally pre-

scribed animal sacrifices could bring either a pair of doves, or even a few litres of flour, and have them counted as a full blood sacrifice (Lev. 5:5-13). Clearly, the efficacy of the sacrifice in accomplishing atonement lay in the grace of God and his willingness to forgive, not in the material or the size of the sacrifice itself.

It is good news that God anticipated Israel's failure, and built it into his long term plans of grace and redemption: The book of Deuteronomy is remarkable in that it both begins and ends in failure. But in neither case is God defeated. It begins with the failure of the exodus generation to take the land of promise. But God offers a fresh choice and challenge to the following generation. It ends with the anticipated failure of the generations to come, after the death of Moses. And yet again, it holds out the promise of hope even in the face of a broken covenant and calamitous curses, of grace after judgment (Deut. 29-31).

This sequence of divine promise, human failure, and sovereign divine grace weaving even that failure into plans of gospel grace and a hope-filled future, is what ultimately shapes the New Testament understanding, articulated by Paul in Romans. The gospel is good news precisely because it takes human failure so seriously, yet refuses to be defeated by it, and uses it to accomplish God's redemptive purpose. The cross, again, is the supreme example.

2 The Prophets

a) The former prophets

It is good news that God persisted with his saving purpose in the highly ambigu-

ous world of Israel in their land: the history of Old Testament Israel is so fraught with failure, rebellion and judgment that it is perhaps difficult to discern much that is gospel within it. And yet the very fact that God persevered with this people, repeatedly challenged and summoned them to repentance and return, and eventually restored them after catastrophic judgment, is in itself a monument to the quality of divine love and patience that the Bible as a whole predicates of the gospel.

It is good news that the exile and return from exile modelled both the sovereign judgment and the sovereign grace of God—in both respects foreshadowing the cross of Christ: The New Testament Gospels present the life and work of Jesus as the completion of, and in many ways, a recapitulation of, the story of Old Testament Israel. Matthew, for example, weaves exodus themes into his birth and infancy narratives.

The story of the exile foreshadows the cross in several ways. It was an act of simultaneous human wickedness, violence at the hands of the Babylonians, and divine sovereign justice exercised by that means. In the same way, as Peter pointed out (Acts 2:23), the cross was the work of human evil and divine salvific planning. The crucial difference was that, whereas the exile is presented to us as a deserved act of punishment for Israel's sins, the cross was endured by one whose sinless life deserved no such thing. The sin was ours.

Similarly, the prophetic interpretation of the return from exile is that it was an act of God's free grace and forgiveness. The hope of Israel lay not in their native ability to survive, but in God's unbreakable will that they

should live, and that his mission through them to all nations would be fulfilled. Thus, the New Testament gospel affirms that in the death and resurrection of Christ, God has kept his promise to Israel, finally and fully (eg, Acts 13:32).

b) The latter prophets

It is good news that the prophets analysed and exposed the complex anatomy of personal and corporate sin: We have already noted the radical diagnosis of sin in the book of Genesis. To this, the prophets add layer after layer of insight and analysis. The stain of sin, as the prophets observed it, is deeply ingrained in every fibre of human life—individual, social, political, economic, etc. There is no part of human life that is free from it, and it is this profound analysis of the problem that makes their affirmation of God’s sovereign grace to be the astounding good news that it is.

It is good news that the prophets persist in affirming the ultimate purpose of God to be redemption—for Israel and the nations and the whole creation: Undoubtedly the greatest contribution that the prophets make to the biblical gospel is their refusal to give up hope in the God of Israel. However much Israel itself might fail in its covenant obligations, God would never abandon his promise that through Israel all the nations of the world would be blessed.

So they envisage that prospect in a rich variety of ways, in texts that portray the nations as being drawn to the worship of God, experiencing the salvation of God, called by the name of God, sharing the blessing of God, and ultimately included fully within the

people of God.⁶ Ultimately, the prophetic gospel is good news for the whole creation, since God’s redemptive purpose includes it all (Isa. 65:17-25).

This great Old Testament gospel vision laid the foundation for the theology and practice of mission to the nations in the New Testament, and reminds us yet again that our understanding of the scope of the ‘whole gospel’ must go beyond individual salvation and have a national dimension, however we articulate that.

3 The Writings

a) Psalms

It is good news that we can worship the living God in response to his revelation and redemption, not as a mechanism to obtain them: We have already seen that the gospel of exodus is that redeeming grace comes before law. Obedience is a response to grace. So is worship, and this is the gospel of the Psalms. We do not worship God in order to do him favours (eg, by feeding or placating him), or to persuade him to do us favours. On the contrary the whole thrust of Psalter worship is responsive to what God has done already, in the history of God’s people and in personal experience. Praise, therefore, in the Psalms is a gospel response to the sav-

⁶ The following texts will repay reflection in the light of this perspective: Is. 2:3-5; 19:19-25; 45:22-25; 49:6; 66:18-24; Jer. 4:2; 12:16; Amos 9:11-12; Jon.; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 2:10-11; Mal. 1:11. This theme of God’s saving purpose for the nations is explored in much greater depth in Wright, *The Mission of God*, ch. 14.

ing work of God, not a legalistic effort to activate it.

It is good news that relationship with God is intensely personal and involves the whole of life, including its pain, suffering and injustice: Nevertheless, of course, praise in the Psalter is not a matter of happy thoughts or words, but is an acknowledgement of the reality and presence of God in all circumstances of life. It can therefore actually take the form of lament, the largest single category of Psalms.

The pervasive presence of lament in the Psalms is an essential part of the biblical gospel for at least two reasons. First, it recognizes that the whole of life is to be brought before God, is of interest to God, and can expect to feel the impact of God's character and action. Lament is holistic because no element of human experience lies outside God's concern. That is good news. And secondly, lament passionately believes that God's character is such that he must and ultimately will do something about evil (ie, finally destroy it and all who unrepentantly persist in it), and that is precisely the affirmation and hope of the gospel. Lament is the voice of trust in God's redemptive purpose in the midst of the long wait under the pressure of things that appear to deny it.

It is good news that the worship of the living God will eventually be universal among the nations: Like the prophets, the Psalms evince a mind-stretching imagination of faith which universalizes what Israel knew to be true for themselves in their own history into a remarkable vision of hope for all the nations on earth. Once again, there is no space to elaborate, but pausing to read the Psalms listed in the footnote

will establish this as one of the sources of the New Testament gospel for the nations, as clearly articulated and practised by Paul.⁷

b) Wisdom

It is good news that the world reflects the moral character of God (Proverbs): The most universal part of the Old Testament canon is the wisdom literature, in the sense that it is open to and draws from the wisdom of surrounding nations, while recognizing the creation gifts of rationality, insight and experience in all peoples. Yet it still staunchly upholds the uniqueness of Yahweh, God of Israel, as the one whom we are to fear if we are even to start out on the road of wisdom. So there are elements of gospel grace in the way Wisdom links life on earth to the character and demands of God, in such a way that rational, spiritual and ethical spheres are integral to each other. To be wise is also to be godly and righteous.

To be ungodly or unjust is also to be foolish. Such insight is not in and of itself redemptive of course (and in the Old Testament Wisdom has to be set within the overarching narrative of redemption), but it does point to the nature of gospel wisdom, which sees all of these embodied in the person of Christ Jesus 'who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30).

⁷ Eg, Ps. 22:27-28; 47:7-9; 67; 72:17-19; 86:9; 87:4-6; 96; 102:13-15, 21-22; 117; 138:4-5; 145; 148:11-13. Consideration of some of these is also included in Wright, *The Mission of God*, ch. 14.

It is good news that God can be known and trusted, against all that points in the opposite direction (Job), and that human wisdom is limited and not in itself redemptive, but is allowed to struggle with deep questions on the foundation of faith (Ecclesiastes): The gospel implicit in Job and Ecclesiastes lies in the way they face up to some of the desperate contradictions of life in this fallen world (innocent suffering, loss, the apparent hiddenness of God, futility, unpredictability, death), and still continue to affirm the goodness and sovereignty of the one true living God and to hope in him.

To say that the cross and resurrection of Jesus constitute the ultimate answer to the questions posed by Job and Ecclesiastes, is of course true. But God has left them in the canon precisely so that we can see how seriously God himself takes these issues that trouble us so deeply, and thereby enables us not only to rejoice in the hope that the gospel provides, but to continue to wrestle with these things on the foundation of that faith and hope.

I hope this survey has not fallen into the trap of simply labelling everything that was remotely ‘good news’ in the Old Testament as functionally equivalent to the gospel, but rather has shown the rich and subtle ways in which multiple ‘good things’ that the Old Testament reflects on are either dimensions or anticipations or outworkings of the fundamental good news of what God has done for the world in and through Jesus Christ.

Because these Old Testament dimensions are so much less familiar, I have given more attention to them, and for reasons of space I will necessarily

have to handle the more familiar New Testament delineation of the good news in summary form.

4 The New Testament

a) The Gospels

It is good news that God kept his promise to Israel, and that Jesus as Messiah of Israel is also Saviour of the world: All three synoptic Gospels take us back to God’s promises to Israel in their opening verses. John’s Gospel takes us back to creation. The New Testament thus begins by recognizing that the gospel it proclaims is founded upon all that we have just surveyed—the good news that is pervasively and holistically explicit and implicit throughout the Old Testament.

The New Testament gospel is not a sudden, exotic, new message never dreamt of before. It is the culmination of the biblical story, through which God’s saving message and action on behalf of Old Testament Israel has reached its climax in Jesus of Nazareth, and has thereby been released to bring about what had been promised to Abraham from the beginning—the blessing of all nations, through faith in Christ.

It is good news that God became human and lived among us: The incarnation is an essential part of the gospel, not only on the minimalistic grounds that for Jesus to die for us he first had to be born and live among us, but also on the intrinsic grounds that God chose to become human, the Word became flesh. The humanity of Jesus is utterly essential to the redemptive meaning of the cross, and it is also crucial to the universal significance of his resurrection for all creation.

It is good news that the kingdom of God has come and is at work in the world: The reign of God is a basic Old Testament affirmation—as a reality (his universal sovereignty over creation and history), and as a hope (that his reign would eventually be manifested, acknowledge and submitted to among all nations). The gospel proclaimed by Jesus was that that future hope was now beginning to be realized in and through his person, life and work.

It is good news that Jesus demonstrated the quality of God's love in his life, the extent of God's love in his death, and the vindication of God's justice in his resurrection: The life, death and resurrection of Jesus, of course, have to be affirmed as the very heart and soul of the biblical gospel. Whatever else is good news is good news because God was incarnate in the person of his Son, Jesus of Nazareth, bore our sins in our place on the cross, and rose again to defeat all the powers of evil and death.

b) Acts

It is good news that God sent his Spirit, both universalizing and internalizing the presence of Jesus. It is good news that with the gift of the Spirit, the new age of salvation is inaugurated. It is good news that the church was birthed as a community of forgiven sinners, committed to faith, love, care, justice, and costly witness. The church in its essence and character is actually part of the good news, not just the vehicle of it. It is good news that God has opened the door of salvation and covenant membership to people of all nations, as Luke illustrates from a Roman centurion in Acts 10 to the Roman capital in Acts 28.

c) Epistles

It is good news that the gospel is so magnificent that only by many metaphors were the apostles able to articulate what God has accomplished through Christ. It is good news that we are called to live out the truth of the gospel in transformed lives and communities.

d) Revelation

It is good news that God is on the throne of the universe and that salvation belongs to him. It is good news that the crucified Lamb of God reigns and all history is under his sovereign purpose. It is good news that God's people will survive and triumph over all that threatens to destroy them. It is good news that Jesus will return, the dead will be raised, God will bring all things to perfect justice, and evil will be destroyed. It is good news that there will be a new creation in which God will dwell among his redeemed humanity forever.

IV 'According to My Gospel'

This is a phrase that Paul uses several times. Clearly he had an understanding of the good news in Christ that could be summed up in that one word. What did it signify?

In search of an answer to this question, I read through the whole Pauline corpus, noting every use of the word. My broad analysis of this suggests that Paul uses the word as shorthand for at least the following six things. In each case I list references in which Paul appears to use the term in these ways.

Firstly, the gospel is an account of the events of Jesus' death and resurrection, understood in the light of the scriptures of the Old Testament, as the

means through which God has made our forgiveness possible. The gospel then, is good news about something that has happened in history, with a long pre-history. It is not merely a ‘good idea’, or a good myth that illuminates reality. It is first of all, historical facts in which God has accomplished salvation. It is what God has done for us that we could not do for ourselves.⁸

Secondly, the gospel is therefore a message to be proclaimed, as all good news should be. It must be heard as ‘a word’, and on being heard, it needs to be received and believed. This message is to be preached to all nations, for it is precisely all nations that are in view in the scope of what God has done in Christ in fulfilment of his promise to Abraham. ‘The work of the gospel’, then, seems to refer primarily to this task of making the good news known by all means of communication possible and at whatever cost. There is an intrinsically verbal dimension to the gospel. It is a story that needs to be told in order that its truth and significance may be understood. And that significance is not only for individuals and nations, but ultimately for the redemption of the whole creation.⁹

Thirdly, the gospel is thereby also truth that needs to be defended, against denial or perversion. So there

is a polemical dimension to the gospel. It exists in explicit contrast and conflict with other worldviews, and being a servant of the gospel necessarily involves costly struggle and spiritual battle.¹⁰

Fourthly, the gospel works transformation. The first aspect of its transformative power is that it transforms our status. Paul’s message is that through the cross of Christ, the righteousness of Christ can become ours through faith in him, so that we can be *declared* righteous by God without violating his own justice. But furthermore, the status of Gentiles is transformed, along with believing Jews. From having been alienated from the covenantal grace of God, it is ‘through the gospel’ that Gentiles can enter into the same status with God as enjoyed hitherto by Old Testament Israel, so that the believing Jews and Gentiles can become one in Christ as a new humanity.¹¹ All the other metaphors that Paul uses to describe the work of the gospel in us have similarly transformative dimensions: redemption, reconciliation, adoption, and eternal life.

Fifthly, the second aspect of the gospel’s transformative power is ethical. ‘*Repent and believe the gospel*’, said Jesus (Mk. 1:15). Radical change of life goes along with faith in the good news. And when they asked John the Baptist what he meant by repentance, he was ruthlessly practical (Lk. 3:7-14). Paul agreed. The gospel involved

⁸ Rom. 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:1-8; Gal. 1:11-12; 3:6-8; 2 Thes. 2:13-15 (which presents the story of the gospel in the same order as the story of Old Testament Israel—loved, chosen, saved, sanctified, glory); 2 Tim. 1:10; 2:8.

⁹ Rom. 1:9,15; 15:16, 20; 1 Cor. 9:16, 23; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Gal. 2:2, 7; 4:13; Eph. 1:13; 3:6-7; 6:19; Phil. 1:5; 2:22; 4:15; Col. 1:5, 23; 1 Thes. 2:2-9; 3:2; 2 Tim. 1:11.

¹⁰ Gal. 1:6-9; 2:5, 14; Phil. 1:7, 27; 4:3; 1 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:8; Phlm. 13.

¹¹ Rom. 1:17 (read with 3:21-26); Gal. 3:6-29; Eph. 2:11-3:6.

a putting off of the filthy clothes of the old humanity and putting on the clothes that bore the aroma of Christ-likeness. So Paul's missionary goal was not evangelism only, in the sense of communicating the message, but nothing short of ethical transformation among those who received it by faith. His shorthand for this comes in the striking phrase with which he begins and ends his letter to the Romans—'obedience of faith among the nations'.

This is a vision steeped in Old Testament covenantal ethics and eschatological vision. And while Paul's whole understanding of the gospel was that it was the work of God's grace, not the achievement of our works, he was equally adamant that the whole point of grace being at work in us was to produce the fruit of lives that have been transformed, negatively from evil and positively in tirelessly doing good (Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 2:11-14).¹² The gospel that is intrinsically verbal is equally intrinsically ethical. There is no gospel where there is no change.

Finally, the gospel is the power of God at work in history and creation. For Paul this was something to marvel at and celebrate. The gospel seemed to have life of its own, such that Paul could personify it as being at work, active, and spreading. The great paradox of the cross—something shameful and absurd to Jew and Greek—was nothing to be ashamed of, for it was the very saving power of God that was transforming history and redeeming creation. All things that have been cre-

ated by Christ, and are being sustained by Christ, will be reconciled by Christ, through the blood of his cross. And, says Paul, 'This is the gospel' (Col. 1:15-23).¹³

V Conclusion

If we could ask Paul what content he might give to Lausanne's phrase, 'the whole gospel', he might have taken even longer than this paper. But I think he would at least have urged us to understand that the whole gospel is

- a Christ-centred story to be told
- a hope-filled message to be proclaimed
- a revealed truth to be defended
- a new status to be received
- a transformed life to be lived
- a divine power to be celebrated.

And I believe, that in urging us to understand these dimensions, Paul would have directed us continually back to what he knew simply as 'the Scriptures'—our Old Testament, for it was 'in accordance with the Scriptures', that Jesus died and rose again for our salvation. Our whole gospel, then, must be drawn from the deep well of the whole Bible, and our mission must be integrated accordingly around its great resonant narrative of saving grace, its transforming demand for, and promise of, covenantal obedience, and its vibrant hope and vision of a new creation in which righteousness dwells, for God will dwell there with his redeemed humanity from every nation.

¹² Rom. 1:5; 16:25-26; 2 Cor. 9:13; Phil. 1:27; 2 Thes. 1:8 (negatively); Tit. 2:11-14.

¹³ Rom. 1:16; Col. 1:6; 1 Thes. 1:5.

The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross

Mark L. Y. Chan

KEYWORDS: *Salvation, sin, atonement, substitution, victory, moral influence, glory, justice*

I The Centrality of the Cross

Central to Christianity is the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross and the resurrection of Christ formed the heart of the apostles' preaching from the very beginning (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; 15:3-4)¹ and the belief that Christ died for the sins of the world is an inalienable part of Christian confession. While attributing Jesus' death to human wickedness,² the apostles nevertheless

affirmed that the cross was no accident but an event that happened according to God's will (Acts 1:14-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32). Over and above human intentionality is the outworking of God's redemptive intention through the cross (Acts 2:23; Heb. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8).

Not surprisingly, the cross occupies a prominent place in the liturgy, writings, proclamation and missionary outreach of the church.³ While much is made of the connection of the cross to the promise of salvation through Christ, one should not forget the relationship between the cross and our understanding of who God is, and the place it has in Christian discipleship, ethics, and missions.

1 See John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 17-40; James Denny, *The Death of Christ*, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1951), 17-155; Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1965); and *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3d ed. (London: Tyndale Press, 1955, 1960, 1965).

2 The Sanhedrin and the Roman authorities converged on the political expediency of having Jesus executed. See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 540-611; and Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005).

3 Evangelical devotional literature and hymnody are full of references to the cross and the blood of Christ. Benjamin A. Pugh describes the phenomenon of 'blood mysticism' or the visualisation and verbalisation of the blood of Christ with a view to enriching one's relationship with God. 'A Brief History of the Blood: The Story of the Blood of Christ in Transatlantic Evangelical Devotion', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31 no. 3 (2007): 239-255.

II Biblical Perspectives on the Cross and Salvation

We understand the significance of the cross rightly only when we understand it within the overarching biblical framework of creation, fall and redemption. More than just individual forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God, the salvation procured by the crucified Jesus is about God's reordering of a disordered creation and the reconstituting of all things in Christ (Col. 1:19-20). The cross must be appreciated against the backdrop of God's redemptive activity in history, particularly in the history of Israel, in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, in the preaching and teaching of apostolic Christianity, and in the present ministry of the church leading up to the second coming. In what follows, we will explore the salient features of a biblical understanding of Christ's work of atonement.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world and plunged humanity into a state of rebellion and alienation from God. Sin violates the sacred order established by God for his creation, resulting in the holy God turning away from humankind until something is done to blot out the offence to his holiness. Without this, sinners will remain hopelessly cut off from God. It is in the divinely orchestrated process of repairing this breach that we find the biblical history of salvation.

The calling of Abraham, the rescue of the Hebrews from Egypt, and the constituting of Israel as God's covenantal people at Sinai are part and parcel of the outworking of God's redemptive plan for the world. When

the Israelites break the terms of the covenant and find their relationship with Yahweh severed,⁴ they turn to the God-given means of making sacrifices for sin, namely the burnt offering 'to make atonement' (Lev. 1:4), the sin offering and the guilt offering (Lev. 4:20; 7:7). The word 'atonement' is used frequently to translate various forms of the Hebrew verb *kipper*, with many English translations linking the word to 'forgive' or 'pardon', with God as the subject (eg, Ps. 65:3; 78:38; Jer. 18:23). The idea of sin being purged or forgiven is therefore closely associated with the Levitical notion of making atonement.

In a slightly different vein, some scholars suggest that the idea of atonement is tied to the word *kôper*, meaning 'ransom' or 'compensation' (see Ex. 30:11-16; 32:30; Num. 25:10-13; 35:29-34; Deut. 21:1-9; etc). Arguably, the concept of atonement in the Pentateuch carries with it the sacrificial sense of purification, as well as the non-sacrificial sense of making payment of a price or ransom.⁵ It is easy to

4 To be sure, the representation of the human problem in terms of a broken relationship with God is but one of many different ways the OT depicts the human predicament. Besides the relational, the human predicament is also portrayed as: disturbance of shalom, rebellion against authority, offence resulting in guilt that necessitates punishment, uncleanness and pollution, shame and disgrace, and finally death. See Christopher J. H. Wright, 'Atonement in the Old Testament', in Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker, eds., *The Atonement Debate* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 69-82.

5 See David Peterson, 'Atonement in the Old Testament', in David Peterson, ed., *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement*

get so tied up with the debates on the precise meaning of the different sacrificial rites mentioned that one misses the important point that sinners can draw near to God and enjoy his presence and promises only through the means that God himself provides. From the perspective of biblical theology, the OT sacrificial system foreshadows the all-sufficient and sin-bearing sacrifice of Jesus the God-Man on Calvary (Heb. 9:12, 14, 24-28) and furnishes the NT writers with the conceptual backdrop to articulate the significance of Christ and his work.

Significantly, God himself is said to 'atone' or 'cleanse the land for his people' (Deut. 32:43) when it is polluted. Even when the Israelites follow the prescribed rituals, the Lord is still implored to 'absolve' or 'atone for' his people (Deut. 21:8). God is therefore the ultimate source of atonement for sin in the OT sacrificial rituals.⁶ Equally significant is the connection between the shedding of blood and the deliverance and forgiveness of God's people. We see this in the first Passover (Ex. 12:7, 12-13) and in the rituals of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:1-34; 23:27-32), where the blood of a slaughtered goat is sprinkled 'upon the mercy seat and before the mercy seat' so as to 'make atonement for the sanctuary' (vv 15-16).

ment Today (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 2-15; Emile Nicole, 'Atonement in the Pentateuch', in Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 47-50.

⁶ Peterson, 'Atonement in the Old Testament', 10.

