

CONTENTS

THEME: The King James Bible

Editorial: The King James Bible
page 291

The King James Bible: A Reflection on 400 Years of its History
BRIAN TALBOT
page 292

C.H. Spurgeon and Suffering
PETER J. MORDEN
page 306

The Gospels and Cultural Adaptation in Mission
FRANK KOPPELIN AND THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER
page 326

Leaders from Disciples: The Church's Contribution to
Leadership Development
RUSSELL L. HUIZING
page 333

Afro-Christian Expression of Sex and Sex Organs: A Critical
Moral Challenge to Contemporary African Christianity
BENSON OHIHON IGBOIN
page 345

Salvation, Pseudo-modernism, Suffering and Hope: A Study
of I Kings 17
JOHN LEWIS
page 360

Review Articles *page 365*

Reviews *page 376*

Index *page 381*

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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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Editorial: The King James Bible

WE DEDICATE THIS issue to the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible which has been such a dominant and beneficial factor in the history of a large part of Christianity, as well as the English language itself. So we open with an interesting account by Brian Talbot (Scotland) of the popularity of this Bible with particular attention to the more conservative and evangelical sector of Protestantism.

Our second article takes up the experiences of one of the 19th century's most famous preachers, C. H. Spurgeon, who was one of the greatest users of the King James Bible. Peter Morden (Spurgeon's College, London) presents valuable insights on Spurgeon's attitude toward suffering, and shows how he coped with his own difficulties and, through his preaching and pastoral care, with those of his people.

We then turn to a short article by Frank Koppelin and our General Editor, Thomas Schirrmacher (Germany), to show how the gospels reveal clear signs that they were shaped to promote the mission of the church and were contextualized for the culture. This emphasizes the importance of pursuing this critical task wherever the gospel is spread and churches are planted. Still on the Gospels, Russell L. Huizing (USA) calls upon his knowledge of leadership and management to discuss the way these narratives show that discipleship represents an imitation of the life of Jesus and an incarnation of his Spirit.

In a different context entirely, Benson Ohion Igboin (Nigeria) tackles an

important but little discussed topic to argue for the application of the biblical authority in relation to a practical everyday matter. In a comprehensive survey of some lesser known areas of the Bible, he points out that in Scripture (as well as in his own culture), there is a reverence for sex and human sex organs which has been drastically lost in popular speech. This is a critical moral challenge for contemporary African Christianity which needs urgent attention.

We end this issue with a short Bible study by John Lewis (Australia) on the story of Elijah (I Kings 17) which addresses 'the pseudo-modernistic world of anxious banality and shallow text messages'. Lewis says that the world has moved into a new 'post-post-modernistic' era dominated by new paradigms forged by technologies and powerful social forces. Elijah's experience will help us to move into a 'dialogue of response and participation in the divine imperative'.

This issue also features some review articles on important books which require extended treatment. We also review the publication from our own task force on Jewish evangelism which met in 2009. Finally we note with sadness the death of the renowned evangelical leader, John Stott, on 27 July 2011 at 90 years of age. This issue carries a review of his biography and we, with so many others, give thanks for his life and ministry.

Thomas Schirrmacher, General Editor
David Parker, Executive Editor

The King James Bible: A Reflection on 400 Years of its History

Brian Talbot

KEYWORDS: *Puritans, Geneva Bible, Bishop's Bible, Revised Version, translation, nationalism, revision*

AS A YOUNG PERSON growing up in a rural, culturally conservative Baptist church in the North of England, in the 1970s, it was clear that the King James Version (KJV) was the predominant Bible version in use in the churches which I may have attended at that time. Other versions were around and used in Christian homes, yet in those various Free churches of different traditions the vast majority of ministers and lay-preachers would have conducted Sunday worship services with and preached from the Authorised Version.

There had been in the theologically broader church scene a warmer welcome for various new versions during the previous century, for example, for the Revised Version (1885); the American Standard Version (1901) and the Revised Standard Version (1946).

However, it was the arrival of the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible in 1978 that finally led to the decline in the usage of the most famous Bible version produced in the English language. Yet 400 years later, in 2011, the King James Version is still the second-best selling English language Bible behind the NIV.¹

I Commissioning

The King James Version was commissioned in 1604 at the Hampton Court Conference, a gathering called by the new monarch of the United Kingdom with a view to easing tensions that had existed in the Elizabethan Church of England. The new king, James I of England and James VI of Scotland, accepted a proposal for the commis-

¹ Information gained from the Christian Booksellers Association website, www.edstetzer.com/2011/02/bibletranslations.html, accessed on 19 April 2011.

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sioning of a new Bible translation put to him by the leading Puritan scholar at the conference, Dr John Reynolds (1549-1607), President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford.²

Why did Reynolds call for a new Bible translation when the Geneva Bible was so popular amongst devout Protestant Christians? It is likely that he wished to see a replacement for the version that was most common in parish churches in England, the Bishops' Bible. Archbishop Matthew Parker (1504-75) had asked the previous monarch, Elizabeth I, to authorise this Bible alone for reading in church since 'in certain places be publically used some translations which have not been laboured in your Realm, having interspersed divers prejudicial notes'. He wanted 'to draw to one uniformity'. This version was not a work of particularly high merit, though this was unlikely to have been the reason why the Queen declined his request, but its significance in this context is that James required it to serve as the basis of the 1611 revision of the English Bible.³

2 William Barlow, 'The Summe and Substance of the Conference Which It Pleaseth His Excellent Majestie to have with the Lords, Bishops and Other of His Clergie at Hampton Court, 14 January 1603' [1604]. See also 'To the Reader', the Preface to the first edition of 1611, *The Holy Bible 1611 Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), vii. Details of the exchange are given in D. Daniell, *The Bible in English* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 432-436.

3 S.L. Greenslade (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible in The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 159-161.

Parker, together with Edmund Grindal (1519-83), Bishop of London, made a concerted effort to restrict the supply of Geneva Bibles in order to encourage usage of the Bishops' Bible. However, 'his [Parker's] lack of confidence [in it] sealed the fate of the Bishops' Bible'.⁴ It is probable therefore, that Reynolds wanted a version of the Bible that would gain general acceptance throughout the land, something that did not happen with the previous Bishops' Bible. It would have greatly surprised him how long it would take before the King James Version became accepted as the 'Authorised Version' in the United Kingdom.

The Geneva Bible was the most popular English language version in the years leading up to 1611. Between 1560 and 1611 there were sixty-four separate editions of the Geneva Bible or New Testament produced.⁵ By way of contrast with the Bishops' Bible, between 1583 and 1603 only seven editions of the Bishops' Bible were produced compared to fifty-one of the Geneva edition.⁶ The fundamental motivation for the production of the Geneva Bible was to make the Bible accessible and intelligible to a lay readership. In addition, it contained marginal notes that proved both immensely popular and helpful to its Protestant readership during the great religious controversies of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. It is generally

4 A.W. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible* (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), 40.

5 Daniell, *Bible in English*, 369.

6 A. McGrath, *In The Beginning. The Story of the King James Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 128-129.

agreed that this Bible version was the best English language version of that day.⁷ As a result, when the King James Bible appeared in print sometime between March 1611 and February 1612 very few British Christians would have been aware of its arrival.

The launch of the new Bible version took place without any fanfare. In fact, even the Stationer's Company that printed it did not record the actual date of first publication. For them it was simply a revision of the Bishops' Bible, the Anglican church's official Bible.⁸ The earliest description of this version was given in February 1612 where it was described as: 'a great Bible of the new translation'.⁹ The origins of this translation (KJV) of the Scriptures were, therefore, much more humble than would have been expected by its later devotees.