Turning to the NT, the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah (Is. 52:13-53:12) stands out as particularly illuminating of the death of Jesus, with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 understood very early on in church history as prophetic of the atoning sufferings of Christ, eg, Philip's application of this text to Jesus (Acts 8:32-35).⁷ The characterization of the servant in Isaiah 53 as a representative figure who is rejected (v 3), bears the guilt and sin of many (vv 4-6c, 12),⁸ suffers undeservedly on behalf of sinners (v 8) even though he is blameless (v 9b), gives his life like a lamb led to the slaughter (v 7) and pours himself out to death as 'an offering for sin' (vv 10b, 12) so as to bring healing (v 5), provides a ready scriptural grid to interpret Jesus' sufferings and death. The penal substitutionary nature of the Servant's offering of himself for the healing of Israel points ahead to the substitutionary death of Jesus. And it is likely that Jesus interpreted his own ministry and passion in terms of the suffering Servant (Luke 22:37; cf. Isa. 53:12 and Mt. 26:28).⁹

The Christological gloss on Isaiah 53 is representative of the attempt by

⁷ See Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Recovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 52-67.

⁸ See J. Alan Groves' discussion on the meaning and significance of 'bearing guilt' in his 'Atonement in Isaiah 53', in Hill & James III, *Glory of the Atonement*, 76-89.

⁹ See R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1971) and the discussion in W. H. Bellinger, Jr. and W. R. Farmer, eds., *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 70-151.

the NT writers to embed the cross within the OT narrative, taking into account God's antecedent work in Israel. In explicating the meaning of Christ's death, they appeal to the Hebrew scriptures and allude to OT events and concepts, all within the rubric of eschatological fulfilment. Jesus' announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God in his ministry signals the beginning of the end. The covenantal promises associated with the 'day of the Lord' have begun to be realized in history in and through Jesus. God's plan of salvation for Israel—and through Israel for the rest of the world—comes to a climax in Jesus.¹⁰ In their different ways, the four Gospels present Jesus and the cross as the means by which God accomplishes salvation, ie, takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29; Mt. 1:21) and brings 'forgiveness of sins' (Lk. 1:77).¹¹

For the apostle Paul, the cross is the power of God to salvation (1 Cor. 1:18) and Christ is 'our paschal lamb' (1 Cor. 5:7). Along with the resurrection, the cross is central to Paul's theology, with the confession, 'Christ died for us', appearing in various forms throughout his writings (eg, Rom. 5:6,

8; 14:9; 1 Cor. 8:11; Gal. 2:21; 1 Thes. 5:10). The significance of the cross is expressed through 'a plurality of images'¹² and overlapping ideas: atonement (or propitiation), reconciliation, justification, redemption, sanctification, regeneration, etc. Paul affirms unambiguously that God has 'reconciled us to himself through Christ' (2 Cor. 5:18) by making him 'to be sin who knew no sin' (2 Cor. 5:21). Through Christ's atoning blood (Rom. 3:24-25), we have been delivered from the wrath of God (Rom. 5:8-10) and made 'the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21). For Paul, the meaning of the cross is rooted fundamentally in his understanding of the divine purpose, in God's righteousness, wrath and love.

The book of Hebrews bears sustained witness to Jesus' high-priestly work (2:17) of making 'purification for sins' (1:3) and his death as a once-for-all atonement for sins (eg, 2:17; 7:27; 9:25-26; 10:12). Hebrews insists on the sinlessness of Jesus (4:15; 7:17-28) and presents him as both priest and sacrifice, portraying his atoning work as the fulfilment of the Day of Atonement ritual. Through the shedding of his blood, without which there can be no forgiveness of sins (9:22), Christ made a perfect offering as our representative (6:20; 7:25), liberating us

¹⁰ See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) for a sustained argument for rooting Jesus' messianic ministry within the context of God's salvific purposes for Israel, and through Israel for the whole world.

¹¹ See I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 34-52; and Joel B. Green, 'Death of Jesus', in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 146-63.

¹² Joel B. Green, 'Death of Jesus' in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 203. For an overview of Paul's ideas of atonement, see Ronald Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1981), 32-51; and Peterson, *Wrath and Mercy Meet*, 35-47.

from bondage to death and the devil (2:14-15) and securing for us forgiveness of sins and an 'eternal redemption' (9:12). Because of the cross, Christ has become the 'mediator of a new covenant' (9:15; 12:24; cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

We find a similar understanding of the cross in the rest of the NT. Peter asserts that Christ's sufferings were anticipated in the prophets (1 Pet. 1:10-12) and that believers have been 'ransomed' with the blood of Christ, the lamb without defect or blemish (v 19). Christ 'suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous' (3:18) in order to bring us to God. Like his fellow NT writers, Peter alludes to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 (1 Pet. 2:21-25). Through Christ's death, our wounds are healed and we are enabled to 'live for righteousness' (v 24; cf. Isa. 53:12). For Peter, the cross has ethical implications and behavioural ramifications, an emphasis also evident in John's letters, where to live right is to walk in God's light.

To those who fail to live in the light and fall into sin, John offers the assurance that the blood of Christ cleanses them from all sin (1 Jn. 1:9). Christ is the 'atoning sacrifice for our sins' and 'the sins of the whole world' (2:2). On this cosmic note, we turn, as John did on Patmos, to gaze at the dazzling Lord Jesus in the book of Revelation, the one 'who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood' (Rev. 1:5b). Jesus is consistently designated as 'the Lamb' whose blood has 'ransomed for God' saints from every nation (Rev. 5:9). Strikingly, Christ the Lamb is at the heart of the throne of God (Rev. 5:6), from where he receives the praise of all God's people, who stand righteous

before God only because the Lamb was slain.

With that glorious vision of the final eschatological outcome of Calvary, we turn now to examine the multi-faceted achievement of the cross.

III The Achievement of the Cross

Unlike the Trinity and Christology, which received formal conciliar expressions in the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) and Chalcedonian Formula (451 A.D.) respectively, the nature of Christ's atoning death has never been set forth precisely in a creedal confession, even though the substance of what Christ achieved on the cross is not in dispute within mainstream Christianity. The meaning of Christ's achievement on the cross has been variously explained by a number of metaphors or 'stories of salvation'.¹³ Whether in terms of a sacrifice, a victory, a punishment, a ransom, a purchase, a legal vindication, or a cleansing, these metaphors seek in their own ways to make sense of the mystery of the cross.¹⁴

There are a number of theories of the atonement in Christian thought, with the main ones being: (a) the *satisfaction* theory of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), which the Reformers

¹³ Stephen R. Holmes' expression in *The Wondrous Cross: Atonement and Penal Substitution in the Bible and History* (London: Pater-noster, 2007).

¹⁴ Sometimes different images are found in the same passage, such as Rom. 3:24-25 where three are found—the legal, the slave market and the sacrificial offering.

developed into what is known as *penal substitution* atonement; (b) the *Christus Victor* model, after Gustaf Aulén's 1931 book of the same name; and (c) the *moral influence* theory associated with Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Much has already been written about the merits of these approaches, and we do not need to rehearse these here.¹⁵ Suffice to say that not all theories of atonement carry the same weight despite the light that each throws on the subject.

Nevertheless, we maintain that there is value in enlisting the different metaphors in probing the mystery of the cross. The fact that there are divergent images points to the church's recognition of the complex and profound reality of what God did on the cross. No one picture suffices; all are needed, though not all are equally persuasive or important.

What then did the cross of Christ achieve? In tackling this question, we shall allude to the different theories as a foil for our exploration.

1 The cross reveals God's love to the world

The cross is at once the place of redemption and God's self-revelation; it is at once 'a word as well as a work'.¹⁶ The revelatory word coming from the cross is about the *glory*, *justice*, and *love* of God. We shall look at these in turn briefly.

¹⁵ See James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006)

¹⁶ Stott, *Cross*, 204.

a) **The glory of God manifested**
 Jesus' humiliating death is described paradoxically in John's Gospel as a 'glorification' (Jn. 17:1); in it both the Father and the Son are glorified (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). The shameful spectacle of the cross may be folly to the world, but to the eyes of faith, it is the wisdom and power of God to salvation (1 Cor. 1:18). The lifting up of the Son on the cross represents a wholly paradoxical manifestation of God's glory.

b) The justice of God is revealed on the cross.

An oft-repeated challenge to faith is the perplexing question of why God seemingly allows the wicked to prosper and injustice to go unpunished. One way Scripture responds to this is to point believers to the future judgment of God. The other is to look back to the decisive judgment that has already taken place on the cross. The sins that apparently went unpunished in the past have now been judged on the cross, so that God is vindicated. By condemning the sins of the world in Christ, God shows his justice. Thus Paul maintains that on the cross the righteousness and justice of God have been revealed (Rom. 3:21-26). At Calvary, God reveals himself as one who will not condone evil, so that no one can accuse him of injustice or moral indifference.

c) The love of God profoundly expressed on the cross.

The cross is at once a statement about God's justice and wrath, and a demonstration of God's love for the world (Jn. 3:16). We know love because Christ has laid down his life for us (1 Jn. 3:16)

as an 'atoning sacrifice for our sins' (1 Jn. 4:10). God demonstrates his love in the self-emptying of his Son, who 'became obedient to death' on the cross (Philp. 2:7-8). Such is the self-giving love of God on the cross that Moltmann, following Luther and late medieval theology, describes him as 'the crucified God'.¹⁷ The God we see on the cross is not a deity who mocks our moral ineptitude, but one who, knowing our weaknesses, enters into our pain and pours himself out in sacrificial love, and in so doing extends to us his divine hospitality.

d) The moral influence of the cross.

Christ's exemplary death has led some to interpret its significance in terms of the power of its moral impact. Abelard, widely regarded as the first representative of what is known as the moral influence or exemplarist theory of the atonement, argues that God does not need any satisfaction, sacrifice, or ransom to forgive us. He can do so simply because he loves us. The reason Jesus went to the cross was to demonstrate God's love to us. As the ultimate expression of self-sacrifice, the cross teaches us how much God loves us and how we ought to love him and others in return. God's love demonstrated on Calvary should inspire us to embody that same self-giving love.

To be sure, God's love revealed on the cross is morally inspiring; Christ

stands before us as an example of self-giving love. Paul appeals to the cross in calling the Ephesians to imitate Christ's love and live a compassionate life (Eph. 5:1-2; cf. 2 Cor. 5:14). Peter does the same in urging his readers to follow the example of the suffering Christ (1 Pet. 2:21; cf. 4:1-2). It is therefore understandable that one should emphasize the moral illumination and persuasion entailed in Christ's death. But to say that the meaning of the cross is exhausted by this exemplarist intent is surely reductionistic.

All Abelardian theories of the atonement are primarily subjective, and have no need for the objective sin-bearing dimension of the divine-human transaction. Jesus is presented as primarily teacher and example, and the traditional notions of justification, reconciliation, redemption, and the efficacy of Christ's death are interpreted exclusively in subjective terms. Conspicuous by their absence is the severity and extent of human rebellion against God, the violation of God's honour, and the reality of his wrath.

Christ's death may exemplify moral courage, but for his action to be meaningfully exemplary it has to be grounded in some objective state of affairs, and it has to be appropriately motivated. It is not enough to say that the cross is morally influential; one must enquire into *how* Christ's love is displayed on the cross. 'True love', Stott maintains, 'is purposive in its self-giving; it does not make random or reckless gestures.'¹⁸ Nicole illustrates it thus: 'If I should die in attempting to save a drowning child, my action may

17 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

18 Stott, *Cross*, 220.

be judged heroic and exemplary. But if I thrust myself in the water to give an example to those present, my act will be seen as insane and far from a paragon of virtue.¹⁹ Insofar as Christ gave his life as ‘a ransom for many’, his action would challenge us to imitate him. But if his death were motivated simply by a desire to serve as our model, then it would not be exemplary.

2 The cross a decisive victory

Through the death (and resurrection) of Christ, God triumphed over sin, death, evil, Satan and all spiritual powers. What looks like defeat is in reality a victory; the crucified is in fact the conqueror. God placed all our trespasses on the cross and made us alive with Christ, and in so doing conquered death (1 Cor. 15:54-57) and ‘disarmed the rulers and authorities’ (Col. 2:13-15; cf. 1 Jn. 5:4-5; Rev. 6:2) so that we can be ‘more than conquerors’ through Christ (Rom. 8:37).

This understanding of Christ’s death as a triumph is central to Gustaf Aulén’s influential study, *Christus Victor*.²⁰ Aulén argues for what he calls the ‘dramatic’ or ‘classic’ view, whereby God in Christ dramatically battles the forces of evil and triumphs over them. This view of the atonement is ‘classic’ in that it was the dominant view for the first thousand years of church history. Aulén rightly emphasizes the cross as

victory, for on it Christ not only saved us from sin and guilt but also from death, the devil and all evil powers (Mk. 3:27; Jn. 12:31; 1 Jn. 3:8; Col. 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15).

While the early church understood the atonement as Christ’s victory, there was little attention paid to the way atonement works. To the question, ‘How is the victory of Christ secured?’, the answer had to do invariably with some sense of redemption. Because of sin, people find themselves captives to Satan. In order to release sinners from this bondage, a ransom must be paid. Hence one way the early Christians described the work of Christ is in terms of the giving of his life as a *ransom*. Jesus characterised his own mission as one of giving his life as a ‘ransom for many’ (Mk. 10:45; cf. Mt. 20:28; cf. Job 33:24; Ps. 49:5-9, 15).

The word for ‘ransom’ (*lytron*) in classical Greek denotes payment made to free a slave or a prisoner, and its use in Mark 10:45 and elsewhere in the NT (eg, 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19) points to Jesus’ death as a price paid to wipe out the debt of sin and set captives free from bondage to sin and Satan (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Eph. 1:7; cf. Col. 1:14 and Rev. 5:9). To redeem sinners, a ransom price was paid, though neither Jesus nor any other NT writer tells us to whom the ransom was paid. The NT is content to state that Jesus gave his life as a ransom without specifying *how* atonement is achieved.

With the payment of Christ’s life as a ransom, Satan was defeated and Christ emerged victorious, with all who are in Christ partaking of that spiritual victory. To be sure, the consummation of this conquest on Calvary awaits the *parousia* (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Philp. 2:9-

¹⁹ Nicole, ‘Postscript’ in Hill & James III, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement*, 447.

²⁰ Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1965), from the original Swedish title published in 1931.

11). Meanwhile, through the ministry of the church, the victory of Christ is actualized more and more in history as sinners are transferred from the stronghold of Satan into the kingdom of Christ. Until then, we recognize that there is a spiritual battle²¹ at hand and we must be vigilant against the schemes of the evil one (Eph. 6:12).

Paul characterizes his ministry as opening the eyes of those blinded by the devil (2 Cor. 4:4) and setting sinners free from his power. Salvation is thus understood as deliverance from the snare of the devil, which results from Christ's conquest of the evil one. It is the prior triumph of Christ that makes possible our freedom.

Aulén's arguments though are not without problems. His presentation of the development of atonement theology strikes one as being too one-sided; his suggestion that the early church was singularly committed to the Christus Victor theme is arguably an overstatement; and his critique of Anselm for failing to regard Christ's death as an offering from God to man and not just from man to God is certainly unfair.²² Nevertheless, Aulén is correct to emphasize the cross as victory, and one may even argue that 'Christus Victor' can be 'a unifying framework' to understand the work of Christ.

We maintain that it is not necessary to differentiate too sharply, as Aulén does, between the satisfaction

metaphor of Anselm and his preferred victory model. The two are not mutually exclusive, and just as the NT does not demand that we choose one over the other, we should embrace both of these as different yet converging perspectives. We turn next to the heart of what Christ achieved on the cross.

3 The cross turning away God's wrath

The idea that Christ's death was a ransom paid to the devil was robustly challenged by Anselm. In his treatise, *Cur Deus Homo?*, Anselm suggests that sin has so dishonoured God's majesty that satisfaction is necessary to repair the damage. Because God is sovereign, the insult cannot be simply brushed aside. And since the injury to God's honour is so great, only one who is God can provide that satisfaction; but since the offence is perpetrated by man, the satisfaction can be made only by man. Pulling these two strands together, Anselm argues that only one who is simultaneously God and man could make satisfaction for God's offended honour, hence the necessity for the incarnation.

Anselm's satisfaction theory of the atonement has the merits of taking seriously both the gravity of sin and the holiness of God. Unlike the moral influence theory, it emphasizes the objective satisfaction made to God. However, the stratified feudal framework on which his theory is based risks treating God like a feudal lord who is duty bound to uphold some abstract code of honour that is somehow objectified apart from him. Does such a view do justice to the biblical picture of God? Furthermore, apart from an over-

²¹ See Gregory A. Boyd, 'Christus Victor View', in *Nature of the Atonement*, 25; cf. his extended treatment on spiritual warfare in *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

²² Stott, *Cross*, 229.

reliance on medieval justice theory, the Achilles' heel in Anselm's theory is that there is no mention of any penalty for sin.²³ And there does not seem to be any necessary connection between Christ's death and the salvation of sinners.

Building on Anselm's view on the seriousness of sin and the need for satisfaction, the Reformers draw attention to the wrath of God and the curse that sinners labour under, and contend that the main obstacle to the restoration of humanity's broken relationship with God is God's righteous wrath against human rebellion. The only way God's righteous wrath can be appeased is through Christ taking upon himself vicariously the penalty that is due to sinners, and offering himself up as a perfect sacrifice to God on their behalf.

The penal substitutionary atonement is therefore premised on three biblical and theological ideas: human sinfulness and guilt; the holiness of God; and the sacrifice of Christ.²⁴ Penal substitution was a key element of Protestant Orthodoxy in the seventeenth century and the evangelical awakening from the eighteenth century on. It continues to be defended staunchly by many in the modern era who wish to see penal substitution as

the controlling model for all articulations of the meaning of the cross.²⁵

The belief that Christ was crucified *for us*, and ideas of substitutionary suffering are not new; they go back to the early church where we find references to the penal character of the cross among the fathers.²⁶ This *crucified for us* character of Jesus' death has clear scriptural support. Apart from intimations of this in the OT (eg, in Ps. 22 and Isa. 52), we find it expressed in, for instance, the epistles of John and Peter (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10; 1 Pet. 2:24). Christ's death on behalf of sinners is often presented in the NT by means of the preposition *hyper* or 'for' (eg, Lk. 22:19-20; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 11:24; etc). The blessings arising from his death are possible only because Christ has taken the punishment and guilt of sinners. Christ did not just die as our substitute; he bore our punishment or judgment as well.

Hebrews 2:17 speaks of Christ making 'a sacrifice of atonement

²³ For Anselm, punishment and satisfaction are alternatives. Satisfaction is made not when someone takes the punishment in place of another; rather it is made when someone dies an obedient death and thus compensates for God's lost honour. In other words, Anselm commends substitutionary obedience, not penal substitution.

²⁴ See Thomas R. Schreiner, 'Penal Substitution View', in *Nature of the Atonement*, 72-93.

²⁵ Eg, J. I. Packer, 'What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution', *The Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 3-45, reprinted in J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 53-100; Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1983) and Jeffery, Ovey and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*. Stott rejects unequivocally 'every explanation of the death of Christ which does not have at its centre the principle of "satisfaction through substitution", indeed divine self-satisfaction through divine self-substitution'. Stott, *Cross*, 159.

²⁶ Boersma, *Violence*, 158-63. Not surprisingly, we have in the Nicene Creed the statement that it was 'for our salvation' that the Lord Jesus Christ 'came down from heaven...and was crucified also for us'.

(*hilaskesthai*) for the sins of the people'. Paul is unequivocal in describing God as offering Christ up as 'a sacrifice of atonement (*hilasterion*) by his blood' (Rom. 3:25). The meaning of *hilasterion* used here has been widely debated, with scholarly opinions divided. Suffice to say that there are persuasive textual, historical and theological reasons to render the word *hilasterion* as 'propitiatory sacrifice' in the sense of turning away God's wrath, rather than the more subjectively oriented 'expiation' with its focus on the cleansing and neutralising of sin.²⁷ Not that there is no place for the latter.

The imagery of sin being purged or expiated certainly has biblical resonance (eg, Isa. 43:25; Jer. 33:8; 1 Jn. 1:7, 9; Rev. 1:5b) and is an important concomitant to redemption. Be that as it may, expiation need not be used exclusively, and certainly not in a way that rejects the notion of divine wrath entailed in the concept of propitiation. On the contrary, we suggest that expiation and propitiation are compatible; defilement is removed when God's just anger against sin has been satisfied.

The word 'propitiation', from the Latin, *propitiare*, meaning to 'render favourable', was used widely in the pagan world with the sense of appeasing the wrath of the gods and winning their favour. The biblical view of the wrath of God though is nothing like the capricious vindictiveness of pagan

deities who punish indiscriminately and must be bribed through appropriate offerings. Rather it is the wrath of a holy God directed at sin (Ps. 11:5-6; Jer. 44:4), which severs humanity's relationship with God. To satisfy God's righteous anger, Christ took upon himself our penalty, offered himself on the cross as a perfect sacrifice to God and turned away his wrath (Rom. 5:9; cf. 1 Thes. 1:10).

The wrath of God is as much manifested on the cross as the love of God. God is angered when he sees his good creation violated and evil visited upon the innocent and vulnerable. In the face of exploitation and atrocities perpetrated by evildoers, God cannot say to them, 'Never mind, I love you anyway'. To do so would be to make a mockery of his love. There are some things that God hates precisely because he is love.

The turning away of God's wrath is but one aspect of the salvific achievement of the cross. Along with propitiation, the other biblical images for salvation include: redemption, justification, and reconciliation. These complementary images take off from the foundational truth of Christ as our substitute.

We look first at *redemption*. Whereas propitiation focuses on averting God's wrath, redemption underscores the sorry state of sinners from which they have been ransomed by the cross. In Christ, 'we have redemption through his blood' (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The imagery is drawn from the ancient world of commerce where the payment of a 'ransom' (*lytron*) secures the release of a slave. Christ achieved freedom for us through the heavy price he paid on the cross.

²⁷ On the rationale for this interpretation, see Leon Morris, *The Atonement*, 151-176; and his *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 184-202. See also Stott, *Cross*, 168-175, and D. A. Carson, 'Atonement in Romans 3:21-26', in *Glory of the Atonement*, 119-139.

Through his death, we have been released from our captivity to sin and guilt. In addition, because Christ our redeemer paid for our release with his blood, he has proprietary rights over us. The redeemed are therefore bought with a price to serve the redeemer.

The substitutionary death of Christ overturns the verdict of condemnation and renders the sinner justified before God. *Justification* is a legal term signifying a verdict of acquittal. In Christ, sinners are found 'not guilty' and declared righteous (2 Cor. 5:21). The words justification, justified, righteous and righteousness share the same root word, *dikaiosyne*. Thus to be justified is to stand righteous before God. On account of Christ, the holy God will treat sinners as if they have never sinned. This justification is 'by faith' (Rom. 5:1), which results in our having a right standing before God.

A final dimension of salvation in Christ is *reconciliation*, whereby Christ's death changes the relationship between God and sinner from one of estrangement to one of communion. Through Christ, we have received reconciliation (Rom. 5:11), and from Christ we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. And even as Christians discharge this ministry, God is at work reconciling sinners to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Reconciliation thus has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension: reconciliation with God and between people. Through Christ, all the barriers that divide people are transcended (Eph. 2:13-16, 18). This is first embodied in the Christian community, and then expressed in the church's ministry in the world.