II Dominance

In the light of its low-key launch it is no surprise that this Bible version struggled to claim support from the vast majority of Protestant churchgoers in the United Kingdom. In fact, the very first time it was included in a formal list of English-language Bible versions was as late as 1645, where it was referred to as 'the last translation pro-

cured by King James' or 'the new translation', and uniquely, 'the reformed and revised edition of the Bible'.¹⁰ Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century the Geneva Bible was the version of choice not only of the Puritans in England, but also their counterparts in America and on the European mainland.

The spiritual ancestors of those Christians who in a later era would refer to themselves as Evangelicals, would almost unanimously have chosen the Geneva Bible as their preferred English-language translation. This version became enormously popular, with more than seventy editions published between 1560 and 1640. In England alone more than half a million copies of the Geneva Bible were sold. It was crucial for its availability that it was printed in the country between 1576 and 1640. The Geneva Bible was also the first English-language Bible published in Scotland, in 1579. However, although the Bible was in English, the dedication of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was in the Scots language.¹¹ Thus this was the Bible of choice of the most evangelical Protestants. No wonder the KJV struggled to make an impact in such an unsympathetic spiritual environment.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, appointed King Edward VII Professorship of English Literature at Cambridge in 1912,

⁷ For example, McGrath, *In The Beginning*, 118-119; Greenslade, *History of the Bible*, 159; D. Wilson, *The People's Bible* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010), 68; F.F. Bruce, *The English Bible* (London: Methuen, 1963), 90-92.

⁸ D. Norton, *The King James Bible A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 133.

⁹ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 66.

¹⁰ Preface, possibly by Downname, to *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament*, fols. B3^r-B4^r cited by Norton, *King James Bible*, 134.

¹¹ G. Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26-27.

made the following comments there about the KJV in a lecture during the First World War. He asked his audience to assent with him 'that the Authorized Version of the Holy Bible is, as a literary achievement, one of the greatest in our language; nay with the possible exception of the complete works of Shakespeare, the very greatest'. He was confident of agreement—'you will certainly not deny this' for he was enunciating a generally held belief.¹² Yet a representative eighteenth century scholar, Matthew Pilkington, an Anglican clergyman who had risen to be prebendary of Lichfield, made plain his distaste for the KJV, as late as 1759, when he drew attention to 'the uncouth and obsolete words and expressions' it contained.¹³

However, there were additional reasons for the unattractiveness of this new Bible, in comparison with the much loved Geneva version. William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633-1645, was a militant Arminian who loathed the Calvinistic theology of the study notes of the Geneva Bible. Laud drew attention to the primary reasons, he believed, which were behind the popularity of this version that was imported from the printing presses of Amsterdam. He wrote: 'For the books which came thence were better print, better bound, better paper, and for all the charges of bringing, sold

better cheap. And would any man buy a worse Bible dearer, that might have a better more cheap?'¹⁴ Laud, for these reasons, banned the printing of the Geneva Bible in England by the King's Printer, Robert Barker; he had a monopoly on Bible production and had invested substantially in the KJV and needed it to become a commercial success. Without the legal restrictions imposed on the printing and importation of the Geneva Bible, it is likely that the KJV would have had very little commercial success.

However, there were two other reasons for the promotion of the KJV at the expense of the more popular version. The first of these related to the proclamation of 1541 specifying a need for Bibles 'of the largest and greatest volume' for use in parish churches.¹⁵ There were only three Bibles printed successively with the required specifications, the Great Bible, the Bishop's Bible and the KJV. Between 1612 and 1641 only the KJV was available to meet this requirement. It was referred to as 'a Bible of the latest edition', 'the last translation', or 'a Bible of the largest volume'. It is interesting that in

¹² Sir A. Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Reading* (Cambridge; Cambridge university Press, 1920), 155; quoted by D. Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 89.

¹³ M. Pilkington, *Remarks upon Several Passages of Scripture* (1759), 114; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 230.

¹⁴ W. Laud, *Works*, Vol. IV, 263; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 91. Puritan and London bookseller, Michael Sparke, who imported Bibles from Continental Europe, in defiance of the Government restrictions on this trade, strongly opposed the practice of printing monopolies and from the opposite theological point of view to Laud mentioned the same reasons as the Archbishop for the popularity of the Geneva Bible (*Scintilla*, 1641; reprinted in A.S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525-1961* (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968), 183-187).

¹⁵ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 23.

the first half of the seventeenth century people were having some difficulty distinguishing between the KJV and the Geneva Bible in terms of the translation of the text, but by contrast found it relatively easy to distinguish the KJV as an artifact.¹⁶

The second of these was the continuing objection by the Royalists to the study notes and theological comments on the text of the Geneva Bible. William Laud, after making reference to James I's criticism of the notes, stated that this issue was just as pressing in the 1640s. He observed 'that now of late these notes were more commonly used to ill purposes than formerly and that that was the cause why the High Commission was more careful and strict against them than before'.¹⁷ In the light of the execution of Charles I a few years later in 1649, the political concerns of Laud and his colleagues appeared to be well grounded. However, William Prynne, a Puritan with more evangelical and Low Church sympathies, while accepting that the annotations were a cause of conflict, suggested that the real issue was a fear on the part of Laud and his supporters that these comments on the biblical text 'should over-much instruct the people in the knowledge of the Scriptures'.¹⁸

By the mid-seventeenth century there had been no significant debate over the alleged superiority or inferior-

ity of the KJV as a Bible translation. Differences of opinion concerned the study notes accompanying the biblical text of the Geneva Bible. The more fervent and Bible-centred Protestant Christians retained their affection for the older version at home, but it was the KJV that regular worshippers heard read, Sunday by Sunday, in the local parish church. This version was now accepted and respected, and crucially, after three decades of usage, was one with which British Christians were increasingly familiar.

III Consolidation

The KJV consolidated its position as the predominant Bible version both in the home and the church in the second half of the seventeenth century. This process took place as a result of two events. The first was the lack of availability of Geneva Bibles. After 1644 this version was neither printed in the United Kingdom nor imported from the Netherlands.¹⁹ The second and equally important fact was the absence of requests for its recall, even after the departure of Laud and the execution of Charles I in 1649, together with the establishment of the Commonwealth in the early 1650s. It is significant that the eight editions of the Bible with the Geneva notes, printed between 1642 and 1715, all contained the KJV text.²⁰

In this era, more than half a century

16 Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 92.

17 Laud, *Works*, Vol IV, 262; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 92.

18 W. Prynne, *Canterbury's Doom* (London, 1646), 181; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 92.

19 Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version*, 125.

20 H. Hamlin, 'Bunyan's biblical progress', in H. Hamlin & N.W. Jones (eds), *The King James Bible after 400 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 214.

after the KJV had first appeared, the public perception of its main rival had changed in England. No longer was the Geneva Bible automatically the people's version, it was now seen more as one associated with the Puritans and with an anti-Royalist agenda.²¹ In the seventeenth century although they were very familiar with the Geneva Bible and used it extensively, even radicals associated with the Dissenting tradition and Oliver Cromwell's regime had adopted the KJV as their primary Bible version. Two examples will illustrate this point.

John Milton (1608-1674), the great scholar and writer of such well-known works as *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, vehemently opposed the established church and supported the execution of Charles I, yet his personal Bible was a 1612 edition of the KJV printed by Robert Barker. It is this version of the Bible that predominates in biblical citations in his literary endeavours.²² John Bunyan (1628-1688) was brought up in very humble circumstances, yet this Baptist preacher became the author of numerous works, including the best-selling religious book (apart from the Bible) in the English-speaking world, *Pilgrim's Progress*. His biblical citations are almost certainly either from the

Geneva or KJV Bibles. Yet it is clear that the Bible he knew best was the KJV; the vast majority of biblical quotations in *Pilgrim's Progress* or in his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* come either from the KJV or from language shared by these two versions.