The four key NT images of salvation canvassed above highlight on the one

hand, the different aspects and magnitude of human depravity and need, and on the other hand, the saving initiative of God in giving his Son on Calvary. While the different metaphors of the atonement contribute positively to our understanding of the cross, we maintain that penal substitutionary atonement, with its realism about human sin, its acknowledgement of God's holy wrath against sin, and its affirmation of the sacrificial and substitutionary nature of Christ's death, is best suited as the 'normative soteriological theory' or 'unified theory of atonement'.²⁸

IV Conclusion: Toward a Missional Atonement

The achievement of the cross is not simply a thing of the past; it continues to run its course today, for to be reconciled to God is to be entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). The experience of God's atoning grace should make a difference in the way Christians live and conduct their lives. According to Scot McKnight, 'atonement is not just something done to us and for us, *it is something we participate in—in this world, in the here and now*. It is not just something done, but something that is being done and something we do as we join God in the *missio Dei*'.²⁹

One may quibble that McKnight's characterisation risks not giving suffi-

²⁸ Alan Spence, *The Promise of Peace: A Unified Theory of Atonement* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

²⁹ Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 30-31; also 117 (author's italics).

cient emphasis to the once-for-all nature of the atonement, but his call to embody the achievement of the cross in the life and ministry of the church ensures that the atonement does not remain an abstraction. One can insist on the 'it is finished' nature of Christ's work and simultaneously affirm the continuing work of Christ in the world carried out through his Spirit-empowered people.

N. T. Wright reminds us that the 'call of the gospel is for the church to *implement* the victory of God in the world *through suffering love*. The cross is not just an example to be followed; it is an achievement to be worked out, put into practice'.³⁰ What God does for us in Christ cannot be separated from what he does in us and through us.

This is in line with our affirmation at the outset that atonement theology must be grounded in the redemptive work of the Trinitarian God. The redemptive reconciling of the world in the Son is an ongoing work of the Father through the Spirit, who empowers the church to serve the divine purpose. Only such a Trinitarian understanding will ensure that what happened on the cross does not remain a past event, but continues to be a present reality that reconciles sinners and transforms the world.

Through the ministry of God's people, the cross continues to confront the world. One of the criticisms levied against penal substitution is that it encourages individualism by focusing on the guilt and forgiveness of the individual. Yet if we believe in the cosmic significance of the cross, then our atonement theology must lead us to engage the world at large. Those who carry their crosses are never blind to the social realities around them.

If the achievement of the cross is to be actualized in the world, then it is imperative that Christians and churches be thoroughly cruciform. The cross must move from being a part of the church's architecture or furniture, to being a part of the church's DNA. As article #6 of the *Lausanne Covenant* asserts, 'a church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross'. As redeemed people bought with the price of Christ's blood, we are to mirror that self-sacrificial love that prompted our redeemer to give his life.

To exercise a ministry of reconciliation, the church as a community must embody that reconciliation in the way her members relate to each other. The cross, Luther reminds us, is the test of everything (*crux probat omnia*), and this is true not just in our congregational life but also in the message we proclaim. We must resolutely resist the temptation to dilute the scandalous message of the cross. Evangelism today cannot afford to bypass the scandalous yet wondrous cross.

³⁰ N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 98.

Signs, Wonders, and Ministry: the Gospel in the Power of the Spirit

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

Keywords: Salvation, worldview, transformation, anointing, supernatural, demons

I Introduction

This article examines the inseparable relationship between the Holy Spirit and the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The subject matter is considered from the viewpoint of contemporary Christianity in the global south, particularly, African-led Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity. We will look at how these African churches, including a very fascinating African-led charismatic church in post-communist Europe, are invoking the power of God in ministry in order to bring the interventions of the Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ to people with all kinds of soteriological concerns.

The central concern of the African and African-led Pentecostal/charismatic churches represented here is to witness to the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, unlike the historic mission denominations of the nineteenth century, the newcomers put a lot of emphasis on the manifestation

and power of the Holy Spirit. Seen in terms of 'the anointing', Pentecostal/charismatic churches draw attention to the need to bring together in ministry the Word and Spirit in order that God's power may be evident in Christian witness.

Indeed, patterns of global Christian growth confirm the viability of pursuing a theological agenda that believes in the connection between the Holy Spirit, the gospel of Jesus Christ and signs and wonders in ministry. The work of the Holy Spirit is to take what is of God, animate it with his *Presence* and through that restore life to human brokenness. For, as J.I. Packer writes, 'the essence of the Holy Spirit's ministry, at this or any time in the Christian era, is to mediate the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ'.¹ He proceeds to commend the contribution of the charismatic renewal movement 'as a God-sent corrective of formalism, institutionalism, and intellectualism'.²

1 J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in our Walk with God*, rev ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 49.

2 Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 184.

II Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity

Lesslie Newbigin identifies three main streams of Christian persuasions in the history of the church with each defined by a particular theological orientation. Roman Catholicism puts its emphasis on structure, ritual and the sacraments, while 'orthodox' Protestantism gravitates towards the centrality of scripture and Pentecostalism operates with the conviction that 'the Christian life is a matter of the experienced power and presence of the Holy Spirit today'.³ The distinctive contribution of the Pentecostals and their charismatic progenies to Christian theology is the emphasis on 'the here and now activity' of the Spirit of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This Pentecostal/charismatic emphasis on power is evident particularly in Africa where the movement functions within a cultural context that holds ardently to belief in a universe alive with benevolent and malevolent powers.

Thus Christians in Africa have found the categories of power, dominion and alleviation of suffering by the power of the Spirit relevant in the general struggle with fears and insecurities within a universe in which supernatural evil is considered hyperactive.⁴ Members of the African pneumatic movements and churches studied here have often profiled the mainline

churches as 'benchwarmers' and accused them of losing 'the power of the gospel' that was very real in the early Jesus movement.⁵ Conversion in Africa, as far as Pentecostal/charismatic churches are concerned, is ultimately a contest between alternative sources and resources of supernatural power.

Thus in African Pentecostalism, Jesus is, above all else, the one who rescues people in the power of the Spirit. In his recently published *African Pentecostalism*, Ogbu Kalu talks about how in contradistinction to the cerebral and rationalistic theologies of historic western mission Christianity, African Pentecostals 'creatively wove the Christ figure into the African universe as the person who could rescue, the *Agyenkwa*, as the Akans [of Ghana] would say'.⁶ Commenting on the role of Christ as *Agyenkwa*, literally meaning 'Saviour', or the one who grants abundant life, Mercy A. Oduyoye explains:

The *Agyenkwa*, the one who rescues, who holds your life in safety, takes you out of a life-denying situation and places you in a life-affirming one. The Rescuer plucks you from a dehumanizing ambience and places you in a position where you can grow toward authentic humanity. The *Agyenkwa* gives you back your life in all its wholeness and fullness.⁷

3 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (London: SCM, 1953), 95.

4 André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani eds., *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 5.

5 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

6 Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, ix.

7 Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 98.

The apostles, with whom it is expected the church would have a continuing ministry, understood too the relationship between the message of the gospel and the manifestation of the power of the Spirit. Thus, following Pentecost, Peter said of Jesus, 'God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour so that he might give repentance and forgiveness to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him' (Acts 5:31-32).

A little earlier the apostles had been released from prison after their incarceration for preaching the resurrected Christ. They accredited to the power of Jesus Christ the miraculous healing of a cripple at the Beautiful Gate. The response of the apostles to a subsequent injunction 'not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus' (Acts 4:18), was to pray that God might confirm the message of the gospel with signs and wonders wrought in the power of the Spirit. Gathered in prayer, they first affirmed the sovereignty of God before asking him to confirm his word in acts of power:

You made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit...Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:24-30).

Following this very direct request for the gospel to be mediated in the power of the Spirit, we are told that 'the place where they were meeting

was shaken'; the apostles 'were all filled with the Holy Spirit', and consequently, they 'spoke the word of God boldly' (Acts 4:31).

Pentecostal/charismatic power approaches to the gospel suggest that these occurrences have not ceased. They defiantly resist the position of Pentecost cessation theories that signs and wonders ceased with the death of the last apostle. In our time, the growth of the Christian church has not occurred in places where there is theological sophistication and high church order and where rational theology reigns supreme. Rather, it has been felt mostly in the two thirds world where Pentecostal/charismatic spirituality with its emphasis on experiential theology is particularly cherished. Thus the greatest contribution of this stream of Christianity to theology, world mission and evangelization is its insistence that the gospel of Jesus Christ is most effective when presented in the power of the Holy Spirit.

If churches in Asia, Africa, Latin America and African-led churches in Europe are growing, I argue, it is because they have come to the realization that the gospel must be preached in the power of the Spirit with signs following. The pneumatic orientation of churches in the two thirds world defies western enlightenment approaches to the gospel, evangelism and mission by taking seriously what Rudolf Otto refers to as the non-rational aspects of 'the Holy'. This is seen in the emphasis placed on the experiential dimensions of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although as I point out later, they may sometimes lose sight of the element of weakness in it, St. Paul is a particularly loved character in this type of

Christianity because his theology of power sustains the inseparability of the gospel and signs and wonders of the Spirit.

In the power of the Spirit, we discover the graces of conversion, healing, deliverance, comfort and strength for this life and the assurance of eschatological hope. In the words of St. Paul in his epistle to the Corinthian church: 'My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on [human] wisdom, but on God's power' (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

I have come to the conclusion through my reading of scripture, personal ministry and by observing patterns of growth and success in contemporary African Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity that the viability of the Christian message lies in holding together in the same breath belief and experience in theology.

III Gospel, Power and Anointing in Africa

The belief in supernatural power means Pentecostal/charismatic spirituality is popular in Africa because its interpretations and responses to evil are not discontinuous with traditional religious ideas in which evil is believed to be mystically caused. In this worldview, belief and experience always belong together.

For example, in her work, *Translating the Devil*, which is based on ethnographic data on the Peki-Ewe of Ghana, Birgit Meyer notes how the inability of historic mission churches to take the experience of the Holy

Spirit seriously, and to 'ward off or cast out evil spirits' and offer people 'protection and healing' in his power, became causes of drifts into Pentecostal/charismatic churches and movements.⁸ Wherever Pentecostalism has emerged in Africa the ministries of exorcism, healing and deliverance have been its main means of evangelizing.

It is in these ministries of the Holy Spirit that people see the existential meaning of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the mission of the Spirit is 'to bring glory to Jesus' by taking from what is his and making it known to the disciples (Jn. 16:14). When the imprisoned John, out of his own uncertainty, inquired about Jesus, he responded by using the language from Isaiah 61 as the authentication of his messiahship (Lk. 4:18) and cited the acts of deliverance that accompanied his ministry as evidence. From this it could be concluded that our gospel is not simply that of saving souls, it is rather, as with Jesus, the bringing of wholeness to broken people in every kind of distress. In other words, the kingdom of God comes with power.

The 'power approach' to evangelism, which takes demon possession seriously is one that, as we note, coheres with African philosophical thought. The underlying worldview differs from that of the typical western-oriented historic mission church in which the Christian faith, as Ghanaian

⁸ Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), xviii.

theologian Kwame Bediako points out, reflects that which has been transmitted through the intellectual history of the West:

Coinciding as it did with significant advances in scientific discoveries, the Enlightenment acted to direct intellectual attention away from the realm of transcendence to the empirical world that could be seen and felt, that is, from the intangible to the tangible. By and large, Christian theology in the West made its peace with the Enlightenment. It responded by drawing a line between the secular world and the sacred sphere, as it were, and so established a frontier between the spiritual world on the one hand, and the material world on the other, creating in effect, a dichotomy between them. Many earnest Christians have been attempting by various means since then to bridge the two worlds.⁹

It is here, as Bediako further points out, that Africa has followed a different path culturally and intellectually from the Enlightenment heritage.¹⁰ Among the Akan of Ghana, for example, 'evil' is *mbusu* and most of the time it is supernaturally caused. When used in connection with life generally, *mbusu* is that which prevents people from living a holistic lifestyle.

This mindset has been sustained in popular Pentecostal/Charismatic dis-

course and so in the Christology of one Ghanaian gospel music, Jesus is 'the changer of evil destinies'. In that sense in both traditional and indigenous Christian worldviews, evil is anything that destroys abundant life. Thus the performance of traditional ritual, described by Meyer, as 'the pivot of Ewe religious life' is aimed at achieving 'health, fertility, protection, and success in life'.¹¹

In the process of conversion, the Ewe Christians, we are told, 'measured the success of Christianity by its capacity to counteract evil at least as successfully as Ewe traditional religion'.¹² In response to the challenges of preaching the gospel in the African context, Pentecostalism provides alternate ritual contexts within which the consequences of evil and spirit possession may be dealt with. Thus in Ghana, the Pentecostal/Charismatic phenomenon of 'ayaresa ne ogyee' ('healing and deliverance') has been consciously integrated into the evangelizing efforts of many Christian traditions, pressurizing even historic mission denominations to hold national evangelistic crusades that emphasize the power of the gospel in acts of deliverance.

Wherever I have seen growth in Christian ministry the power of the Spirit has also been evident. It is my custom to ask the initiators of these ministries about what, in their thinking, accounts for the successes they may be having. In almost every case the word 'anointing' has come up in the conversation. As one such charismatic

⁹ Kwame Bediako, 'Worship as Vital Participation: Some Personal Reflections on the African Church', *Journal of African Christian Thought* vol. 8 (2005), 3.

¹⁰ Bediako, 'Worship as Vital Participation', 3.

¹¹ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 61, 68.

¹² Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 138.

church leader put it to me recently, 'the anointing makes the difference'. The anointing is a mediated phenomenon and the openness of the leadership of new Pentecostal/charismatic churches to these graces has served as a major challenge to traditional understandings of ministry.

What the new crops of African charismatic Christian leaders understand by 'the anointing' is continuous with the understanding with which Jesus worked. The anointing accounts for the viability of the relationship between the gospel and the power of the Spirit as succinctly outlined in St. Luke's proclamation of the mission of Jesus Christ:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk. 4:18-19).

Luke makes it clear that both the Saviour himself and his followers are empowered for the life and ministry of the kingdom by the Holy Spirit. He singles out the Spirit as the power for the life and mission of Jesus. Streams of Christianity that believe in this mission statement, as outlined by Luke, and appropriate it for their ministries do not usually have to search their archives for evidences of the power of the gospel in the work of evangelization.

The experience of the Spirit brings results: the Bible talks about it; the history of the church proves it; and the promise of Jesus Christ that those who believe in him would do greater works

does confirm even today that there is a relationship between the Spirit and the power of the gospel.

IV Jericho Hour

In the lives of the Pentecostal/charismatic streams of Christianity, the expression 'anointing', used by Jesus in his mission statement in Luke, simply implies 'the power of God in action'. At the Christian Action Faith Ministry's (CAFAM) imposing Prayer Cathedral in Accra, Ghana, a weekly non-denominational prayer meeting dubbed 'Jericho Hour' is held from nine o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock noon. The four thousand seat auditorium is always filled to capacity at this time. People from all walks of life come into the Prayer Cathedral to pray that God will release them from the burden of sin and other encumbrances of this life. They pray that he will bring the deep-seated problems of their lives down, as he did the walls of Jericho in Joshua's day, and then set them free from sickness, financial indebtedness, unemployment, barrenness and sterility. In short, people patronize Jericho Hour in search of 'healing and deliverance'.

Testimonies abound that the prayer time works. Evident in the testimonial narratives I have encountered week after week at the CAFAM Prayer Cathedral are a number of identifiable areas of emphases relevant to our discussion: forgiveness of sin, healing for the physically sick, deliverance for the possessed and prayer for the reversal of evil destinies that people may prosper in life; in short, holistic salvation. On several occasions, including during a visit on Thursday, 3 January 2008,

participants were anointed with oil 'for breakthrough' in whatever brought them to the 'presence of the Lord'.

Jericho Hour serves the same purpose as the many Pentecostal/charismatic healing camps found in various African contexts where the sick and troubled may even be quarantined as they await 'a visitation' from the Holy Spirit. E. Kingsley Larbi has studied these healing camps and his thoughts on why people patronize them are worth quoting at some length:

Suppliants primarily go to the camps in search of salvation that relates to the here and now. They go there because of sickness and the need for healing; they go there because of financial and economic problems; they go there because of problems related to marriages, children, employment, family needs; they go there because of lawsuits; they go there because they are struggling with drunkenness and they want to overcome it; they go there because of educational issues...they go there because of alleged problems with demons and witchcraft. But this is not all: some, in addition to their material needs, seek 'spiritual upliftment'.¹³

At Jericho Hour and at these healing camps, people go in search of anointing to break their yokes. 'Anointing', we have noted, is a mediated phenomenon and the expression is used primarily in the context of the application of olive oil either to persons to effect healing or to

things in order to transform their conditions for the better. Thus the sick may be anointed and so may be haunted homes and physical objects in order to restrain evil influences upon them.

This idea of anointing is illustrative of the African worldview in which sin and evil on the one hand and sickness and suffering on the other go together. The Bible does not always see things this way. So in John 9, Jesus did not consent to the interpretation that the condition of the man born blind could have been caused either by personal sin or generational curse. Nevertheless, it is also true that as Christians we believe that to accomplish anything in life, God's favour is required. It is thus instructive that in the mission statement of Jesus in Luke, 'anointing' and 'favour' come together within the same context.

Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity takes this relationship seriously and to this end, anointing services are meant to, as one charismatic church program in Ghana was themed, 'activate God's presence' in the lives of believers. African Pentecostal/charismatic believers are aware that the 'anointing' originates from a source more profound than a bottle of olive oil. The anointing oil points to transcendence as Pastor Joseph Eastwood Anaba of Ghana puts it in his book, *The Oil of Influence*: 'It is the personality, power, and glory of the Holy Spirit released in the believer and upon him to saturate his spirit, soul and body so that he can operate and live like Jesus on earth.'¹⁴

¹³ Emmanuel K. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: CPCS, 2001), 407-408.

¹⁴ Anaba Eastwood, *The Oil of Influence* (Bolgatanga: Desert Leaf Publications, 2000), 18.

The anointing is therefore synonymous with the power of the Holy Spirit. My participation in anointing services has always established very forcefully the thinking that ‘anointing’ is the power of God in action. This is how I also understand St. Paul’s submission that his message and preaching did not occur with ‘wise and persuasive words’ but with a demonstration of the power of the Spirit. In contemporary Pentecostal/charismatic thought, St. Paul would be spoken of as someone with ‘anointing’. In the context of general Pentecostal/charismatic theology this power of God is available for ministry in keeping with the promise of the glorified Christ: ‘you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you’ (Acts 1:8).

To this end, Bishop David O. Oyedepo of the Living Faith Ministries Worldwide notes that ‘every believer requires the anointing for sustenance, performance, success, breakthrough and fulfillment’. The different levels of anointing, he submits, make the difference between degrees of impact in the proclamation of the message of the gospel.¹⁵ I point out elsewhere that the line between ‘anointing’ and ‘power’ appears very thin indeed. This power is authenticated in things and persons by virtue of their becoming effective and influential. Thus ultimately, the anointing is God’s abiding presence, his Holy Spirit, who empowers those who speak in his name, enabling them to function in various gifts of grace and through that demonstrate the liberat-

ing mighty power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁶

V The Spirit, Anointing and Power of Conversion

The anointing, something Jesus had and of which the church stands in need today, is akin to what G. van der Leeuw describes as ‘the power of God poured out and absorbed’, which enables recipients to perform miracles and operate in ‘the gifts of grace’.¹⁷ Having established that there is a connection between the experience of the Spirit and the power of the gospel, I now turn to a very contemporary example through the ministry of Pastor Sunday Adelaja.

Pastor Adelaja is founder of ‘The Church of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations’ based in Kiev, Ukraine. He is a man anointed by God. Pastor Sunday Adelaja has taken Eastern Europe by storm with a very forceful message that ‘Jesus makes a difference’. Since its formation in the mid 1990s the Embassy of God has grown from a handful of people praying in a living room to a 25,000 member strong church in 2007. In the last three years part of my research has focused on this church. The Embassy of God marked its fourteenth year of existence in April 2008.

There is no reason to believe that the numbers are exaggerated. In May

¹⁵ David O. Oyedepo, *Anointing for Breakthrough* (Lagos: Dominion House Publications), 63.

¹⁶ Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Unction to Function: Reinventing the “Oil of Influence” in African Pentecostalism’, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*. vol. 13 no. 2 (2005), 231-256.

¹⁷ G. Van Der Leeuw, Hans H. Penner, J. E. Turner, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (New York: Harper Row, 1963), 35.

2004, I joined members of the Embassy of God in street evangelism procession, the 'Jesus March'. At the time, membership was supposed to be around 20,000 and given the numbers that showed up at the Jesus March, it was obvious that this was a truly mega-sized church. My second more extensive visit took place in December 2007 during a Winter Prayer and Fasting program that afforded me the opportunity to hear and see presentations from the various ministries of the Embassy of God church. The testimonies of transformation sounded genuine and moving and as each ex-convict, ex-drug addict, ex-leader of a mafia gang, former prostitutes and alcoholics narrated how they came to Jesus Christ through the ministry of Pastor Sunday Adelaja, my mind kept returning to the interventions that Jesus made in the lives of such persons as the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5:1-20.

Starting the new ministry with seven people as a home fellowship, Pastor Sunday Adelaja began to reach out to the 'outcasts' and 'oppressed', which, as he explained to me, meant those whose human dignity had been eroded through addiction to narcotics, armed robbery, prostitution, and alcoholism. These were people whose families were ashamed of them, and whom the Ukrainian establishment was finding difficult to deal with and rehabilitate. The extent of drug abuse in many European countries threatens to overwhelm the resources available to rehabilitate its victims. For many such people scientific and clinical solutions have simply not worked.

At God's Embassy, such problems, Pastor Sunday says confidently, are confronted with the mightier power

and intervention of the Holy Spirit. The personal transformations, restorations, and reclamation of dignity that followed forced Ukrainians to take a keen interest in the mission of Pastor Adelaja in their midst. Today people whose lives were going nowhere either serve the church as pastors, leaders or else have settled down as responsible citizens who have re-channelled their gifts and talents into viable economic ventures to the glory of God and a blessing to those who are still in the 'world' and under the influence of the evil one.

VI Jesus, the Gospel and the Power of the Spirit

I pointed out earlier that the story of the Gadarene demoniac is particularly instructive as an interpretative model in the expression of the gospel through the power of the Spirit. A significant number of Bible scholars and theologians make much of the fact that this particular healing miracle of Jesus took place in Gentile territory, supporting the fact that the kingdom of God was now universal. Jesus asked the healed man to spread the word about the mighty deeds and mercy of the Lord and he did so enthusiastically. In line with the emphasis on his Gentile background, Eckhard J. Schnabel concludes that the result of the proclamation of the healed demoniac, though not recorded, 'implies that a positive outcome of his witness was not considered futile'.¹⁸

¹⁸ Eckard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 337.

This outcome, I suggest, would have depended not so much on the fact the man was a Gentile, important as that may be, but on the fact that Jesus had power over demons and evil powers. He has grace, that is, the anointing, to restore God's distorted image in the human person destroyed, not just by sin, but its other consequence of making the human person vulnerable to the activities of evil powers. To that end, we encounter in this story of the Gadarene demoniac three main themes:

First, we find a message of the reality of evil. Whether it is personified as Satan, the devil, or seen through multitudinous demonic powers as found in the passage, the important point is that the power of the gospel comes out forcefully in the encounter with evil. The victim of demonic possession who came out to meet Jesus from the tombs, we are told, operated with some form of superhuman strength: 'For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him' (Mk. 5:4).

Usually, I distinguish between demon possession and demon oppression. Demonic oppression refers to cases in which malevolent supernatural powers influence a person's life for ill. In demonic possession, evil spirits actually take over the executive faculties of a person and so he or she suffers some form of personality dissociation. The extreme case of demonic possession, which is the type we encounter in this passage, is insanity. The ministries of healing and deliverance offered in places like Jericho Hour and the healing camps are designed purposely as interventionist methods in such cases.

Second, the devil or demons are agents of destruction: 'Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones' (Mk. 5:5). Blinded by the demons, the situation that confronted the demoniac reeked of 'triple uncleanness'—he lived in the midst of unclean pigs, he lived in the unclean world of the dead (tombs) and was possessed by a legion of unclean spirits.¹⁹ The behaviour of the demoniac recalls the statement of Jesus that 'the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy', but Jesus comes that humankind may have life and have it in its fullness (Jn. 10:10). The demoniac's behaviour before the encounter with Jesus was an indication of his need for some form of intervention. He needed to be delivered from the destructive powers of the demons that were controlling his life and bringing him to ruin.

African initiated Christianity has always focused on this message. Witchcraft, for example, is not only real but for African Christians it is also an instrument of the devil for the destruction of victims. The prophets of African independent churches won followers by acknowledging the older spiritual powers and absorbing them with a new Christian synthesis. As the new African initiated churches established prayer centres to tackle the evils of witchcraft, the historic mission churches dismissed it as a figment of people's imagination and a psychological delusion. Members of the older denominations troubled by witchcraft

¹⁹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 508.

voted with their feet and walked out of the churches to look for help where it could be found.

Third, Jesus demonstrated, as he did so many times in his ministry, that he indeed had power to overcome evil. Jesus, 'far from being contaminated himself through his contact with such Gentile pollution, transforms it by his presence and word'.²⁰ It is not insignificant that in the Bible the *presence* of God is synonymous with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The reference Wright makes to 'presence and word' underscores the fact that Jesus ministered in the power of the Spirit. He did not only cast out the evil powers destroying the man's life but Jesus also restored the glory he lost as a result of demonic control.

When the former demoniac's neighbours heard of his deliverance and came running to see this spectacular act of power encounter, they saw a transformed human being: 'they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind' (Mk. 5:15). The man became a living testimony and Jesus turned him into a disciple to go and spread his own story of healing and deliverance (v. 19).

VII Mission, Transformation and Influence

When the gospel is carried in the power of the Spirit, the evidence from the life of the early church suggests that there is first 'transformation' and then 'influence'. There is transformation because lives are turned around and there is

influence because the effects of the gospel on others become palpable. The evidence of the transformation of the Gadarene demoniac, one can conjecture, gave some weight to his proclamation that God's salvation in Christ works. It is easy to imagine how his transformed personality was enough testimony to the power of the gospel.

A similar submission could be made of the effects of the gospel on the people one encounters at the Embassy of God and other such places where testimonies abound regarding the transforming power of the Spirit of God. Based on the work of Kenneth S. Latourette, Andrew Walls has reconsidered the history of Christian expansion in terms of the 'influence of Christ'.²¹ This influence of Christ is seen in the 'greater works' of those who follow the footsteps of Christ in mission. Three major influences are identified in the work of Latourette: first, the spread of Christian proclamation in particular areas, which Walls recasts as, the 'Church test'; second, the number and strength of new movements owing their origin to Christ, which he recasts as the 'Kingdom test'; and third, the effect of Christianity on humankind as a whole, recast as the 'Gospel test'.

In looking at this threefold means of measuring the influence of Christ, I find Walls' use of these tests helpful tools in explaining the importance of carrying the gospel in the power of the Spirit as evidenced in the story of the man from Gerasa and in the mission of

²⁰ Wright, *Mission of God*, 508.

²¹ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002).

Pastor Sunday Adelaja and his Embassy of God church.

In Walls' reinterpretation of Latourette's work, the first sign of the influence of Christ is the physical presence of a community of people willing to bear his name, that is, 'the existence of a statistically identifiable, geographically locatable Christian community, however small'.²² What has made God Embassy in the Ukraine the talking point in terms of Christian mission is the identifiable community of transformed people in a supposedly atheistic environment testifying to the influence of Christ upon their church as a community functioning in the power of the Holy Spirit. With a sense of what the church as a community of believers stands for, Pastor Sunday Adelaja gives voice to the 'church test' when he writes that, 'God wants everyone to actively participate in the life of the church, so that his greatness, might, and glory could be manifested through us'.²³ It is for the same reason that the former demoniac was mandated to '[g]o home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you' (Mk. 5:19). The ultimate aim of this kind of testimony was to generate a community that believed in Jesus Christ and his mission.

The second test is the 'Kingdom test' and relates to the demonstration through the church of the transformative power of God. In the words of Walls, 'the kingdom is declared when

demons are cast out by the finger of God. The kingdom of God has drawn near in the presence of Christ with his acts of power'.²⁴ In other words, the kingdom of God comes with power and when it does, the dark night of sin and all that detracts from human wholeness are chased away so that God's image in people may be restored. The image of the Gedarene demoniac after his encounter with Christ, found by witnesses to be 'sitting there, well dressed, and in his right mind' (Mk. 5:15) is one that may also be invoked here to explain what the coming of the kingdom upon people is like.

It is instructive that many African Pentecostal/charismatic ministries like the Embassy of God can point to former narcotics and prostitutes who are now turned around for Jesus after encountering his power. Kingdom signs like these, Walls notes, mark the new innovative movements that reflect true Christian expansion. Like the kingdom, he writes, 'they sprout and stir up; they produce a more radical Christian discipleship'.²⁵

The kingdom test signifies how God intervenes in the lives of people in order to restore them—a message that, as we have noted, is an underlying theme of Pentecostal/charismatic theology. As with true kingdom movements, the Embassy of God and the other movements have established as movements of reformation, renewal and revival. And indeed when I asked Pastor Sunday Adelaja to summarize his vision in one word, he told me: 'God has called us to effect another reformation'.

²² Walls, *Christian History*, 10.

²³ Sunday Adelaja, *Church of the Embassy of God Eighth Anniversary Brochure* (Kiev: Fares Publishing, 2002).

²⁴ Walls, *Christian History*, 14

²⁵ Walls, *Christian History*, 14.

The final test is the 'gospel test' and relates to the difference that the resurrection of Christ makes in the here and now.²⁶ Out of the chaos that is associated with lives wasted on narcotics and other vices the Pentecostal/charismatic movement sees itself as an instrument of newness in the land and in people's lives. The motivational messages of Pastor Sunday Adelaja, for example, help bring the message of the resurrection as newness to a people looking for hope after 'death' in post-communist Europe. In all the cases of transformation and intervention we encounter in the Bible including those of the prodigal son, the woman of Samaria and Zacchaeus, this metaphor of 'death' and 'resurrection' applies. As the father in the story of the prodigal son captured his son's transition in the explanation to the complaining older brother: 'this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found' (Lk. 15:32).

VIII The Cross and the Power of the Spirit

The rejuvenation, empowerment and restoration that come from the experience of the ministry of the Spirit have often led to a certain triumphalism on the part of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. In the contexts of the social tremors that many experienced in post-communist Europe and the harsh and debilitating economic conditions of Africa, Christian triumphalism has often left those who may still be going through 'the valley of the shadow of death' without testimonies.

This is particularly so because testimonies invariably focus on the interventions of the Spirit and demonstrations of his power in healing and restoration. Smail notes how, bolstered by what has happened to us, we can easily come to see ourselves as 'living in a world of supernatural power that leads us from triumph to triumph, where the weak, desolate sufferer of Calvary has been left behind, or at any rate has ceased to dominate the scene'.²⁷ Pentecostal/charismatic triumphalism is evident in its choruses, the names of churches, testimonies permitted in public worship and in the very sermons that are preached. Further, the bulk of African Pentecostal/charismatic sermons come from the Old Testament. The reason is simple. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jabez are easily used to support theologies of prosperity and triumph on which preachers like to dwell.

Celebrating our victories in Christ is in order. However, Smail counsels that we should begin to be in constant guard in case, without any conscious intention, we should begin to evade the cross by devising and promoting a charismatic theology of glory: 'A spirit who diverts us from the cross into a triumphant world in which the cross does not hold sway may turn out to be a very unholy Spirit'.²⁸ The experiences of Jesus Christ on the cross and those of St. Paul, particularly in the refusal of God to answer his prayer to remove his thorn in the flesh, are indications that

²⁶ Walls, *Christian History*, 19.

²⁷ Tom Smail, Nigel Wright, and Andrew Walker, eds., *Charismatic Renewal* (London: SPCK, 1995), 56.

²⁸ Smail, *Cross and Spirit*, 58.

sometimes God's purpose in those difficult situations may be to grant the grace of endurance. If Jesus bore our grief upon the tree, the call to take up our cross and follow him must be seen as a call to bear pain and suffering by standing with those who need our empathy in a fallen world.

The Pentecostal/charismatic emphasis on signs and wonders as integral to Christian ministry is certainly a turning away from what Roger Bowen refers to as the 'closed' Western worldview and a turn towards the world of the Spirit and the manifestations of his power.²⁹ However, the triumphalism associated with signs and wonders which we have discussed must necessarily be balanced with the theological worldview within which Jesus carried out his own ministry. His also was a ministry carried out in the power of the Spirit but one that was 'always exercised out of weakness, sorrow, conflict, suffering and even defeat'.³⁰

With the increasing use of the media in particular there are clear abuses and faulty theological interpretations occurring in churches. In a case recalled by Jenkins, the church sells anointing oil for healing and television viewers are asked to place glasses of water and bottles of oil by their sets that they may be infused by divine power through remote control. Giving in particular is fast losing its place as part of our response to God in worship. The church offering is now given the same interpretation as a secular

investment in which what is 'reaped' depends on what one 'gives' and even the rewards are seen more and more in material terms.³¹ The numbers of people one meets at African healing camps who have not had their problems solved tend to be many more than those who testify to different breakthroughs.

There is reason to thank God for the victories but it is equally important to appreciate the grace that God grants to those who must necessarily go through one form of pain and difficulty or another. God's power, Bowen perceptively concludes, 'is at work not only for the poor and weak but also in the poor and weak, and there is no escape from the way of the cross'.³²

IX Conclusion

In spite of some obvious deficiencies in its theological understanding, the centrality of healing and deliverance in the message of salvation and its import for Christian mission cannot be overemphasized. It provides some evidence of the practical difference between African indigenous Pentecostal thought and the inability of traditional western mission Christianity to respond adequately to the theological questions raised by African Christians in particular.

In the neo-Pentecostal ministry of healing and deliverance, God's salvation is given active expression as a salvation of power meant to be experi-

²⁹ Roger Bowen, *So I Send You: A Study Guide to Mission* (London: SPCK, 1996), 164.

³⁰ Bowen, *So I Send You*, 164.

³¹ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 65.

³² Bowen, *So I Send You*, 164.

enced. Information gleaned from interviews, messages, and the writings of exponents and observations of the phenomenon in practice suggest that the phrase 'healing and deliverance' is used correlatively in African Pentecostal/charismatic theology to refer to the deployment of divine resources, that is, power and authority in the name or blood of Jesus—perceived in pneumatological terms as the intervention of the Holy Spirit—to provide release for demon-possessed, demon-oppressed, broken, disturbed and troubled persons, in order that victims may be restored to 'proper functioning order'. That means they are restored to 'health and wholeness' and are thus freed from demonic influences and curses, that they may enjoy God's fullness of life understood to be available in Christ.

Our world stands in need of a gospel carried in the power of the Spirit. This

way of doing ministry should not be considered confessional or denominational but rather the way Jesus Christ did his ministry. It is the way to remain relevant to the Bible and the task of the church. A word of caution as we end. Miracles do not actually prove anything about God. Therefore the focus of discussion ought always to shift from their actuality to the nature of God, in whom truth alone resides. That nature is one which intervenes in our lives in order that we may be translated from destruction, whatever form it takes, into abundant life in Christ. In the prophecy of Zechariah as quoted by St. Luke: '[God] spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets...that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us...that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives' (Lk. 1:68-79).

Aspects of the Atonement

Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity

I. Howard Marshall

The Christian understanding of the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ and its relationship to the salvation of sinful humanity is currently the subject of intense debate and criticism. In the first two chapters Howard Marshall discusses the nature of the human plight in relation to the judgment of God and then offers a nuanced defence of the doctrine of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for sinners. The third chapter examines the place of the resurrection of Christ as an integral part of the process whereby sinners are put in the right with God. In the final chapter Marshall argues that in our communication of the gospel today the New Testament concept of reconciliation may be the most comprehensive and apt expression of the lasting significance of the death of Christ. The papers are expanded versions of the 2006 series of Chuen King Lectures given in the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

I. Howard Marshall is Emeritus Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Honorary Research Professor at the University of Aberdeen. He has authored many books on the New Testament.

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The Gospel and Ethics

Jonathan Bonk

KEYWORDS: *Discipleship, obedience, behaviour, Christendom, religion, faith, evangelism*

I Introduction

Why do evangelicals draw such a sharp distinction between faith as *cognition* and faith as *a way of life*? Given our Lord's teaching, example, and depictions of the final judgment, it is appropriate to begin with the reminder that the New Testament was written *by* disciples *for* disciples whose primary commission was to *make* disciples wherever they went in the world. This stands in marked contrast to modern evangelical stress on proselytizing and church planting, with expansion of a particular theological franchise as the goal.

1 What do we mean by the *Whole Gospel* as distinct from the Gospel?

The 'gospel' means that salvation is *always* and *has always been* a free gift, offered by our loving creator to all persons, regardless of the culture-specific social and religious conditioning that comes with all human survival beyond

birth—whose faith is '*credited to them as righteousness*' (Rom. 4; Heb. 11-12). That is very good news! But the qualifying adjective '*whole*' implies that there is such a thing as a '*partial*' gospel, a gospel that is somehow diminished, distorted, or compromised, and perhaps therefore fatally delusional.

Since the word *evangelion* or its derivatives (translated 'gospel' or 'good news' in the *NIV*) occurs at least 117 times in the New Testament; and since evangelism is at the very core of the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization, it is appropriate that our understanding of the term, as evidenced in our evangelical practices, be revisited against the standard of Scripture, and in particular our Lord's own teaching.

Jesus did not invite people to believe in the New Testament or to become Christians. Jesus himself was not a 'Christian'. He invited men and women to learn from him, to follow him, and to acknowledge him as Lord. There is no gospel apart from Jesus Christ. And our gospel is not only about *who Jesus was* and *what he did*, but about *what he says* and *where he leads*. Someone who does not follow Jesus cannot be said to be his disciple in any New Testament

sense of that term. It is discipleship that we are called to live and proclaim.¹ Jesus proclaimed 'good news', but because appropriation of this good news was contingent upon *following* him, *learning* from him, *obeying* him, and *living and dying* with him, it was deemed by many of his contemporaries to be *bad* news.

2 What do we mean by *ethics*?

'Ethics' means, most simply, human behaviour in relation to persons, peoples, and all things, including creation. According to the online version of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ethics is all about ultimate value and how human actions can be judged right or wrong.²

It is not the purpose of this paper to go into the theology of ethics. It is enough to point out that if ethical content were to be stripped from our scriptures, there would be almost nothing left. We live out our lives in a *moral* universe, created by God. In Christ, God showed and taught his people how to live in his universe. The history of God's chosen people, both Abrahamic and New Covenant, is an epic saga that begins with creation and culminates in the final judgment. Biblical ethics involves both restraint from personal evil and active pursuit of the neighbour's good, even if that neighbour is an enemy.

¹ See Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), especially ch. 1, 'Discipleship: For Super Christians Only?' (3-17), and ch. 2, 'Who Is Your Teacher?' (18-31).

² <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106054>> accessed on 22 January 2008.

II What is the relationship between the *gospel* and *ethics*?

In answering this question, Scripture is best left to speak for itself. If one were to remove the ethical content from the New Testament, whatever remained would be undecipherable or meaningless. As Jesus himself said, '*Whoever serves me must follow me; and wherever I am, my servant also will be*' (Jn. 12:26). '*He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him....*' (Heb. 5:9); '*...the Holy Spirit... God has given to those who obey him*' (Acts 5:32). '*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come*' (2 Cor. 5:17).

1 Gospel and ethics—Jesus

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew

you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Mt. 7:15-23).

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), Jesus explains what was intended by the Law (5:17-7:6), concluding his exposition by cautioning listeners to distinguish between *two roads*, *two kinds of trees*, and *two kinds of builders*. In the case of the roads, not comfort along the way, but destination, is everything; in the case of the two trees, the one that produces fruit is the good tree; in the case of the two builders, it is the one who goes down to bedrock whose house stands. In each of these examples, Jesus references obedience to what he has taught—ethical behaviour in one's relationship to people, things, and circumstances—as the way, the fruit, and the foundation. As his cousin so tactlessly reminded the esteemed religious leaders of the time—calling them a '*brood of vipers*'—escape from the coming wrath necessarily requires '*fruit in keeping with repentance*' (Mt. 3:7-8). Far from being inimical to the gospel, genuine repentance, evidenced by ethical behaviour, is at its very core.

Jesus frequently warned religious insiders whose flawless social standing and impeccable religious credentials were thought to give them the inside track with God that if these were the primary basis of their presumed good standing before God, they were profoundly deluded. He would go on to comment with strong approval on the faith of persons whose sole qualification was behaviour (Mt. 8:10-12).

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel

with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Mt. 8:10-12).

Only those who did God's will could actually be said to have appropriated the good news of peace with God. It was the doing of his will that constituted irrefutable proof of family-of-God affinity.

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you'. He replied to him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother' (Mt. 12:46-50).

In the story of Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10), it was not until the tax collector had actually repented—giving half of his possessions to the poor and repaying fourfold those whom he had cheated—that Jesus said, '*Today salvation has come to this house...*'. Welcoming Jesus as his guest was only the first step of the genuine repentance that ensued, and it was his repentance that elicited from Jesus his reassuring words about salvation.

In the sobering account of the final judgment (Mt. 25:31-46), the Son of

Man reminds his listeners that for a thirsty person the good news is a cup of water; for a prisoner it is social communion; for a stranger it is a warm welcome into the bosom of one's own family. The gospel is not merely a speech about Jesus, but a practical personal response, however inconvenient, to concrete need.

While words may well come later, they are not an adequate response when it is within one's power to do more than talk. Jesus clearly demonstrated this pattern by stopping to pay attention to the socially utterly insignificant men and women who constantly 'interrupted' his ministry—the lepers, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the sick, and the social outcasts. 'What do you want me to do for you?' (eg, Mk. 10:51; Lk. 18:35ff), he would ask. If there were those who could not speak for themselves, Jesus would respond to requests on their behalf.³ In all of these and other instances, perhaps never more poignantly than in his story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25ff), Jesus showed what it means to do good to another person simply because one has the power to do it (Jas. 4:17). This is a profoundly ethical dimension of the true gospel.

2 Gospel and ethics—Paul

Paul's teaching is consistent with that of Jesus. He begins Romans by speaking of '*the obedience that comes from faith*' (Rom. 1:5) and concludes by

insisting that his gospel '*and the proclamation of Jesus Christ... [is] now revealed... so that all nations might believe and obey him...*' (Rom. 16:26).

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (Tit. 2:11-14).

Paul—so often misused to support the notion that there can be spiritual regeneration without any evidence of new life in Christ—leaves no doubt about what he means by the gospel. Conversion is to Jesus, and discipleship is a lifelong, essential part of what it means to follow him. *Pressing on* is an indispensable element of Paul's understanding of discipleship, and anyone who is not a disciple of Jesus may not in any gospel sense of the word be said to be a follower of Jesus. The good news is that '*ours is a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith"*' (Rom. 1:17). It is this that unites those who are his from the beginning to the end of the human story. Righteous men and women *live* by faith. They don't simply talk about it, or use it as a kind of magical key to heaven or as a handy fire escape from hell. Faith is a way of living. Paul's passionately reasoned argument in Romans 8 reinforces the point that those who belong to Christ

³ eg, Mk. 1:29ff; 2:1ff; 5:22ff; 7:24ff; 8:22; 9:17ff; 10:13ff; Lk. 4:31ff; 4:38ff; 5:12ff; 5:17ff; 6:6ff; 7:11ff; 8:26ff; 8:40ff; 9:37ff; 13:10ff.

live as followers of Christ:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom. 8:5-14).

In Romans 2:1-16, Paul returns to the argument that he raised earlier in his discourse on God's righteous judgment. He makes it clear that God cannot be fooled by a religious or racial pedigree. It is behaviour based on

knowledge—obedience to what has been revealed—that marks his true children, whatever their religious label.

Righteousness never comes apart from God, Paul continues in the next chapter:

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (Rom. 3:22-31).

The freedom that is found in Christ Jesus is the freedom to follow him, to be on intimate terms with God, to escape the tiny, dark dungeons of our sinful egos, and to be transformed by

the renewing of our minds so that we can *'test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will'* (Rom. 12:2). In Romans 12, following his outpouring of praise for the breadth and width and depth of God's mercy and grace to those outside the Abrahamic bloodline, Paul goes on to press the logic of what he has just said, urging his readers to worship God through the offering up of their bodies as living sacrifices. This sacrifice, it is clear, is not merely some kind of mental assent to correct doctrinal formulations! Paul says that the life-sacrifice he is talking about entails giving up one's precious conformity to 'the world'; that is, to the social, moral, and political conventions and expectations peculiar to the society that creates, defines, recognizes and legitimates who we are.

Christ's followers become strangers in their own cultures, not because they forget the language and complex social syntax that provide the unique meaning, cohesion and sense of place for every human being, but because their behaviour as followers of Jesus increasingly mirrors their Lord's will. As 'dearly loved children', they 'imitate God' in living lives of love (Eph. 5:1-2). Paul makes by clear practical implications for everyday life what he intends his readers to understand by this:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people

who are in need. Practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay', says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head'. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:9-21).

Paul returns to these ethical themes repeatedly in his other letters. Whether it be their treatment of spouse, children, slaves, the weak, the poor, the sick, the ordinary, or the enemy, those who have welcomed the gospel with open hearts and minds have turned around and embarked on a lifelong ultimate metamorphosis into Christ-likeness. Being *'alive in Christ'* has direct ethical consequences, as far as Paul is concerned, including living as children of light (Eph. 4), and imitating God in the most practical, everyday ways imaginable (Eph. 5-6). In his letter to the Philippians, similarly, Paul stresses the ethical outcome of imitating the humility of Christ (Phil. 2-4).

Believers in Colossae, too, were

reminded of the ethical import of the gospel. After a stirring call to freedom from the self-justifying but stultifying rules and regulations to which all religions, including Christianity, are so naturally inclined, Paul goes on to insist in Colossians 3:5-17 that because we are free in Christ, we, as the chosen people of God, should set our hearts on things above and put to death the earthly nature, all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

As Paul personally demonstrated and tirelessly taught, the good news that is in Christ Jesus is by no means incompatible with *'press[ing] on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [us]'* (Phil. 3:14).

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their

god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil. 3:12-21).