It is probable that Milton and Bunyan were the first two major English Dissenting writers who were predominantly influenced by the KJV.²³ The Bible version so closely associated with the monarchy and the established church had become the favoured version of radicals and dissenters by the second half of the seventeenth century.

IV Revision

In the eighteenth century, as in the previous one, variant texts of the KJV had circulated with unacceptable levels of printers' errors. Nonconformists, in particular, had drawn attention to them. William Kilburne had assembled a formidable list of typographical errors in his *Dangerous Errors in Several Late printed Bibles*, as early as 1660.²⁴ He was, though, only one of many writers to draw attention to this problem. Baptist minister Henry Jessey (1601-63), who was known as a 'living concordance' of the original languages of the Bible, spoke for many Protestant Churchmen of his day when he stated that it is: 'our duty to endeavour to have the whole Bible rendered as exactly agreeing with the original as

21 J. N. King & A.T. Pratt, 'The materiality of English printed Bibles', in Hamblin & Jones, *King James Bible after 400 Years*, 88. See the discussion of some of the Geneva notes on this topic in McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 141-148.

22 J.P. Rosenblatt, 'Milton, anxiety, and the King James Bible', in Hamblin & Jones, *King James Bible after 400 Years*, 181-201.

23 Hamlin, 'Bunyan's biblical progress', 202-218.

24 Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version*, 127-128.

we can attain'.²⁵

Yet there was a lack of political will to embrace the necessary wholesale revision of the KJV text in circulation at that time. John Wesley (1703-91), the leading Methodist minister, revised the New Testament text of the KJV in 1755 and made as many as twelve thousand modifications of it.²⁶ Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), the well known biblical expositor and Congregational minister, also drew attention to the need for the revision of the KJV text in the preface to volume one of his popular works, *The Family Expositor* (1739). In its six substantial volumes, published over a period of seventeen years, the Northampton minister proposed a significant number of revisions to the KJV text.²⁷

Progress on this subject was most closely associated with the work of two scholars F.S. Parris, Fellow of Sidney College, Cambridge, and Benjamin Blayney, Fellow of Hertford College, Oxford, who produced revised texts for their respective university presses, two of the three permitted Bible publishers, in 1743 and 1769. Blayney's edition, that incorporated Parris's modifications, soon became the universally accepted text of the KJV that has hardly altered since that time. This version differed from the 1611 text in no fewer than 24,000 places. However, many of the changes were simply the

correction of accumulated printers' errors, though others were more substantial changes. What is remarkable is that these alterations were accepted by the Christian public without significant criticism. This signalled that the KJV had not yet become a sacrosanct cultural icon, a status that would be bestowed by some Christians at a later date.²⁸

However, the publication of Blayney's modified text in 1769 was the event that stilled the many critical voices raised against the language and accuracy of the KJV.²⁹ In addition, a number of other factors began to emerge that enhanced the status of this biblical text. First of all, beginning around 1780, the classical taste that had dismissed the writings of the seventeenth century as unsophisticated began to take a delight in past works for their own sake. An unknown writer to *The Critical Review*, in January 1787, while still suggesting that the KJV did not achieve the highest literary standards, nevertheless, argued that:

The defect in idiom we cannot allow to be a fault; it raised the language above common use and has almost sanctified it; nor would we lose the noble simplicity, the energetic bravery, for all the idiomatic

25 E. Whiston, *The Life and Death of Mr Henry Jessey* (London, 1671), 45-47; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 98-99.

26 Daniell, *Bible in English*, 536.

27 I. Rivers, 'Philip Doddridge's New Testament', in Hamlin & Jones, *King James Bible after 400 Years*, 124-145.

28 Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version*, 132-142. D.W. Bebbington, 'The King James Bible in Britain from the Late Eighteenth Century', 1. I am grateful to Professor Bebbington for allowing me to read a copy of this as yet unpublished paper, prepared for 'The King James Bible and the World It Made, 1611-2011' Conference at Baylor University, Texas, 7-9 April, 2011.