The freedom that we have in Christ is not simply an invitation to 'invite Jesus into our hearts', and then get on with our lives as though what he says is either irrelevant or too impractical to bother with. It is through the training of our minds that we become like Christ, and enter into the freedom of our Lord. Like anything else that is worthwhile—mastering an instrument, an academic discipline, a new language, a technical science, or an artistic skill—the transformation that takes place when we follow Jesus is not sudden, but gradual, requiring a lifetime of joyful effort to master and sustain. Paul could press on with all his might (Phil. 3 above), and yet be supremely free.

3 Gospel and ethics—other NT writers

The apostle John insists, *'If you know that he is righteous, [then] you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him'* (1 Jn. 2:29). He goes on to warn, in ways strikingly reminiscent of Jesus, that there would be leaders who would attempt to lead us astray on this very point:

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you

know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him (1 Jn. 2:28-3:24).

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother (1 Jn. 3:4-10).

As shocking as these words might seem to the soothing advocates of cheap grace, John is still not finished. He goes on to suggest that any biblical doctrine of eternal security is inseparable from following Jesus and doing what he says:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at

rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us (1 Jn. 3:16-24).

The author of Hebrews, likewise, insists that God's people are those who do what God tells them to do. '*So do not throw away your confidence*', the author says; '*it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.... My righteous one*', the writer continues, '*will live by faith [emphasis mine]. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved*' (Heb. 10:35-39).

What follows in chapter 11 illustrates the author's argument: '*By faith Abel offered.... Noah... built an ark.... Abraham... obeyed and went.... Abraham... offered Isaac... as a sacrifice.... Isaac blessed Jacob.... Jacob... blessed each of Joseph's sons.... Moses' parent hid him.... Moses... refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter [and] chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He*

regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt.... By faith he left Egypt... persevered... [and] kept the Passover.... By faith the people passed through the Red Sea.... Rahab...*welcomed the spies....*' And so on.

It is significant that not a single one of these had ever heard of Jesus, and yet Moses is described as '*regarding disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward....*' (Heb. 11:26). In all instances, the stress is not on any refined theological system that provided believers with the correct names, relative proportions and properties of the Godhead, but obedience in everyday life.

It is not farfetched to conjecture that James was, of all of the New Testament authors, among those most intimately and deeply influenced by Jesus; after all, he was his elder brother. It is little wonder that his teaching is so reminiscent of Jesus' words in the Gospels. Not surprisingly, when it comes to the relationship between the gospel and ethics, he is as adamant as was Jesus himself. '*Faith without deeds is dead*', he famously concluded, at the end of a blistering expose of false faith that included the tart reminder that in the depth, breadth and orthodoxy of their theology, the demons are unparalleled (Jas. 2:26, 19).

III Gospel-Ethics dichotomy

How can it be that in churches around the world the Nicene Creed or its equivalent is recited regularly and repeatedly, while no recurring allusion is

made to the Sermon on the Mount, the core of our Lord's teaching? How could men and women be sent into exile, thrown into prison, tortured on the rack, burned at the stake or otherwise subjected to agonizing deaths simply for holding doctrinal opinions at variance with those preferred in the centres of power?

Similarly, how could 'Christians' be characterized chiefly by insatiable greed for the gold and silver of others, by murder, genocide, and the theft of entire continents in the name of Christ in pursuit of that idolatrous obsession? And how could it be that all this was carried out at the behest and with the hearty blessing of 'Christian' leaders? How did it come about that those who identified themselves as Christians could devote such prodigious thought to who Jesus *was* in the Godhead, reverencing him in the Eucharist, and yet give such scarce heed to what he actually *said* they should do? How has it become customary for evangelicals to say 'Lord, Lord' and ignore the Lord's will for the everyday lives of his followers (Mt. 7:21)?

Finding answers to such questions requires revisiting the prolonged debates characterizing the first five centuries of the Christian faith.⁴ As

⁴ I addressed this in my earlier article, 'Following Jesus in Contexts of Power and Violence' in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Oct. 2007), 342-357. For an overview of this critical period in the history of Christianity, two of Ramsay MacMullen's books are helpful: *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), and *Voting About God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Peter Brown points out in his admirable biography of Augustine of Hippo, fierce debates characterized Christianity in the eras preceding and following the sack of Rome. These debates were won, not by argument alone but by legal compulsion and force of arms. Each of the protagonists—Augustine, Donatus, Pelagius and Julian—was able to muster strong biblical arguments in support of their particular views. But in the end, military power rather than theology assured an outcome favourable to Augustine.

The church's collaboration with political and military power necessitated a hermeneutic that gave central place to sacraments, canon, and doctrine. While there continued to be a strong emphasis on the salvific work of Jesus, his distinctive ethical teaching was ignored, marginalized or contradicted. Much of his teaching was relegated to the realm of the sweet by and by, or else selectively applied to personal ethics, permissible only insofar as their practice did not contravene or undermine the state. Since what Jesus advocated and modelled for his followers was rightly regarded as impractical for the maintenance, protection and expansion of civil society through violence, the category 'Christian' came to serve primarily as an indicator of assent to correct doctrinal formulations.

It is lamentable that in the prolonged and often unseemly process, much—including ethical integrity—was lost to the church. Swept away were biblical emphases on the fruit of the Spirit, on the purity of Christ's bride (the church), and on the idea of a sojourning community of pilgrims and strangers following the Lord through alien territory. Eliminated was the idea

that Christians, including non-clergy, should make growth in Christ-likeness the primary goal in life.

The idea that Christian life entailed more than compliance with sacramental requirements largely disappeared until the Reformation and Radical Reformation a full millennium later. Personal, voluntary faith in God through Jesus Christ was displaced by a coercive system that obliged everyone to be a member of the church. Admission standards were minimal. Ethics meant little more than compliance with the laws of the dominant state, however unjust. With Charlemagne's ascent to power several centuries later, Christendom emerged full-blown, infusing the West's self-perception in its violent rise to global economic and military hegemony.

It is within the cocoon of Christendom orthodoxies that the theological assumptions and formulations of the missionary movement from the West were gestated. Much of what we now associate with the category 'Christian' derives from well-intentioned, highly ingenious use of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures to legitimate, facilitate and sustain political and military power, on the one hand, and from the privileges concomitant with their accommodation to secular power. The result was a deeply compromised Christianity that has sadly born closer resemblance to the powers of this dark world than to the one in whose name wars, genocides, robberies, pillage, torture, and the evangelization of all of the world's continents by European peoples has been blessed.

Our evangelical doctrines explaining the processes that trigger God's salvific grace and mercy rely far more

on Christendom thought than on what Jesus himself taught. Today, as a result, evangelical thought and behaviour are often jarringly inconsistent with what Jesus himself lived and taught. That is why it is possible for evangelical believers to speak of 'the gospel' and 'ethics' as though they were separable. Dallas Willard is right when he observes that many professed Christians practise '*vampire Christianity*'. A vampire Christian says to Jesus, in effect: 'I'd like a little of your blood, but I don't care to be your student.... In fact, won't you just excuse me while I get on with my life, and I'll see you in heaven'.⁵

IV Implications for evangelism

Since the Lausanne Movement is about evangelization, I will suggest the most fundamental implication that occurs to me. Christ's followers are not called to plant churches, and they are not commissioned to win converts. Christ's followers have been commissioned to *make disciples* wherever they are in the world, according to what is commonly referred to as the 'Great Commission' found in Matthew 28:19-20.⁶

5 Willard, *The Great Omission*, 14.

6 In reference to the Greek text, Christopher J. H. Wright points out that 'go' is not an imperative but 'a participle of attendant circumstances' whereas the imperative is to 'make disciples'. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 35. What would the evangelical missionary movement and its ecclesiastical offspring have been like if the King James Version had properly translated this text?

Discipleship is not simply an option for Jesus' followers. The word '*disciple*' occurs 269 times in the New Testament, while the word 'Christian' occurs only three times—as a designation for the disciples of Jesus who could no longer be regarded as simply another Jewish sect (Acts 11:26). One is either a follower of Jesus, or one is not a follower of Jesus. In the words of Dallas Willard:

[T]he kind of life that we see in the earliest church is that of a special type of person. All of the assurances and benefits offered to humankind in the gospel evidently presuppose such a life and do not make realistic sense apart from it. The disciple of Jesus is not the deluxe or heavy-duty model of the Christian—especially padded, textured, streamlined, and empowered for the fast lane on the straight and narrow way. He or she stands on the pages of the New Testament as the first level of basic transportation in the Kingdom of God.⁷

Discipleship is an integral part of what it means to be a Christian. And discipleship means ethics. There can be no Christian conversion without ethical repentance and a life of steady transformation, until we are like him when we see him face to face. There is nothing in the teaching of Jesus that suggests the option of enjoying forgiveness at Jesus' expense, and then having nothing more to do with him. There is nothing in our scriptures to suggest that the *belief* of faith and the *life* of faith are two different things—the first compulsory and the second optional.

7 Willard, *The Great Omission*, 3.

V Biblical understanding of the gospel and ethics

1 For nominal Christians

Given that both Christendom and neo-Christendom have been marked by anything but the good fruit described by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, we might legitimately conclude that Christendom is a rotten tree, a false prophet, a house built upon the sand. If the behavioural standards outlined in St. Paul's famous fruit of the Spirit passage (Gal. 5:16-26) are, as he insists, normative for followers of Jesus, and if our Lord's own frequently reiterated teaching is to be taken seriously, then many religious derivatives of Christendom can scarcely be identified as 'Christian'. A tree is known by its fruit.

Our Lord's criteria for identifying his own have often been neglected. It is of no little significance that in his sobering pronouncements on the final judgment, touched upon at the beginning of this paper, doctrinal correctness seems to play little pivotal role in the fate of the person standing before him. Instead, verdicts are rendered on the basis of personal qualities and relational behaviour, as summarised by the righteous judge in his own Sermon on the Mount. God's people are those who *do* the will of the Father.

2 For those who behave 'Christianly' but do not claim Christ

Since it is here that I am most likely to be misunderstood, I begin by affirming that by 'gospel' we mean the good news that we can have peace with God through the atoning work of our Lord

Jesus Christ. But in light of the extent to which our doctrinal formulations have been influenced and even subverted by Christendom, we do well to remind ourselves that our relatively recent evangelical faith is part of a much longer story of God's active reconciling love for his creation.

For the greater part of human history, according to our own scriptures, those whose faith has been credited to them as righteousness have had no knowledge of Jesus Christ. As Jesus told his disciples, '*[M]any prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it*' (Mt. 13:17). Jesus in no way diminishes the secure standing of these prophets and righteous men and women before God, but simply points out that those who see and hear Christ are more privileged.

There is nothing in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures to suggest that this mercy is triggered solely by mental appropriation of insider information about mysterious doctrines. Whether the beneficiary of God's mercy is a follower of Jesus or simply a righteous person who longed or longs to see what the followers of Jesus now see, mercy is a result of God's action, not ours. The lives of '*prophets and righteous men*' are seen through the cross of Christ—the spotless lamb of God who was '*slain before the foundation of the world*' (Rev. 13:8), taking away the sins of the world.

3 For our evangelical theology and evangelism

What if the church synods had been as concerned about Christ-like behaviour as with coherent, internally consistent

doctrine? What if post-Constantinian Christianity had been as preoccupied with what Jesus taught as with what people should be permitted to think about him? What if instead of, or in addition to, a creed that distilled the doctrinal essence of Christianity, the council of Nicea had formulated a manifesto or charter of kingdom citizenship—the identifying behaviour of a follower of Jesus, based on what Jesus himself said?

What if those charged with administering, defending, and expanding Christian territory had been as concerned about Christ-like behaviour as they appeared to be about doctrinal beliefs and sacraments? What if the church fathers had wrestled as long and hard with the implications of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount as they did in puzzling out normative theories about the nature and work of the triune God?

Our answers to such questions profoundly influence our understanding of a sinner's standing before God, and the way that we proclaim the good news of reconciliation with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. These answers also directly affect those of us who—because we are professionally religious people who make a living from maintaining and promoting our several versions of orthodoxy—easily slip into the error of the Pharisees, reifying our self-justifying pieties to such an extent that sometimes there is no room for God himself. When he comes among us, we get rid of him, because he is too unlike the god over whom we imagine ourselves to have achieved a theological monopoly.

It was the acute awareness of this discrepancy between words and deeds

that gave rise to the several Reformations to which we modern evangelicals trace our roots. It is not surprising that it was evangelicalism—with its traditional awareness that genuine faith will always express itself in both words and life—that produced the great social movements of the nineteenth century, including the abolition of slavery, prison reform, the war against vice, the emancipation of women, public schools for poor children, child labour laws, orphanages for the parentless, homes for abandoned women, and philanthropic missions to the world.⁸

The title of a book by the most prominent evangelical of his day is testimony to an acute awareness that the ostensibly 'Christian' nations and their comfortably established churches were far from 'Christian'.⁹ The gulf between official belief and actual practice could be bridged only by genuine conversion. This was the message of the Moravians, the Pietists, the Anabaptists, the revivalists, and their heirs, we contemporary evangelicals.

⁸ For an account of evangelical social action in North America, see Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977); for an examination of evangelical social action in Great Britain, see Kathleen J. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962).

⁹ The best known evangelical reformer of all time is probably William Wilberforce, whose book, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes, Contrasted with Real Christianity*, was published in 1797. Revealingly, on the face page of the book appear the words 'Search the Scriptures!' from John 5:39.

What is the relationship between the gospel and ethics? To push this question to the limit, can the behaviour of someone from another religion be credited to them as righteousness? Is it possible for someone who has never heard of Jesus—or who has heard such garbled, conflicted, and ethically compromised nonsense as to make ‘Christianity’ either totally incomprehensible or morally reprehensible—to be *saved*? Is it possible for such a person to be on a life trajectory that aims at Christ the centre without even being aware of it?

Both the Hebrew and the Christian scriptures—*Constantine’s Bible*—provide abundant evidence in support of this argument. Our scriptures remind us that for most of human history, those who have been ‘saved’ have had no knowledge of Jesus the Christ. As Jesus told his disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it’ (Mt. 13:17). This suggests to me that it is entirely possible, indeed probable, that persons today, similarly, who have no actual knowledge of Jesus, or whose encounter with ‘Christianity’ is such as to make refusal to join our ranks an issue of maintaining integrity, can be and are being saved. There are those who have too much integrity to identify themselves with the category ‘Christian’.

If we can get beneath or behind Christendom orthodoxies as being the final arbiter of who *is* and who *is not* a follower of Jesus, and begin to think instead of a family identity based upon doing what our Lord says, then these ‘insiders’ are true followers of Jesus, even though they worship in mosques.

My conviction is that some of the most significant movements to Christ in the Muslim world and across the continent of Africa are successful precisely because they have eschewed the religion of Christendom so that they can follow Christ as Lord.

Anyone familiar with powerfully hegemonic western cultural forces and with the history of western migrations, sometimes brutal global expansion and morally flawed cultures can appreciate how difficult it would be for a morally upright person in a Muslim culture to associate himself or herself with the category ‘Christian’. The term is at times so closely associated with behaviour that is anti-Christ in its impulses, practices and objectives as to make refusal to convert to ‘Christianity’ a matter of basic integrity. What person, with any integrity, would want to identify himself or herself with a movement chiefly associated with violence, imperialism, slavery, economic and military hegemony, unjust treaties, pornographic arts, dysfunctional families, and greed?

The so-called ‘insider movement’ may one day prove to have been God’s way of preserving the true church beyond the life expectancy of Christendom and its deeply compromised churches. One does not have to be a ‘Christian’ in the formulaic understanding of that word in order to live in poverty, sorrow, meekness, and thirst for justice; those who call themselves Christians have no monopoly on mercy, purity of heart, or peacemaking.

Of course, those of us who call ourselves Christians should be at once recognizable by these identity tests of our Lord, but we have no exclusive monopoly on them. And when we see these

qualities in persons whose geographical and social circumstances have not provided them with the luxury or opportunity to meet Jesus personally, we should nevertheless recognize them as brothers and sisters, bearing a distinct family resemblance to Jesus our Lord and Saviour, whose advent, death, and resurrection they, like Abraham, would rejoice to see! And we should introduce them to Jesus, and invite them to be his disciples.

Missiologically, such an understanding would take us back to the original commission, not to make con-

verts or save people, but to make disciples who—with us—learn of and from Jesus, and who follow him in communities of faith that are significantly, redemptively countercultural, a palpable expression of their genuine *'longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them'* (Heb. 11:16). In short, such an understanding would once again result in a whole gospel, alive with the life-transforming good news of what Jesus did and what he promised to those who follow him as the way, the truth, and the life.

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.

Stephen R. Holmes is a Baptist Minister and Lecturer in Theology at the University of St Andrews, Scotland.

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'Unexpected' Guests at God's Banquet Table Gospel in Mission and Culture

Ruth Padilla deBorst

KEYWORDS: *Parable, counter-cultural, trans-cultural, divine image, justice*

I Introduction

Split cod and ale. That is all they have eaten for years on end. But today the sisters' table is sumptuously spread with exquisite fare that awakens all senses. With lavish love the servant Babette has spent even her last cent on this banquet. And no one who partakes of it is left unchanged: an estranged couple kisses in forgiveness, two sisters discover the bounty of creation, and a stray general is struck. 'Grace makes no conditions, it takes all to its bosom and proclaims amnesty. That which we have rejected is poured out on us'. *Babette's Feast*, Gabriel Axel's 1987 film, marvellously ushers us into the theme of gospel in mission and culture.

The theme of this paper is broad and demands an interdisciplinary approach. Not discrete strands that

can be tidily woven into a braid, gospel, culture and mission mix and mingle rather like food and guests, smells and tastes, tinkling glasses and laughter at a shared and well-laden table. This paper proposes that Christian communities can and do live out God's mission in the world when they are willing to live, in ever-present tension, as 'third-culture' followers of Jesus. As they together indwell the story of God's saving action recorded partly in Scripture, submit to Christ's sovereignty and are filled by the Holy Spirit, Christians from around the world can become an alternative culture, which draws on the particularities of their unique backgrounds but also transcends them. These welcoming communities are historical out-workings of God's mission and localized expressions of the bountiful banquet of God's kingdom.

Background for that claim is laid out in several sections: readers are first invited to witness the telling of a story around a table, and the confrontation of two socio-cultural and religious paradigms: that of some

Pharisees and that of Jesus, who, in his prophetic role, draws on the long story of God's action in human history.¹ Then, with broad strokes, a narrative portrait is depicted of God's banquet table through the ages, one to which all people are called so that they may live out their creational purpose as relational and cultural beings, and the world may come to know God's love. The spotlight next rests on the early followers of Jesus, revealing their struggles and successes in becoming a community whose lifestyle affirmed their relational bond to each other and to God as well as their creational, culture creating, calling. Finally, a call is issued for followers of Jesus today to live as inculturated expressions of God's mission in today's world.

II Good News at the Banquet Table

1 Jesus' Banquet Story

The Gospel of Luke records a parable of Jesus about a great dinner (Lk. 14:15-24). The table is abundantly laden; however, when sought out, the initial invitees 'begin to make excuses', alleging more important occupations. Of course, they are wealthy, powerful people, capable of buying land, purchasing five yoke of oxen for a proportionately big plot of land, and probably particularly respected and esteemed in their city. But even they customarily would have

previously confirmed their attendance; and their refusal to attend is not taken lightly by the host.² So, countering all cultural expectations and rules of table etiquette, the host sends not for friends, brothers, relatives or other rich neighbours (v. 12), but for the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame from the roads and lanes, the relegated people from 'outside' town.

2 The 'Expected' Guests at the Table

Important as is the content of the parable, the textual and historical context illumines our matter yet further. It is the Jewish Sabbath and Jesus is seated at the table of a leader of the Pharisees. The gospel account paints an air pregnant with tension. Jesus has daringly healed a man with a severe illness that caused fluid retention, under the scrutinizing eye of those who are 'watching him closely' (Lk. 14:1). He has just challenged religiously and culturally acceptable and highly discriminatory seating arrangements (v. 8-11); and he now tells the story in response to the piously self-assured exclamation of a well-fed dinner guest: 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' (v. 15).

Of course, 'anyone' in the vocabulary of most of the privileged Judean scribal groups and Pharisees applies to a rather circumscribed circle of influential men which probably does not include uneducated Galilean peasants, even less despised Samaritans, and

¹ For further discussion on the assertion that Jesus was, in effect, a Pharisee, see Hyam Maccoby, *Jesus the Pharisee* (London: SCM Press, 2003).

² Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary—New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 230.

never, heaven forbid, unclean Gentiles, like occupying Roman forces or foreign traders. 'Blessed' in this man's mind is a qualification limited to people like him: sons and perhaps some daughters of Abraham, who abide within the same socio-cultural and religious framework as he does.

Particularly blessed within that framework are men like him who, at least publicly, seek to interpret Mosaic law carefully, according to the traditions of previous generations of the pious, and to apply them rigorously.³ The ancient words of the prophet regarding the feast of the Lord — 'a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filed with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear' (Isa. 25:6)—pertain to *them*. They are to be counted among the chosen of God, and, in the resurrection, theirs is the prerogative of being fed abundantly in the intimacy of God's kingdom.

People from outside that enlightened circle can gain limited access to the table only if they submit to the socio-religious and cultural traditions and standards of the insiders: this is the case of the Jewish proselytes who can draw close by means of circumcision, baptism and adherence to Jewish law and practice. Theirs is a rather exclusive banquet.

3 A Prophetic Vision

As the story goes, Jesus does not overtly counter the pious affirmation of the dinner guest. Instead, he turns the entire picture upside down, and ends his para-

ble with a provocative editorial comment: 'For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner!' (v. 22). The shocking turn of the story is that those who feel most secure in their 'right' to belong, and consequently take upon themselves the role of judges and excluders of others, are precisely the ones who run the risk of excluding themselves from the celebration. Their self-assuredness blinds them to the recognition that there, sitting at their very table, eating and drinking with them, is the very Lord of the banquet, the only true host, and prevents them from accepting his invitation.⁴

At the Pharisees' table, a man with dropsy had been brought in, not as a welcome guest but as bait to trap Jesus. At the table of God's kingdom, Jesus dares suggest, it is precisely the people excluded from the socio-cultural and religious establishment who are the celebrated guests. With such a brazen statement, Jesus radicalizes the prophetic role he has publicly assumed upon his arrival in Jerusalem (Lk. 13:33). He has made explicit his adoption of a certain 'script' existent in their shared cultural tradition: in identifying himself as God's prophet, he attributes to himself characteristic traits, roles and messages recognizable to his contemporaries.⁵ He stands

³ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 828.

⁴ Moessner points to the fact that in this passage the Greek *kyrios*, Lord, is applied to Jesus, and not to the naturally expected owner of home. David Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet: the Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 275.

⁵ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: the Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 58.

in the line of their father, Abraham (Gen. 20:7), of the prophetic prototype Moses (Deut. 34:10).

Jesus speaks and acts as God's prophet, as 'a human being called by God for a specific mission: to proclaim the divine vision of the world and society and to invite conversion to that vision.'⁶ As God's prophet, Jesus dares hearken back to a vision of God's kingdom often forgotten or distorted in his day and all too frequently throughout the history of God's people. The good news he incarnates and announces is not really new, though it needs to be witnessed and proclaimed afresh: 'unexpected guests', particularly people devoid of power within the ruling cultural framework, are welcome guests at God's table.

III God's Multicultural Kingdom Table

The good news experienced and recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures begins with the story of creation, which is necessarily cast within a particular language and cultural ethos. Its implications, nonetheless, are universal: *all* humans are created in God's image,⁷ as relational, creative beings, and are

called to shape family and community, culture and science in relationally responsible ways, multiplying and filling the earth as expressions and agents of God's good purposes for all of creation.⁸

The epic continues: in spite of the marring of that image through rebellion and its deadly consequences, men and women do shape families and develop diverse cultures. Some live in tents and raise livestock. Others play the lyre and the pipe. Yet others make bronze and iron tools. No one culture is upheld as best. All communities, in their particular ways and within their own cultural paradigms, 'invoke the name of the Lord' (Gen. 4:17-26). All are welcome to the table. Problems, however, arise when people disregard either of the two interrelated expressions of their divine image: first, their relational character in reverence to God and respect for other people, and second, their cultural character, their call to organize their lives in order to creatively care for all forms of life (Gen. 4:8-16; 6:1-8).

Even in the midst of these contradictions, there still is good news: God is experienced and portrayed as one who does not abandon his mission when under pressure. Beginning with Noah, God establishes and re-establishes a 'covenant' with humanity, resembling the ancient Hittite Suzerain's 'treaty' with his vassals, always offering anew the possibility for people to live out their relational and

6 Alejandro Botta, *Los Doce Profetas Menores* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 1 (author's translation).

7 Croatto affirms that the 'image' of God in the Genesis didactical narrative is not accidental but essential: 'humans, and *all* humans, are "image" of God. They are "theomorphus".' Severino Croatto, *El Hombre En El Mundo: Creación y Designio. Estudio De Génesis 1.1-2.3* (Buenos Aires: Editorial La Aurora, 1974), 175 (translation and gender inclusive language added by author).

8 Regarding the ontological aspects of the creational and relational responsibility of humankind as God's image, see Croatto, *El Hombre En El Mundo*, 181.

culture-creating nature (Gen. 9:1-7).⁹ When humanity is tempted to concentrate numbers, power and wealth in one place, running the risk of establishing hegemonic and life-denying uniformity at Babel, God disperses them, safeguarding diverse cultural expressions and languages.

When God calls Abraham out of his land to begin a new people, a particular blessing is promised in relation to a universal intent: 'I will make you a great nation... so that you will be a blessing.... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen. 12:2-3). Centuries later, the apostle Paul would frame this expansive promise as 'gospel' in that it evidences God's favour, not restricted to one ethnic, cultural or language group, but available to all peoples (Gal. 3:8).

When the Egyptian empire, feeling its power threatened by the growth of Abraham's descendents inside its domain, tightens its grip and institutes carefully tailored ethnic cleansing, God intervenes (Ex. 3:16ff). God not only liberates the Israelites through Moses, assuring their survival as a people, but also establishes ethical, social and economic conditions aimed again at guaranteeing their capacity to live out fully their relational and culturally creative calling among the

nations. Imbedded in this law is good news for every day life.¹⁰ As Wright puts it: 'All nations belong to God, but Israel will belong to God in a unique way that will, on the one hand, demand covenantal obedience, and, on the other hand, be exercised through a priestly and holy identity and role in the world'.¹¹

Within the covenant community, religious commitment is inseparable from economic and political relations: debts are to be cancelled, land is to be returned to the original family (Lev. 25), even the foreigner in the land is to be protected (Ex. 22:21) and received in love (Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 10:19). Particularly the poor, the defenceless and people whose circumstances have uprooted them from family and native culture are welcome to the table. Trouble ensues, however, whenever allegiance to foreigners is accompanied by the adoption of their gods and the concurrent turning away from God and his ethical and relational standards. Although the table of the Lord of hosts is spread 'for all peoples' (Isa. 25), there is room at it for only one head host, and this is the incisive and recurring message of the Old Testament prophets.

Even when disobedience leads to exile and the Jews become strangers in unknown lands, surrounded by differ-

⁹ 'The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture' in Robert T. Coote and John R. W. Stott eds., *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture: The Papers of the Lausanne Consultation on Gospel and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980). Regarding the 'Noahic Covenant', see Arthur Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: the Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 49-51.

¹⁰ Horsley affirms: 'Interpreters of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) have long...recognized that, in theological terms, the Mosaic covenant includes gospel along with law'. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 113.

¹¹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 257.

ent cultural traditions and expressions, the relational and culture-creational call still holds fast. As Glaser points out, the prophet Jeremiah's words parallel those of Genesis 1: he urges the people to build houses, plant gardens, eat what they produce, marry and have children, multiply and not decrease (Jer. 29:5-6). But the call is not merely to survive. 'Seek the welfare (peace, *shalom*) of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf', continue the words of the prophet (v. 7). Theirs is a culture-creating role, which engages them in all dimensions of the life of their 'host' culture in search of the wellbeing of its inhabitants. In keeping with this vision, Scripture records Daniel and his friends training for the Babylonian civil service and Mordecai serving Xerxes, the king of Persia, as 'second in rank' (Esth. 10:3).¹²

The biblical story briefly records the return from exile as a time during which effort had to be made to rebuild not just a place but a people. In seeking to create a 'distinctive Jewish identity', Ezra and Nehemiah insist on obedience to Mosaic law, surround the city with a wall and purge the community from all things foreign. The book we know as Malachi, written about those days, also attacks cultic impurity and marriage with foreigners, both concerns that could, and eventually did, lead to attitudes of superiority and exclusivity. Yet the offerings accepted by the promised 'messenger of the covenant' are those presented by people who care for and respect the foreigner (Mal. 3:1, 5). Even the alien,

whose presence may threaten the identity and challenge the cultural patterns of God's people, is welcome at the table of God's kingdom.

Along with the biblical record we fast-forward four centuries. The Jewish people have undergone much change since the days of Malachi: Persians and Greeks were followed by precarious independence and they are now under the iron rule of Rome.¹³ Horsley paints the picture:

This new world order established by Rome... meant disruption and disorder for subjected peoples of the Middle East such as the Judeans and Galileans. In conquering and reconquering them the Roman military forces repeatedly slaughtered and enslaved the inhabitants and destroyed their houses and villages, particularly in the areas of Jesus' activity around villages such as Nazareth and Capernaum.¹⁴

Roman power is exerted locally through Judean kings who in turn build up a temple structure that religiously ratifies their authority. Suffering, for the majority of the population of the region, is compounded by the imposition of heavy taxation in addition to traditional temple tithes. The very culture of the people is threatened when a Roman-style temple is built, Palestinian cities are renamed and dedicated to the emperor, and high priests are appointed by the Roman governor. Repression and taxation run families into debt and hunger, ripping at the

12 Glaser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 130.

13 Glaser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 163.

14 Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 34.

very social texture of their communities.¹⁵ Galilean and Judean peasants respond with political unrest and agitation in defence of their traditional way of life: theirs is a resistance to foreign domination, but also to Herodian and high priestly connivance with this rule at the expense of their own people and with total disregard for their law and tradition.¹⁶

It is in the thick of such tension that we encounter Jesus at the table of the Pharisee, and witness the clash between two incompatible interpretations regarding who is welcome at the table of God's kingdom. Jesus' story confronts the 'official' story line of the comfortable and relatively powerful religious man who lives within the cultural expectations of his context. Jesus' story, however, is far from exotic, extra-cultural or foreign to Jewish identity and tradition. It springs from and extends the long story of God's good purposes for all people that Jews, even not highly educated ones, would recognize as part of their tradition.

In his prophetic role, Jesus is spearheading a mission of renewal among his people that builds on God's mission of reestablishing the relational, creational image of God in all people, which is being threatened by human sin, by imperial power, and by legalistic and ritualistic religious power. Again in Horsley's words:

Jesus launched a mission not only to heal the debilitating effects of Roman military violence and eco-

nom ic exploitation, but also to revitalize and rebuild the people's cultural spirit and communal vitality.¹⁷

As the New Testament reflects, the first followers of Jesus perceived and recorded his life and message as good news *within* their socio-economic, historical, cultural and religious contexts.

In the 'official story' of Roman and temple power, peasants and fishermen, women and children are insignificant cogs in the imperial system, worth no more than their meagre taxes. It actually favours the powers-that-be for internal rivalries and regional competitions to keep people away from one another. In these days of uncertainty and massive threat to their identity and survival as a people, Jesus reminds his fellow Jews of who they are: a community of mutual concern held together by God's sustaining hand, in order to illustrate to others what God's good purposes look like in the here and now.

In the imperial story they are a relegated, insignificant colony, nobodies close to extinction. In God's story they are welcome guests at the table of God's kingdom. It is to them that Jesus announces and demonstrates the good news of salvation, reconciliation, healing, restoration and freedom during the years of his public ministry.

Accordingly, on the climatic night before Jesus' death, he gathers around the Passover table, not the renowned figures of his day, not the press, the military, nor the diplomatic core, but a handful of simple folk, twelve of his followers, including even the one who

15 Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 33.

16 Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 54.

17 Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 126.

would betray him. With them he shares bread and wine, to them he reiterates his law of love which will be supremely illustrated in his own death, and to them he delegates the remembrance of this inclusive table at which the host gives himself away for the sake of his guests.

IV Followers of Jesus at the Table

Although Jesus' life and ministry were circumscribed to a rather small geographical area, that is not the case with his followers. It was the Jews of the Diaspora who provided the initial basis for the growth of the early church. These were mostly Hellenized Jews, primarily urban, more influenced by Greek culture than their Palestinian counterparts. Many of them had taken Greek names, employed Greek as their mother tongue and read the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Torah.¹⁸ These were people who stood between cultures: they were immersed in Jewish tradition but were inevitably marked by their broader participation in the Greek world.

This double identity underlies the Gospel of Luke and its sequel, Acts. On the one hand, it is obvious that Luke intends to prove the historical, theological connection of Christianity with its Jewish roots. At the same time, both in form and in content, his writing reflects its Hellenist setting and is

meant to address people immersed in that broad and diverse cultural milieu.¹⁹ Luke and Acts conform more to Greco-Roman standards for historical writing than those of traditional Jewish biography present in the other gospels.²⁰

Most significant for our theme is how this bi-cultural writer highlights the barrier-crossing nature of the good news as the plot moves from Galilee to Jerusalem (in Luke) and from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (in Acts).²¹ But borders crossed are not merely geographical: women, along with the outcasts, the poor, the 'outsiders' are prominent in Luke's writing.²² This we have observed in his account of Jesus at the Pharisee's table. And we witness it again in Acts.

Table issues—who is fed, when, what and how—surface in the narrations of Acts and threaten the unity of the fledgling church. Luke's recollection is honest: the church has to grapple with the social and cultural differences that spring up in every-day matters. Diaspora Jews often returned to Palestine in order to die and be buried

¹⁸ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became The Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 49, 57.

¹⁹ 'The word "Hellenist" is derived from the verb *hellenizo* meaning "to Graecize" in speech or custom.' Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: a Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 30.

²⁰ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 322.

²¹ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 186.

²² His Hellenistic sensitivities could explain, for example, Luke's more emancipated attitude toward women. Thurston attributes to this cultural sensitivity the fact that some have called Luke's the 'Gospel of womanhood'. Thurston, *The Widows*, 23.

in the land of Israel. The widows would then receive support from the temple or synagogue. However, those that joined the sect of Jesus followers would have been cut off, and stood in need of charity.²³ As the story recorded in Acts 6:1-7 goes, the followers of Jesus from among the Hellenist Jews complained. In their perspective, 'their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food' while the widows among the Palestinian Jews were being favoured.

It is not difficult to imagine the inner workings of this conflict: possibly among the Hebrew widows were some Galilean women who had followed and served Jesus and hence were given preference in the daily distribution.²⁴ There might have been cultural clashes between these and the Hellenized women, deemed too liberated by more traditional insiders. In any event, the response was prompt and effective: leaders were chosen from among the Hellenist followers of Jesus to care not merely for their own people but for all those whose needs brought them to the table. It is not surprising, coming from Luke, that in the next stories recorded we encounter two of these 'minor' leaders taking on roles central to the witness of the new church: Stephen becomes the first martyr among Jesus' followers; and Philip preaches in Samaria and to an African official, the first non-Jew (or Jewish proselyte) whose conversion is recorded in the Bible.

Another 'table story' is central to

the self-understanding and mission of the early church. Peter, the prominent leader of the first believers, very much an insider both of Palestinian Jewish tradition and of the Jesus movement, is commanded in a vision to eat unclean (non-kosher) food that had been off limits for Jews since time immemorial. He is still puzzling in horror over the vision when messengers of a Roman centurion call out to him, extending an invitation to Cornelius' home.

Against all Jewish ritual law—according to which eating, drinking, providing and receiving hospitality from non-Jews is strictly prohibited—and probably overcoming much personal prejudice—Romans like Cornelius were oppressing his people and had very recently crucified his teacher!—Peter responds. He welcomes the messengers into the house where he is staying, travels a long distance with them, and enters Cornelius' house, where he shares, and actually discovers, the good news. In amazement he declares: 'I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him' (Acts 10).

Much to the consternation of the 'central' church in Jerusalem, Peter actually enters into the intimacy of the Roman centurion's world: he stays for days, partaking of the same food under the same roof with this man who represents everything the Jewish people hate, fear and reject. Cornelius was Roman, a soldier of the imperial army that was crushing Israel. Although he feared God, he had never taken the steps required to become a Jewish proselyte. He and his household adhered to traditions, habits, diets and

23 Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 338.

24 Thurston, *The Widows*, 30.

values abhorrent to them. Surely he should become *like* them in order to become one *of* them! Then he would be welcome at the table of fellowship.

In striking contrast to that attitude ring the words of yet another bi-cultural follower of Jesus, a man born as a Roman citizen into an established family of Tarsus, a prominent city of the empire, but raised (possibly in Jerusalem) as a Jewish boy in the Pharisee tradition. Paul affirms that he is willing to become like others, 'all things to all men', be they weak, Jews, or people not bound to the law, in order that they may share in the blessings of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:2-23). Accordingly, he dedicated his life to making the good news of God's kingdom known to women and men, Jews and Gentiles, in cities spread wide across the Roman Empire.

The early church stumbled, debated and suffered as it made its way out of its first, culturally determined 'table manners' and sought to understand and convey the universal reach of the good news in daily interaction with the people of many cultures, languages, and gods, that had been 'dumped together helter-skelter' by the Roman Empire.²⁵ Their primary affiliation as members of a new community allowed Christians to create a new and coherent culture and identity within the culturally diverse chaos of their day. Stark summarises his analysis of this 'revitalization movement':

Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing

new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent problems. To cities filled with homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn apart by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity.²⁶

Such an alternative way of living was not some new and passing fad but rather a current and contextually relevant indwelling of the good news story of God's good purposes for God's creation. Against the backdrop of prevailing up-rootedness, injustice, oppression and relativity, the new people of God sought together to establish communities whose lifestyle affirmed their relational bond to each other and to God, as well as their broad creational calling. Drawing on elements of their diverse cultural background, early followers of Jesus actually created 'a new culture capable of making life in Greco-Roman cities more tolerable'.²⁷

V A Call to Christian Mission

In recent years, a shift has occurred within the social sciences regarding the concept of culture. Many sociologists today favour an understanding of culture as a 'repertoire of techniques',

²⁵ The entire book of Acts depicts this struggle. See particularly Acts 11 and 15. See also Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 213.

²⁶ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 161.

²⁷ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 162.

'a toolkit of strategies', as 'complex, rule like structures that can be put to strategic use' rather than as a tight network of a few abstract central themes or values instantiated in a range of symbols, rituals and practices in collective life. Culture is deemed as more dynamic, as both constraining and enabling. Personal agency is accounted for rather than overridden by social conditioning, and more allowance is given to choice and variation. Within this understanding, people can, and do, participate in multiple cultural traditions at the same time; they also can and do question and override cultural constraints. The job of cultural sociologists, within this understanding, is to study how these information-processing mechanisms or techniques (schema or scripts) are acquired, diffused and modified.²⁸

In light of this shift, our exploration of gospel in mission and culture must move beyond the classical Niebuhrian route regarding the position of Christ and church in relation to a supposedly homogeneous and non-porous culture. Instead, we must consider what specific aspects within any particular cultural construct are compatible with a biblical worldview. Rodney Clapp affirms in this regard:

The church as a culture will approach any particular host nation (or cultural practice) with discrimination. It need not indiscriminately reject, and it cannot indiscriminately accept, any and all aspects of a

particular culture... Christians are not haters or lovers of culture, any more than fish could be said to hate or love water.... The question is not choosing for or against it; the question is *what kind of culture is at hand?*²⁹

There are elements in all cultures that reflect God's creative, life-enhancing goodness, and elements born out of human rebellion that breed death in their wake. The issue is, how are Christians to discern the ones from the others or even to disengage from the very water they swim in?

I propose that the church worldwide has within herself the resources required for such discernment: Christian communities can and do live out God's mission in the world when they are willing to live in the ever-present tension of being 'third-culture' followers of Jesus. In this section we will explore what that might look like. What, in other words, are the missiological implications of the gospel in culture?

1 The Concept of a 'Third Culture Kid'

David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken define a 'Third Culture Kid', (or TCK), as follows:

A Third Culture Kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the

²⁸ Paul DiMaggio, 'Culture and Cognition' in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 23 (1997), 265-268.

²⁹ Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 177.

cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.³⁰

What is striking is that people who have grown up between worlds, treading both the home culture of their parents and the culture of their host country, have been found to create, together, and identify most strongly with a third culture that transcends all original ones, without denying their value. The culture of a TCK is a 'culture between cultures' in which he or she engages meaningfully, and with a sense of belonging, with people from very diverse cultural blends.

2 Missiological implications

The parallels are obvious: Christians are called, in Jesus' words, to be *in* the world, but not *of* it. Though imbedded in particular national, ethnic, and cultural stories, Christians also claim to belong to another reality as real as the first: they inhabit the story of God's action and mission in relation to the world—their second culture.

Through this 'double belonging', as TCKs do, they together create a new 'third' culture in which they share with people from very diverse cultural backgrounds. Allegiance to that group grants its members the capacity to look

at their first national, ethnic or cultural group as if from the outside, from a more discriminating vantage point than would ever have been possible from within. They are free to question and imagine alternatives rather than simply receiving their cultural environment as a given and all-determining reality.

a) Third-culture communities at the crossroads

As third-culture people, followers of Jesus are called to recognize as relative many dimensions of their culture that those encased within it experience as inevitable and imperative. Third-culture Christians stand in what Orlando Costas has termed the 'crossroads', those often unsettled and unsettling, uncomfortable, but generative places 'where the forces of history (ideologies, political and economic systems, social and religious movements) confront each other'.³¹

Most communities grant space only to like-minded, like-looking, like-speaking people. But followers of Jesus are called to acknowledge they have been sent as he was into the world, as agents of reconciliation. So, unafraid of mixing with the 'wrong' people, or of not fully belonging, they must stand in the interstices of society; between belief and unbelief, between purposeful and aimless living, between community and disintegration, between the global and the local, between people and nature, between haves and have-nots, between power and vulnerability,

³⁰ 'The TCK Profile' seminar material (Interaction, Inc., 1989), 1, in David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: the Experience of Growing up Among Worlds* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2001), 19.

³¹ Orlando E. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982). 325.

between north and south, east and west. Once they capture a vision of the table of God's kingdom, submit to Christ's sovereignty and are filled by the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus are called to celebrate their unmerited inclusion at the table of God's kingdom, and both welcome people who look, think, speak and eat differently than they do, and also take the risk of confronting any power that excludes or deprives people of their rightful presence at the table.

The good news is that, contrary to most expectations, true gospel witness in the world does not rest on power, or the structures of Christendom, but on sharing in the passion of Jesus. In Newbigin's words, 'the very heart of the biblical vision for the unity of humankind is that its center is not an imperial power but the slain Lamb'.³² Consequently, the 'central reality' in witness is 'neither word nor act, but the total life of a community enabled by the Spirit to live in Christ, sharing his passion and the power of his resurrection'.³³

In so doing, or rather in so *being*, the church—the multi-faceted community of Jesus disciples, gifted in 'many tongues' by the Spirit—indwells God's story, she takes on God's mission in the midst of clashing and blending human cultures and is used by God to weave those strands into meaning and life-granting wholes. It is there, at the 'crossroads', where missiology—the critical reflection about Christian faith

as cultural, ideological, religious, social, economic and political borders are crossed—is most fecund, as Costas says.³⁴

It is precisely its 'third-culture-ness', its ecumenicity and catholicity that offers the world church the necessary correctives to the inevitable cultural blind-spots. 'It is only by being faithful participants in a supranational, multicultural family of churches', affirms Newbigin, 'that we can find the resources to be at the same time faithful sustainers and cherishers of our own respective cultures and also faithful critics of them'.³⁵ As 'third-culture' people, Christians are called to celebrate their unmerited inclusion at God's kingdom table and stand in the often painful place of the prophet, denouncing national, class, ethnic and tribal values and practices that counter God's good purposes for *all* people, even at the risk of exclusion, ridicule, persecution or death.

b) Socio-cultural particularities

Of course, this 'third-culture-ness' does not deny particularity. In Brett's words, 'Christian faith does not mean the erasure of cultural identity altogether'.³⁶ A Chinese Christian will continue being Chinese and an Argentine, Argentine. What occurs, instead, is that 'the specificities of social identity

³² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 159.

³³ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 137.

³⁴ Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate*, 28.

³⁵ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 197.

³⁶ Mark Brett, 'The Loss and Retrieval of Ancient Religion in Ancient Israel and in Australia' in Michael Parsons, *Text and Task: Scripture and Mission* (Bletchley: Paternoster Press, 2005), 12.

are given dignity within the larger body of Christ' and add to its rich multiplicity.³⁷ In becoming a first-century, Aramaic-speaking Jewish man, and binding his divine identity into the specificities of that time and place in history, God says 'yes' to socio-cultural particularity, even to a powerless particularity. And as the account of Pentecost so vividly portrays, and the impact of vernacular translations through the centuries attests, God's Spirit gifts people of diverse settings to hear the good news in their own language, even when it is not the language of the empire of the day.

The good news is that even in a world in which a given civilization is esteemed as privileged, more enlightened or progressive than others by the powers-that-be (Rome in Jesus' time, the British Empire in its height, or transnational capitalist elites today), no *one* culture is granted hegemony over others in God's story. No one culture owns the keys of the Kingdom. No one has generated *the* illumined reading of the Bible and reality, *the* definitive theological articulation or *the* anointed outworking of faith in society. God's mission enlists Christians to celebrate the unique character and contribution of diverse people groups, to strive to make it possible for every person to encounter God's story in her own language, and to stand against all homogenizing cultural impositions that nullify particular expressions of God's creative image in diverse people.

A tempered appreciation of the virtues and vices of particular cultures

does not imply, however, that third-culture people must leave their initial culture at the door in order to sit at God's banquet table. God's kingdom is not some amorphous, supra-cultural, other-worldly milieu. Rather, it is a space of vibrant, life-giving, God honouring encounter of spice and colour, smell and sound here and now, in the complex entanglement of human relations. As 'third-culture' people, followers of Jesus are called to live today in light of the completion of God's story, with daily expectation of Christ's imminent return. They are called to express in their daily interactions, the confident belief that one day the triumphal choir before God's throne will be composed of a great multitude from *every* nation, tribe and people, proclaiming, on bended knee, God's sovereignty in their own very distinct languages.

VI Conclusion

The characters in Axel's film discover, or rather are discovered by, the good news of healing, abundant, and undeserved grace when they share in Babette's lavish feast. In contrast, today's economic globalization, accompanied by the individualistic and materialistic culture of its mostly western proponents, is threatening the relational and creational capacity of people, undermining community life, effacing rich cultural distinctives, and plundering the environment the globe over.³⁸ No longer able to support their families locally, ravaged by violence

37 Brett, 'Loss and Retrieval' in *Text and Task*, 13.

38 Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Making Globalization Work* 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006), 9.

and exclusion, millions of people emigrate or wander the world as refugees. Thousands of women are left alone with their children in crowded cities. Families are torn apart. And so is the entire eco-system: land is gouged by mining, rivers and air are polluted by waste, with no respect for its integrity or sustainability.

Followers of Jesus, as creative and responsible stewards of both this world and of God's story, cannot remain indifferent. With humble yet bold confidence we can and must affirm in prophetic word and deed that even within this ruling world order, or disorder, there is good news for humanity. N. T. Wright puts it well:

What the Christian gospel offers, and what Christian ministry must urgently offer in its formation of communities of faith, hope, prayer and witness, is a love which cannot be deconstructed, a love which manifestly is seeking its neighbor's good rather than its own, a love

which goes out into the public square not in order to gain power, prestige or money but in order to incarnate that love of God which is expressed precisely in God's putting of all things to rights, God's righteousness, God's justice.³⁹

Is the community we belong to and create one such as this? Is our table one at which immigrants, people of diverse cultural backgrounds and different languages are welcome, not as oddities or welfare cases, but as full-fledged members? In as far as Christian communities the world over live together in light of God's grace-full story, they become historically visible and culturally alternative out-workings of God's mission and localized expressions of the bountiful banquet of God's kingdom.

39 N.T. Wright, *The Gospel and Our Culture* (Nashotah: Nashotah House Studies, No. 1, 2007), 32.

Text and Task

Scripture and Mission

Michael Parsons (editor)

Practical, scriptural and contemporary, *Text and Task* is a series of essays on Scripture and mission. A team of biblical scholars suggest ways forward in areas such as the implicit missional narrative of David and Goliath, the story of Solomon and his Temple-building, the genre of lament, the explicit gracious message of the prophet Isaiah,

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Michael Parsons lectures at the Baptist Theological College, Perth.

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The Gospel in Historical Reception

'you welcomed the message with joy...' 1 Thessalonians 1:6

Timothy C. Tennent

KEYWORDS: *Advance, recession, frontiers, Christendom, culture, missions, Majority world*

I Introduction

Central to the theological reflection of the Lausanne movement has always been the realization that the gospel is rooted in real history and the gospel has been received within particular historical cultural contexts through the ages. The gospel cannot be properly understood in a vacuum or in isolation from the history of those who have 'welcomed the message with joy'. The purpose of this essay is to see how our history fits into the larger context of Christian history and how this has affected what Christians mean by the word 'gospel'.

II A Framework For Understanding *Christian* History

One of the great contributions of the Lausanne movement to the larger ecumenical

movement has been the focus on Christian history, not merely church history. Church history tends to focus on particular denominations and confessional movements identified by various churches through the ages. Christian history, in contrast, seeks to capture a larger perspective and examines the overall movement of Christianity as a world movement. To understand this perspective, three key themes will be addressed: the advance and recession motif, the cross-cultural transmission of the gospel and the shift in the ethnic and geographic diversity of the world Christian movement.

1 Advance and Recession

One of the peculiar features of the spread of Christianity is that it has been characterized primarily by serial, not progressive, growth. In other words, Christianity has not had an even, steady growth beginning with a central, cultural and geographic centre from which it subsequently spread to its present position as the largest,

Timothy C. Tennent (PhD, University of Edinburgh) is Professor of World Missions and Indian Studies and the Director of Missions Programs at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Visiting Professor of Missiology at Luther W. New, Jr. Theological College in Dehra Dun, UA, India. He is the author of *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations (ISPCK) and Theology in the Context of World Christianity (Zondervan)*.

most ethnically diverse religion in the world.

Instead, Christian history has been one of advance and recession. Christian history has witnessed powerful penetrations of the gospel into certain geographic and cultural regions, only to later experience a major recession in that region and, sometimes, even wither away almost to extinction. However, just as Christianity was waning in one quarter, it was experiencing an even more dramatic rebirth and expansion in another.

This advance-and-recession theme is such a major feature in Christian history that the eminent church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette uses it as a major organizing theme for his famous multivolume work, *A History of Christianity*.¹ The important point is to recognize that despite what it feels like when a Christian is living in the midst of a particular cultural and geographic advance, if you step back and look at the whole picture of Christian history then you must be forced to conclude that there is no such thing as a particular Christian culture or Christian civilization.

This picture is in stark contrast to what one observes, for example, in Islam or in Hinduism, the two largest religions after Christianity. Islam initially emerged in Saudi Arabia, and from that geographic and cultural centre Islam has spread all over the world. Today, there are far more non-Arab Muslims than Arab Muslims. Yet, despite its diversity, Islam retains a

distinctly Arab orientation. Devout Muslims insist that the Qur'an is untranslatable into any language other than Arabic. The call to prayer goes out in Arabic, regardless of the national language of the surrounding Muslims. All Muslims face towards Mecca when they pray. All of these are important indicators that Islam has had a progressive, not serial, growth. It has always enjoyed a single cultural and geographic centre in Saudi Arabia and has never been forced to fully embrace cultural translatability.

Hinduism emerged in the Gangetic plain of North India over three thousand years ago, making it one of the oldest religions in the world. Yet, Hinduism has never lost its cultural and geographic centre in North India. Just as Islam can hardly be imagined apart from Saudi Arabia, the home of the holy city of Mecca, the Ka'ba, the black stone and the tomb of Muhammad in Medina, so it is difficult to imagine a Hinduism which withers away in India, but finds a new centre in, say, sub-Saharan Africa.

Yet, this is precisely what has happened repeatedly in the history of the Christian movement. As Christians in the twenty-first century we are experiencing the most dramatic advance and recession in the history of the world Christian movement. However, in order to understand this phenomenon, we need to see it within the historical context of the second major theme; namely, the cross-cultural transmission of the gospel. Within this theme, three examples will be highlighted.

¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, vols. 1 and 2 (Peabody: Prince Press, 2000).

2 The Cross Cultural Transmission of the Gospel

a) From Jewish Birth to Gentile Home

Christianity began as a Jewish movement fulfilling Jewish hopes, promises and expectations. Indeed, the continuity between Judaism and Christianity seemed so seamless to the earliest believers that they would have never thought of themselves as changing their religion from Judaism to something else. They understood Christianity as the extension and fulfilment of their Jewish faith.

Yet, right in the pages of the New Testament we read the story of those unnamed Jewish believers in Antioch who took the risky and very controversial move to cross major cultural and religious barriers and share the gospel with pagan, uncircumcised Gentiles. Acts 11:19 begins by recounting how, after the persecution in connection with Stephen, these scattered believers began to share the gospel 'as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews'. The very next verse records one of the most important missiological moments in the entire New Testament: 'Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and *began to speak to Greeks also*, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus'.

This is the beginning of a new cultural frontier which, though radical at the time, would soon become so prominent that it would be considered normative Christianity. At the time that these unnamed believers from Cyprus and Cyrene began to preach the gospel to Gentiles, the church was comprised

of Jewish believers and a few Gentile God-fearers like Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch who had accepted the Torah. In other words, the Gentile God-fearers had accepted the Jewish messiah as their messiah and were living out their new faith on Jewish terms. The cultural centre of this young, fledgling movement, known simply as 'the Way' (Acts 9:2; 19:23; 24:14), was based in Jerusalem under apostolic leadership. Jerusalem was the first geographic centre of the Christian movement and Judaism was its first religious and cultural home.

The importance of Jerusalem is underscored by what happened when news got back to Jerusalem about this surprising turning to Christ among Gentiles. The apostles in Jerusalem sent Barnabas down to Antioch to investigate this new movement. Later, Paul and Barnabas entered into such a sharp disagreement with some Judaizers who strongly opposed the Gentiles coming to Christ apart from Judaism (circumcision, submission to the Torah and dietary restrictions among other things) that Paul travelled to Jerusalem to make his case before the apostles.

The Jerusalem Council met to debate and to discuss the basis for accepting Gentiles into the church. The group decided, of course, that Gentiles did not need to come to Jesus Christ on Jewish cultural and religious terms. They were not asked to submit to or to keep the many intricacies of the Jewish law, but only to respect a few broad guidelines which would clearly separate the Gentiles from their pagan past, while still affirming that sinners are saved not by keeping the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. The Jewish 'cen-

tre' formally recognized the presence of Christ in these new Gentile brothers and sisters. Since this 'Way' now included Gentiles on their own cultural terms, it could no longer regard itself as a curious subset of Judaism. The faith had successfully traversed its first major cross-cultural transmission.

b) The Fall of the Empire

The turn of the fourth century in the Roman Empire was marked by the most brutal persecution the church had ever experienced. Emperor Diocletian ordered the destruction of church buildings and Bibles, and he imprisoned many Christian leaders. However, all of this changed when his successor Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 313. In the decades which followed, Christianity experienced dramatic expansion among Hellenistic Gentiles until Christianity soon became the 'professed faith of the overwhelming majority of the population of the Roman empire'.² In fact, Christianity became almost coterminous with the empire.

According to Stephen Neill, the estimated number of Christians in the empire on the eve of the Edict of Toleration was approximately five million (10% of the population) and by the time Emperor Justinian officially closed the School of Athens in 529 the number of Christians was closer to 25 million.³

Greek-speaking peoples with a Hellenistic culture and a pagan background were now the best example of *representative* Christianity. Indeed, by the fourth century, Jewish Christians represented only a tiny percentage of the church.

Throughout the fourth century the Roman Empire increasingly showed signs of weakness and disintegration. Tragically, the moral and spiritual climate of nominal Christianity generally mirrored that of the declining empire, as the church, during this period, was either focused on internal doctrinal disputes (as reflected in the ecumenical councils) or Christians had become part of monastic communities which were not interested in revitalizing Roman civilization. The post-Constantinian Christian movement became culturally triumphalistic and spiritually decadent. Looking back, Christianity might have shared the same demise as the empire, symbolized best by the famous sacking of Rome by the Goths in 410.

Remarkably, however, Christianity found new vitality outside the empire, among new people groups westward in Ireland and Scotland and eastward into Arabia, Persia and beyond. St. Patrick arrived in Ireland around A.D. 432, Columba founded his famous monastery in Iona in 563, and Aidan founded Lindisfarne in Northumbria in 635. Many of the invading Germanic peoples were also brought to faith in Jesus Christ.

In a matter of a few decades the church was facing another new cultural shock with the entrance of Visigoths (Spain), Ostrogoths (Italy), Franks (Northern Gaul), Burgundians (Southern Gaul), Vandals (N. Africa), Angles and Saxons (Britain), all enter-

² Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1, 97.

³ Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1, 269; see also Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 39, 41.

ing the church in significant numbers. Centuries later, this pattern would repeat itself. The relatively stable Carolingian empire, which had substantially been Christianized, eventually disintegrated, and a new wave of invasions began with the arrival of the Scandinavians, who were also, in turn, evangelized.

Not only was Christianity continually making cultural gains on one hand while suffering losses on the other hand, but the geographic centre was also shifting. By the end of the second century, Rome, as capital of the empire, was the most important city for Christians. Indeed, even in the structure of the book of Acts, we are already beginning to see the strategic and cultural importance of Rome for Christians. However, in 330 Constantine relocated the capital to Byzantium (modern day Istanbul), which he renamed Constantinople. By the time Rome was sacked in 410, Constantinople was the undisputed geographic centre of the Christian faith. Christianity experienced some remarkable advances in the East during this time, including important progress among the Slavic peoples.

During the ninth and tenth centuries, when Christianity in the West had reached dangerously low levels of faith and practice, Constantinople represented the most vibrant expression of Christianity in the world. In fact, the Russian ruler Vladimir was so moved by what he experienced in Constantinople that he sponsored the propagation of Eastern Christianity throughout Russia. Christianity, it seems, was becoming accustomed to reinvigorating its vitality and inner life through cross cultural transmission to new

people groups and the ability to adapt to new cultural and geographic centres.

c) A Faith for the World

The Protestant Reformation led by Luther (1483-1546), along with the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation led by Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), represent renewal movements which helped to stimulate new vitality among previously Christianized peoples who had become largely nominal. Christianity in the Middle Ages was still confined primarily to Europe, which remained the geographic centre. However, a revitalized European Christianity eventually led to dramatic missionary endeavours which brought the gospel to many new people groups, including most of Latin America and many new people groups of Asia.

Fuelled by missionary activity in the wake of the *Padroado* (1493), the Papal decree which divided the world between Spain and Portugal, initially giving Spain exclusive rights to the New World in the West and Portugal the rights to the East, the Roman Catholic Church in 1622 founded the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*. Its purposes were to assist in training new missionaries, to oversee all Roman Catholic missionary work, and to coordinate major new missionary initiatives in non-Roman catholic regions of the world. Eventually the Protestants, beginning with the Moravians and later through the creation of dozens of new mission-sending societies, followed with their own missionary initiatives. The nineteenth century missionaries would plant the seeds for a future twenty-first century Christian

harvest beyond anything they could have imagined during their lifetimes.

However, quite apart from missionaries committed to sharing their faith across cultural and geographic lines, Europe itself was engaged in the largest ocean-based migration in the history of the world. From 1500 until the middle of the twentieth century, millions of Europeans relocated to the new world, bringing their faith with them and spawning the birth of massive new populations, largely Christian. The gospel, once again, proved that it was culturally and geographically translatable. Soon the English-speaking world, including Britain and North America, became the most important new centre of vibrant Christianity.

d) Living on the Seam of History

The purpose of these brief snapshots is to underscore the fact that the lifeblood of Christianity is found in its ability to translate itself across new cultural and geographic barriers and to recognize that areas which once were the mission field can, over time, become the very heart of Christian vitality, while those areas which were once at the heart can lose the very faith they once espoused. Jerusalem, Antioch, North Africa and Constantinople were all at one time at the centre of Christian vibrancy. Yet all of these places have only a very tiny remnant of Christianity remaining and, with the exception of Jerusalem, are almost completely Islamic.⁴ In contrast,

places like Lagos, Nigeria and Seoul, S. Korea, where the presence of Christianity at one time seemed almost unimaginable, are today vibrant centres of Christian faith.⁵

Augustine witnessed the barbarian invasions, realized their significance, and produced his classic *City of God*. William Carey lived at one of these seams of history and produced his influential *Enquiry*. We now live at another one of these great seams in the history of the world Christian movement and, as I have learned over the past twenty years teaching in two seminaries, one in the US and one in India, God is raising up new voices who will move beyond merely lamenting the emergence of a post-Christian West.

But will we be able to articulate the significance of the remarkable re-discovery of Christianity—the re-discovery of a Christianity which is simultaneously more ancient and more shockingly fresh, a Christianity which is both post-western and trans-western? Christianity is being re-discovered apart from the West, but due to dramatically changing immigration patterns into North America and Europe

⁴ Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (London: Associated University Press, 1996).

⁵ Bill Bowder, 'Worship Numbers Fall Again', *Church Times*, found at <http://churchtimes.co.uk/templates/NewsTemplate_1>, accessed 26 August, 2008. In fact, there are more Anglicans in Nigeria alone than the whole of Europe. Ruth Gledhill, 'Archbishop Thanks Africa for Lessons on Faith', *The Times* (London), 26 July 2003, 20; Charlotte Allen, 'Episcopal Church Plays Russian Roulette on the Gay Issue', *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 2003, M-1; Dianne Knippers, 'The Anglican Mainstream: It's Not Where Americans Might Think', *Weekly Standard*, 25 August 2003.

and the growth of Christianity in so many different parts of the world, even the language of 'Southern Christianity' may yet be inadequate to describe what is happening.

3 The Seismic Shift

The most evident sign that we are living on a 'seam' of some new historical epoch of Christian history is the rise of the 'Majority World' church and the signs of the possible, although once unthinkable, demise of western Christianity. Therefore, this deserves more careful scrutiny. Evidence of this development is seen, for example, when we observe where the majority of Christians are now located around the world.

After its birth in Asia, Christianity had its most vigorous growth as it moved steadily westward and northward. As more and more people in the West embraced Christianity, Europe and, eventually, North America became the heartland of the world Christian movement. However, beginning in 1900, Christianity has experienced dramatic growth in the south and east, away from the traditional locus of where the majority of Christians were located for over a thousand years.

For the first time since the Protestant Reformation the majority of Christians (approximately 67%) are now located outside the western world. Some specific examples of how the church is changing will, perhaps, help to illustrate this shift better. At the turn of the twentieth century the Christian church was predominately white and western. In 1900, there were over 380 million Christians in Europe and

less than ten million on the entire continent of Africa.⁶ Today there are over 367 million Christians in Africa, comprising one fifth of the entire Christian church. Throughout the twentieth century a net average gain of 16,500 people were coming to Christ every day in Africa. From 1970 to 1985, for example, the church in Africa grew by over six million people. During that same time, 4,300 people per day were leaving the church in Europe and North America.⁷

The church is not just moving southward, it is also moving eastward. In South Korea, for example, despite the fact that Christianity was not formally introduced within the country itself until the eighteenth century, it is staggering to realize that today there are over 20 million Christians in South Korea alone. In fact, South Korea is widely regarded as the home of the modern church growth movement, exemplified by the remarkable story of the Yoido Full Gospel Church pastored by Dr. David Cho. Founded in 1958 with only five people in a small living

⁶ The *World Christian Database* notes that there were 380,641,890 Christians in Europe and 9,938,588 Christians in Africa. See <http://worldchristianitydatabase.org/wcd/esweb.asp?WCI=Results&Query=415>, accessed 26 August, 2008.

⁷ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 15. Elizabeth Isichei says that the number leaving the church in the West is 7,500 per day. See Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1. See also Dana Robert, 'Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24 no. 2 (April 2000), 53.

room, the church now claims over 700,000 members, making it easily the largest church in the world.

India has been called the cradle of the world's religions, having given birth to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Yet, today, this land of exotic eastern religions is also the home of over 60 million Christians.⁸ Church planting in India, particularly in the traditionally Hindu north, is taking place at a blistering pace so that many missiologists are predicting that by the year 2050 India will have over 126 million Christians.⁹ However, even Korea and India cannot match the dramatic rise of the church in China. Even as recently as Mao Zedong's (Tse-tung) famous Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) there were only about one million Christians in China. Today, the Chinese church comprises over 90 million believers and is the fastest growing church on the planet.¹⁰

Western scholars and liberal Christians have long predicted the demise of historic Christianity and the rise of the

'secular city'.¹¹ Their solution has been to call the church to abandon faith in the supernatural and the historic confessions of the Christian faith. They have argued that doctrines such as the deity of Christ, the Trinity and the authority of the Bible are no longer credible or believable in the modern world. Therefore, Christianity should conform to the norms of western secularism. However, it seems that rather than saving Christianity, secular, relativistic forces are quickly turning twenty-first century mainline liberal Protestantism into a curious aberration, a mere footnote, in the larger story of the advance of global Christianity.

In contrast, the dramatic rise of Majority World Christianity is to a large extent morally and theologically conservative. These new Christians believe the Bible, are Christ centred, and are supernaturalistic. Philip Jenkins' study of Majority World Christianity found, in contrast to their western counterparts, that they have a 'much greater respect for the authority of scripture', especially the Old Testament and the book of James, and 'a special interest in supernatural elements of scripture, such as miracles, visions, and healings', and they also believe in

⁸ Todd M. Johnson, Sarah Tieszen and Thomas Higgens, 'Counting Christians in India, AD 52-2200', an unpublished research report produced by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, the research center at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary which produces the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. This represents 6.15% of the population of India, far above the official 3% figure given by the government. However, the official figures disenfranchise millions of Christians who are counted as 'tribals' or who are remaining within Hindu communities.

⁹ This is the current projection of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. This will represent 8.94% of the population of India.

¹⁰ Barrett, Kurian and Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 191.

¹¹ See John Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1999), 29-42; Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: MacMillan Press, 1966). But see Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1995), xvi.

the 'continuing power of prophecy'.¹²

As Peter Berger has said, 'To put it simply, experiments with secularized religion have generally failed; religious movements with beliefs and practices dripping with reactionary supernaturalism have widely succeeded'.¹³ The French writer Gilles Kepel has aptly called this dramatic turnaround the 'revenge of God' (*la revanche de Dieu*).¹⁴ As Harvey Cox has noted, 'if God really did die, as Nietzsche's madman proclaimed, then why have so many billions of people not gotten the word?'¹⁵ There is a global Christian revolution happening outside the western world, and most western Christians are only gradually beginning to realize the full implications of this shift.

III Cultural receptions of the Gospel

1 The 'Gospel' and Cultural Embodiments

If the gospel does not exist in a vacuum, but must become manifest in particular contexts, then it raises the question as to how the very word 'gospel' has undergone change in the midst of the emerging new cultural receptions and embodiments. Have

Christians changed their understanding of what the word 'gospel' means and, if so, what is the nature of these transformations?

a) Christendom and post-Christendom

'Christendom' refers to a political and ecclesiastical arrangement which reinforces a partnership between the church and the state. The state strengthens the church by promoting Christian hegemony over religious and cultural life. The church, in turn, gives legitimacy to the state by supporting the ruler and tacitly implying divine sanction on the actions of the state. In the context of Christendom, Christianity receives protection from the civil authorities (eg, the English monarch has the title, 'Defender of the Faith') and receives many privileges because it is the 'established' religion of the realm.

The classic phrase was '*Cuius regio, eius religio*', broadly meaning, the faith of the ruler was the religion of the realm. The ruler was responsible for the spiritual welfare of his or her people; the ruler decides how they will worship, and in his or her dominion uniformity of faith and practice is considered normal. To embrace a different faith was to be a 'dissenter' with all of the explicit and implicit sanctions that term implied. Because of the connection with the state, Christendom often (even unconsciously), regarded the Christian faith in territorial ways. To belong to the 'realm' means, by definition, that you shared the faith of the 'realm'. Particular embodiments of the gospel were, therefore, linked to specific geographic regions and, tragi-

¹² See Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4, 53, 54, 60-62.

¹³ Berger, 'Desecularization of the World', 4.

¹⁴ As quoted in Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, xvii. See Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Kepel, *The Revenge of God*, 103.

cally, became unduly linked with nationalistic identities.

Christendom has existed in both official, explicit ways as well as unofficial, implicit expressions. In certain regions, most notably Europe and Latin America, Christianity was constitutionally granted special status and, therefore, we find Christendom its most explicit expression. In other regions, such as the United States, there is an official separation between church and state. The U.S. Constitution does not sanction a particular version of Christianity, but, nevertheless, it found innumerable ways to extend special status to Christianity over other non-Christian religions. State funerals take place in the National Cathedral, God's name is invoked in public speeches and biblical texts are quoted on public occasions, and so forth. Even in unofficial Christendom, society is frequently committed to a civil religion as a kind of societal consensus which affords Christianity a privileged status within the broader society.

Protestantism originated as a movement within the larger context of European Christianity and, therefore, was born in the context of Christendom. This profoundly influenced the way the word 'gospel' was understood. To be a Christian within a Christendom arrangement is to see Christianity at the centre of all public discourse. Evangelism occurs passively because Christianity is the prevailing plausibility structure.

Christianity is the normative expression of religious faith and ethical action and there are no major dissenting voices or alternative religious worldviews. Therefore, the 'gospel'

does not need to robustly defend itself against, for example, either secular atheism or some alternative religious worldview such as Islam or Hinduism. Islamic or Hindu counter-claims are virtually non-existent in Christendom. The most frequently found encounters which Christendom-type Christianity has with non-Christian faiths are when it has engaged them as a cultural 'other' in military campaigns (such as the Crusades) or in sponsoring a missionary who, often unwittingly, transmitted the gospel and the host culture in a single package.

Today the 'gospel' has to be rediscovered in the West apart from Christendom. We can learn much from many of our Majority World brothers and sisters who have learned over many centuries how to live out their faith as a minority faith or, often, in the context where there is a state sponsored religion other than Christianity.

Many countries with a predominately Islamic population have their own version of 'Christendom'. However, rather than calling it something like 'Islamicdom', it is often best observed by the presence of Islamic Sharia as the governing arrangement and which, effectively, merges 'mosque and state'. Even in a place like India which is governed by a secular constitution, Hinduism consistently receives special recognition and protection. Similar examples could be given with countries like Bhutan, Nepal or Thailand.

What are the implications of this for how the 'gospel' is understood? Several examples can be given.

First, the gospel must be invested with a renewed capacity to critique culture, not just accommodate it. Only

when the gospel is freed from the chains of Christendom can it provide the necessary critique of the state and the prevailing culture which is required when the kingdoms of this world clash with the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Second, the gospel must become more robust in responding to very specific challenges which hitherto went unnoticed. In a Christendom context, the challenges of unbelief or from other religions are distant and remote. Therefore, the gospel gradually becomes domesticated and weakened. Today we are witnessing the rise of many new challenges all around us: post-modern relativistic secularism, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the seeping pluralism of Hinduism, to name a few. These challenges will inevitably force faithful Christians to become far more articulate about what constitutes genuine Christian identity.

Third, evangelism has to become more intentional and one cannot assume that any of the dominant Christian paradigms of the last century are widely understood. Even basic religious categories like 'God' or 'sin' or 'faith' which once sat very comfortably within the security of a mono-religious discourse must now be explained and clarified.

Tertullian famously once asked, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem... what has the academy to do with the church?'¹⁶ Tertullian envisioned a culture with the revelation of God's word at the centre. Divine self-disclosure is seen to trump all other

knowledge and discourse. In this sense 'Jerusalem' represents a society framed by revelation and, therefore, theological and cultural stability. 'Jerusalem' represents a congregation of the faithful gathered to hear God's word, the centrality of the pulpit, and the one-way pronouncements which are issued 'six feet above contradiction'. In contrast, 'Athens' represents dialogue and speculation. 'Athens' is the place of religious pluralism and dialogic speculation.

Today, we must recognize that we are no longer proclaiming the gospel from the 'Temple Mount' of our 'Jerusalem'. Instead, we are seeking to persuade the gospel into people's lives in the midst of the raucous, pluralistic, experimental, sceptical environment of the 'Mars Hill of their "Athens"'. There are competing deities and revelations which clamour for attention. The gospel which we proclaim is largely 'unknown' and our witness may need to find collaborative help from general revelation to gain a hearing for the gospel.

b) Modernity and post-modernity

The second cultural embodiment which must be examined is how the 'gospel' is understood in the context of modernity and post-modernity. Peter Kuzmic, the internationally renowned leader from Eastern Europe, and plenary speaker for Lausanne II in Manila, once commented that the most defining word of our time is the word 'post'. We live in a *post*-communist, *post*-Christendom, *post*-denominational, *post*-western, *post*-Enlightenment and *post*-modern world.

16 Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 7.9.

One of the earliest writers to recognize the collapse of modernity and the movement towards a post-Enlightenment world was the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in his 1979 article entitled, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.¹⁷ In the article, he coined the word 'post-modern' in the way that it is used in today's discourse. He stated that the fundamental shift of our time as western civilization is a growing crisis of truth.¹⁸ In the modern world there was a belief in an overarching truth—whether informed by a Christian world-view or even a secular belief in progress and the perfectibility of humanity. Lyotard argued that modern societies produced order and stability by generating what he called 'grand narratives' or 'master narratives'. These grand narratives provide a clear sense of 'telos' of destiny. Intellectual reflection was the embarking on a journey with a clear destination—the pursuit of truth.

In contrast, the *post-modern* context is marked by a collapse of all grand narratives. Post-modernism marks the movement away from claims to objectivity and a greater emphasis on fragmented forms and discontinuous narratives. In short, the very notion of truth as Truth has begun to collapse. There is no longer a cohesive 'canopy of truth' or meta-narrative

which gives meaning and purpose to our civilization. We are left only with our personal narratives. The only 'truth' which remains is what is true 'for me' with little courage or confidence remaining to state anything with certainty which is true for everyone or speaks about objective truth. To use the language of Lesslie Newbigin, in post-modernism there are no more 'public facts', all we have left are 'personal preferences'.¹⁹

Looking back from this perspective, it is easy to see how the evangelical understanding of the gospel has been influenced by Enlightenment thinking. On the positive side, the gospel benefited from the notion of a meta-narrative and the idea of a final, all encompassing 'telos' to which all of human history was moving. The Christian meta-narrative and final goal of history may have been different from that of the Enlightenment, but, at least the paradigm was there to build on. On the negative side, the over emphasis on reason sometimes produced hyper-rational expressions of Christianity. Furthermore, the deeply imbedded notions of human progress often caused evangelicals not to take sin seriously enough and to render the 'gospel' as nothing more than the greatest 'self-help' plan.

How is post-modernism influencing the evangelical understanding of the gospel? What implications does this have for Christian mission?

It is clear that post-modernism

¹⁷ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

¹⁸ For a brilliant analysis of this trend and the implications of it for the contemporary church, see David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) and *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁹ This is one of the central arguments in Lesslie Newbigin's *Foolishness to the Greeks*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

poses a number of serious challenges to the gospel. First, post-modernism erodes the very concept of objective truth rooted in God's self-revelation. Therefore, the authority of the Bible, the trustworthiness of expository preaching and the call to repentance, to name just a few, all suffer. Second, post-modernism's emphasis on personal narrative separate from any overarching meta-narrative has further pushed the church towards a privatized understanding of the gospel. Under the sway of post-modernism, the gospel loses its historical, missional and cosmic dimensions and through a radical kind of reductionism becomes merely a prescription for obtaining personal peace.

Third, post-modernism's emphasis on the autonomy of personal choices has further pushed the church towards a full acceptance of marketing strategies for attracting new believers, business models for long-term planning and strategy and a general entertainment orientation because in this new world the 'consumer is king'. Once the gospel must be made 'fun', then there is little room for the prophetic imagination, the cost of discipleship, and the call to repentance.

In response, the church must regain confidence in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need a fresh understanding of the rule and reign of God as the great eschatological fact to which all history is moving. The wonderful thing about the biblical vision of the *eschaton* is that it simultaneously trumps the modernist notions of human progress as well as the post-modern malaise about any ultimate meaning at all. We need a renewed call to repentance, a *metanoia* about what it

means to be the people of God called to mission.

Finally, and this is one of the great contributions of the Lausanne movement, we need to discover deeper ecumenism which looks beyond our own institutional aggrandizement and to discover that overarching evangelical unity which can move the church forward in the face of the challenges of our day.

c) One centre and multiple centres of universality

We are now observing something unique in Christian history, the emergence of what John Mbiti has called *multiple* new 'centres of universality'.²⁰ This means that for the first time in history, the gospel is simultaneously emerging with strength in multiple different cultural centres. It is not as if the gospel is emerging with vitality only in sub-Saharan Africa. It is also emerging with renewed vitality in Korea, China, India and even Latin America. We now have *multiple* centres of universality.

For the first time, this means that the gospel can no longer be identified primarily with one cultural centre. This will inevitably enhance the universality of the gospel and it will also simultaneously enhance the need for greater cultural sensitivity, global partnerships and cooperation, all things which are the hallmarks of the Lausanne movement. The day has finally arrived when we can say that the church of Jesus Christ on every continent is both

²⁰ As quoted in Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 157.

sending missionaries and receiving missionaries. This new reality has been captured well by Samuel Escobar in his book, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*.²¹ The phrase, 'from everywhere to everyone' precisely describes the new situation we are in.

The other major development is that the demographics are transforming even the former heartlands of Christianity. Immigration patterns are slowly transforming the face of Christianity even in North America and Europe. The fastest growing Christian groups in North America and Europe are the non-white, non-European peoples. African, Chinese, Korean, Indian and Hispanic churches, to name a few, are springing up all across America in unprecedented numbers.

What are the implications of this for the 'gospel'? First of all, the gospel must be re-discovered as a post-western faith. The gospel has been overly identified with the West for so long that we cannot even imagine all the ways the gospel has been unwittingly domesticated by its long sojourn with western culture. The church all over the globe, (even in the so-called post-Christian West), must re-discover the gospel as a post-western faith.

Second, even though the *geographic* centre of global Christianity has moved, this has not dramatically changed the fact that in terms of theological training, finances, book publications, to name a few, the West continues to play a central and vital role.

²¹ Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Nevertheless, it is very unusual that the very place which boasts the strongest educational centres for theological education (namely, Western Europe and N. America) is also the very centre where Christianity is declining the fastest. This is another new situation the church is facing.

All of this has profound implications for missions in the twenty-first century. We are in danger of becoming what John Mbiti calls 'kerygmatically universal' while remaining 'theologically provincial'.²² In other words, the global centres of the church's vibrant proclamation are becoming increasingly diverse, whereas theological reflection continues to be dominated by western scholarship. Mbiti's point was that even though 'the centres of the Church's universality are no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London or New York' but are now in 'Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila', there has not been the corresponding shift towards 'mutuality and reciprocity in the theological task facing the universal church'.²³

This means that the church in the West must re-think our missionary role beyond first generation gospel work of evangelism and church planting and also think about our role in helping to stimulate theological training institutions and encouraging indigenous theological writing, and so forth. The

²² John S. Mbiti, 'Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church', in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, eds., *Mission Trends No. 3: Third World Theologies* (New York: Paulist Press, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 6.

²³ Mbiti, 'Theological Impotence', 9, 10; Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 154.

West itself will be increasingly in need of first generation gospel work and the Majority World will increasingly need second and third generation gospel work.

Finally, we must learn to re-think how the gospel is transmitted to new people-groups. This is another unique feature in the history of Christian expansion. There are very few examples in Christian history where a people group with less power and economic strength have brought the gospel to a people group with greater power and greater economic strength. Throughout Christian history, the gospel has almost uniformly been shared by people with greater economic and political power to those with less power and resources. To this day, the very word 'missions' in the minds of many people is synonymous with economic assistance and various ministry of mercy.

However, today, the emerging dominant paradigm is that people groups from under developed countries are likely to produce the greatest number of cross-cultural missionaries. This means that the traditional ways in which missions has been supported will no longer be viable. It will probably mean a dramatic rise in self-supporting and/or bi-vocational missionaries from around the world, closer to the eighteenth century Moravian model than the twentieth century faith missions model.

IV Conclusion

This essay has provided a broad historical framework for helping us to understand the nature of our time. It is clear that the church is undergoing

another major 'advance and recession' motif and we are caught in the middle (or on the seam) between a 'western recession' and a 'non-western advance'. Living during the transition between two major historical epochs is always fraught with a sense of disequilibrium and special challenges. The Lausanne movement is uniquely poised to reflect on these changes and to serve as a bridge between important conversations going on by Christians all over the world.

This essay has also sought to understand how these historical changes are influencing how Christians, particularly evangelicals, have understood the gospel. We have seen that the gospel is, to use the language of Andrew Walls, both the 'prisoner' and the 'liberator' of culture. On the one hand, the gospel's transformative work transcends any cultural particularities. On the other hand, it is clear that the gospel message has often been domesticated because of its long sojourn within a particular cultural context. This essay highlighted three major shifts in how the word 'gospel' is now being understood in a post-Christendom, post-modern, multi-cantered Christian movement.

Because we are living in such an important 'seam' of history, there is wisdom in calling for a period of readjustment and re-assessment. In 1972 the World Council of Churches called for a moratorium on missions. This inadvertently set forces in motion which caused a dramatic decline in missionary commitment around the world. I am not calling for a moratorium, but rather what I prefer to call a 'missions *selah*'. The word *selah* occurs throughout the Psalms. The precise

meaning of the word *selah* is unknown. However, most believe that it signifies some kind of musical pause or interlude. This is precisely what I have in mind.

Western Christians have been accustomed to playing the melody. We directed the orchestra, we decided what pieces would be played and where, and the players were mostly from the West. Now, the orchestra is far more diverse and we are being asked to play 'harmony' not 'melody'. This requires a temporary interlude; a

time to pause and re-assess; a time to think about what we are doing in fresh ways.

As a globally representative movement, Lausanne is uniquely poised to help during this transitional interlude. I am convinced that if we are attentive to the refreshing winds of the Holy Spirit during this tumultuous and yet thrilling time, we will have a missiological re-birth where in partnership with the global church, we will see a remarkable rebirth of the church's life and faith like we have not known.

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Case Study

How will we know when the Holy Spirit comes?

The question of discernment

Kirsteen Kim

KEYWORDS: *mission, context, power, ethics, liberation*

When the Apostle Paul stood in front of the Areopagus, he began by connecting with the spirituality of the ancient Athenians, affirming their search for God and the spiritual awareness of their poets. Paul attempted to use the Athenians' spiritual language to tell about the Creator God and about Jesus and his resurrection. At the same time he discerned a spirit of idolatry which prevented repentance and practical obedience to the Holy Spirit of God (Acts 17:16-34).

Trying to bridge the spiritualities of the Jewish and Greek worlds in this way, Paul faced misunderstanding and had limited immediate success in terms of new Christians—but from our standpoint two thousand years later, we can see this is a Christian city and we know how the use of Greek thought and language has contributed to the formation of Christian theology, partic-

ularly to our understanding of God the Holy Spirit. So I consider it doubly appropriate that here at our conference in Athens we pray, 'Come, Holy Spirit!'

My research into the Holy Spirit and mission¹ arises from my personal experience of different spiritual contexts: in Britain, where I grew up; in South Korea, my husband's home country; in the United States where we studied; and in India, where we taught for four years in a seminary. I found that, in each country—and even in different Christian denominations—the spiritual milieu and the cultural meaning of the word 'spirit' is different, and this gives a different nuance to the biblical testimony to the Holy Spirit. I also came to believe that, in many cases, we may better communicate the good

¹ Kirsteen Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003); *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY / London: SPCK, 2007).

Kirsteen Kim (PhD, Birmingham) has lived and worked in Korea and in India, where she taught mission studies at Union Biblical Seminary, Pune. Dr Kim is an Honorary Lecturer in the University of Birmingham, and the author of *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Orbis/SPCK) This is a slightly revised version of a presentation to the conference on world mission and evangelism of the World Council of Churches held in Athens on 9-16 May 2005.

news of Jesus Christ by beginning with the language of the Spirit.

The Father sends the Spirit into the world and, as followers of Christ, we are privileged to participate in that mission (Rom. 8:14-17). In this case, the first act of mission is discernment.² To join with the Spirit in mission, we need to ask how the Spirit comes and how we recognise the Spirit.

In the Bible there are three main events in which the Spirit comes. At Pentecost the Spirit gives birth to the church (Acts 2:41-42) and Christian mission (1:8). But this is possible only because of a prior event: Jesus Christ our Saviour was conceived in the Spirit (Lu. 1:35) and the Spirit of God shone and shines forth from him³ (2 Cor. 4:6;) so that Christians refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus or the Spirit of Christ (Jn. 7:39).⁴ Nevertheless, the Spirit was also known in a much earlier event, long before even the coming of Jesus Christ, as the agent of creation and author of life (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; cf. 6:17), who continues to be creatively present and active everywhere in the world (Ps. 104:30; Job 33:4).

These three ways in which the Spirit came—and comes—are inter-related because the new community begun at Pentecost is significant for the future

of the whole creation (Rom. 8:19-23). Due to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the church is given the Spirit as a foretaste of the liberation and new life which God desires for all (2 Cor. 1.22; 5.5; Eph. 1.13-14; Rom. 8.23). However, the Spirit of God is not the possession of any community but as wind moves in the whole creation (Jn. 3:8; Ps. 139:7) and as living water is freely given (Jn. 7:37-38).⁵

People look for the Spirit in different places—above, below, outside, within, beyond, among—and have different criteria for spiritual discernment according to their faith or conviction. For the Christian, by definition, discerning the Spirit will relate to Jesus Christ. However, no group can prove its spiritual vision before the end so, in the meantime, if we are to live together in our common home—the earth, we need to share our resources for discernment. The Indian theologian of dialogue, Stanley Samartha, once wrote that the claim that the Spirit is with us is not ours to make; it is for our neighbours to recognise⁶ (cf. 1 Cor. 14:20-25).

Discernment is a matter for ecumenical debate as well as individual conscience. It requires wide horizons—in view of the breadth of the Spirit's mission, openness—because of the unpredictability of the Spirit's

² James D.G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays* Vol. 2: Pneumatology (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 72.

³ Stephen B. Bevans, 'God Inside Out: Toward a Missionary Theology of the Holy Spirit', *IBMR* 1998: 22/3 (July), 102-105; 'Jesus, Face of the Spirit: Reply to Dale Bruner', *IBMR* 22/3 (July), 108-109.

⁴ Samuel Rayan, *Come, Holy Spirit* (Delhi: Media House, 1998; originally published 1978), 37.

⁵ I am indebted to the work of Vandana for her stimulating reflections on water as a symbol of the Spirit in John's Gospel: Sister Vandana, *Waters of Fire* 3rd edn (Bangalore: ATC; New York: Amity House, 1988; first published, Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1981).

⁶ S.J. Samartha, 'Milk and Honey—Without the Lord?', (*Indian*) *National Council of Churches Review* 101/12 (Dec 1981), 670.

movements, and humility—since the Spirit is the Spirit of Almighty God. Many questions of discernment are not around criteria but about power: about who has the authority to discern the Spirit for others. We are not obliged to accept someone else's identification of what is good or spiritual, however strong their tradition, however weighty their theology, or however much power they wield, if their exercise of that authority is incompatible with the Spirit of Christ (Mk. 3:29; Mt. 12:31-32).

I find four biblical criteria for discernment, though none alone is proof of the Spirit's presence. The first is ecclesial: the confession of Jesus as Lord, which is made possible by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Jn. 4:2). We hope and expect to find the Spirit in the Christian community, where Jesus Christ is proclaimed and worshipped. However, it is the Spirit that defines the church not the other way round. Calling 'Lord, Lord' is not necessarily a guarantee of a spirit of obedience (Mt. 7:21-22).

The second criterion is ethical: the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, and so on (Gal. 5:22). The Spirit changes our lives, producing Christ-likeness. But good works alone are not a sign of the life of the Spirit—they may be the result of unregenerate legalism (Rom. 7:6)—the whole character is important.⁷

⁷ These first two criteria were recognised in the reports of the Canberra Assembly of the WCC in 1991, 'Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation' (see Michael Kinnamon (ed.), *Signs of the Spirit*. Official Report of the Seventh Assembly of the WCC, Canberra, 1991 (Geneva: WCC, 1991), 256.

The third criterion is charismatic: the practice of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11).⁸ Where there is empowerment to prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, compassion (Rom. 12:6-8), we have good reason to believe God is at work (by the Spirit). However, exercise of a spiritual gift is not a sign of the Spirit's presence if it lacks love (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

The final criterion is liberational: being on the side of the poor.⁹ The effect of the Spirit's anointing on Jesus Christ was that he announced good news to the poor (Lu. 4:18), and this must be a touchstone for all spiritual claims.

When discerning the Spirit in any activity, we need to ask whose interests are being served; who is benefiting from this? But the criterion of liberation also needs to be qualified. The liberation struggle must be waged in a way that is loving to our enemies (Mt. 5:43-48), and does not aim to crush them, but to live in peace with them¹⁰ (Rom. 12:18).

'Discernment of spirits' is listed as a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:10). The use of the plural 'spirits' here raises a question: Are we seeking to

⁸ This suggestion from the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has been made by Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*. JPT Supplement Series 20 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

⁹ This is suggested by the work of liberation theologian Samuel Rayan, *Come, Holy Spirit*, 132.

¹⁰ Donal Dorr, *Mission in Today's World* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: The Columba Press, 2000), 128.

discern one Spirit or to distinguish between many different spirits? In large measure my research suggests that this depends on world view or cosmology. Whether we talk about spirit (singular) or spirits (plural) may also indicate the difference between a philosophical approach and popular religion. Furthermore, the language of 'spirits' may be used with widely differing reference. However, it may be useful to think that, in the course of mission, we encounter many diverse spirits and powers in the world, whether we regard these as supernatural entities or natural forces, or simply use this language as a metaphor for socio-economic powers.

We need the Holy Spirit to discern these spirits.¹¹ We need the Spirit of wisdom to distinguish good from evil, and to know with whom to work and what to fight against. We can have confidence that, however powerful and threatening they may be, all 'thrones', 'dominions', 'rulers', and 'powers' are only creatures of God and, at the end, will be reconciled in Christ (Col. 1:15-20). On the other hand, it may be that those who are not against us are for us (Mk. 9:40). At the very least, we may need to give them the benefit of the doubt, and perhaps even cooperate with them for specific purposes. In showing hospitality to strangers, we may be entertaining angels without

knowing it (Heb. 1:14; 13:2). There are good as well as bad forces at work. A mission theology of the Holy Spirit should allow us to appreciate creativity and love wherever it is found and affirm whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable (Philp. 4:8).

The focus for the conference in Athens was on the Spirit's role as healer and reconciler. Both these ministries encourage a comprehensive understanding of the Holy Spirit. For many 'spiritual' has to do with meditation, contemplation, and other religious practices and techniques. For others, the Spirit primarily drives action for social transformation and development. In Christian healing, we learn to hold both these aspects of the Spirit's work—presence and activity—together. Moreover, in reconciliation work, we balance truth-telling with listening, justice with peace because the Spirit is the Spirit of truth (Jn. 16:12-13) and also the Spirit of love (Rom 5:5). In practice, healing and reconciliation each link the creative and redemptive roles of the Spirit together¹² as we see God at work by the Spirit to bring well-being and joy in our hearts, in the church, and in the world (Acts 14:17).

So, together in the Spirit and discerning the spirits by the criterion of Jesus Christ, we look for the coming of the Spirit that we may catch onto—and be caught by—the Spirit's movement in the world, which is God's mission.

11 Justin S. Ukpong 'Pluralism and the Problem of the Discernment of Spirits' in Emilio Castro (comp.), *To the Wind of God's Spirit: Reflections on the Canberra Theme* (Geneva: WCC, 1991), 81.

12 John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 25-41.

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