29 Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version*, 146.

elegance which a polished age can bestow...Our attachment to this venerable relic has involuntarily made our language warm.³⁰

V Renewed Prominence

Critical accuracy in the text now combined with changing cultural tastes that placed greater value on the 'relics' of the past, led to the KJV being viewed with greater favour in the wider social context of that day. It was not only secular and literary figures that were placing greater value on the KJV. Vicesimus Knox, the Anglican headmaster of Tonbridge School in Kent, argued with respect to the KJV, that 'its antiquity is a greater source of strength than any correction of its inaccuracies would be' and that 'the present translation ought to be retained in our churches for its intrinsic beauty and excellence'.³¹

This new mode of thinking and use of early seventeenth-century language was adopted by some evangelical Christian ministers, for example, Edward Irving, the most popular London clergyman in the 1820s. He deliberately adopted the linguistic forms found in the KJV.³² In such a social context as this, modernisation of the language of the KJV was out of the question.

A second reason for the enhanced

respect for the KJV was its growing association with national pride and identity. The French Revolution of 1789 had shaken the confidence of the British establishment with very real fears that the upheaval across the English Channel might erupt 'in England's green and pleasant land'. Some of the more radical Evangelicals such as Scottish landowner Robert Haldane welcomed these changes, in the hope that the toppling of Roman Catholic governments in Europe might lead to greater freedom to preach the gospel in those lands, though he needed to assure anxious colleagues that he was not wishing to promote a revolution at home.³³

Political concerns had escalated further with the rising threat from Napoleon Bonaparte in still Catholic France. Militant Protestantism was the natural way to assert a distinctive religious and political identity.³⁴ France through ignorance of the Scriptures, it was assumed, had not adopted the Protestant faith. By contrast, the King James Bible came to be viewed as a symbol of national identity. It was distinctly Protestant. Roman Catholics would not accept it and preferred their own Douai-Rheims editions. When Bible verses were reproduced in educational literature in Catholic Ireland, they gave passages in both the Douai-Rheims and the KJV.³⁵

However, more enlightened Evangelical Protestants, such as Scottish

30 *The Critical Review*, 63 (1787), 40, quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 241.

31 Vicesimus Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary* (1778), 266-267; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 243.

32 E. Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God*, 2 vols (Glasgow: for Chalmers and Collins, 1826), 1, 308, quoted by Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 3.

33 R. Haldane, *Address to the Public concerning political Opinions* (Edinburgh, 1800).

34 Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 4.

35 A.S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525-1961* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968), 346.

Baptist Christopher Anderson, recognised that the Catholic Irish primarily had legitimately objected to the use of Protestant catechisms in their schools. When a further step was taken, the production of the Bible in their native Irish language, there was a much greater degree of openness to work with the Protestant teachers and preachers. Anderson saw it as a scandal that the Bible had not been provided for the Irish in their own language.³⁶ The KJV's identification with a sense of British identity had hindered its acceptance amongst the Irish Catholics. By contrast, it had the opposite effect on the majority of Protestant Christians in mainland Britain.

VI British and Foreign Bible Society

A third reason was the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1804. The growth of Evangelicalism in the early nineteenth century led to a large increase in the production of Bibles for personal use, at a price ordinary people could increasingly afford. English Congregationalist John Campbell, in 1844-45, recorded a list of some of the necessities of life required in the 1840s: 'light postage, quick transit, cheap Bibles, and cheap Periodicals, for the millions of England'.³⁷ Numerous societies were

established to promote particular Christian causes.

The BFBS believed that no barrier of language, cost or supply should hinder access to the means of salvation to potential readers. Over a period of around sixty years it transformed the contemporary printing and binding trades, becoming a Victorian institution in its own right. The initial motivation for the formation of the society was to overcome the scarcity of Welsh-language Bibles in Wales.³⁸ However, this challenge soon pointed to the even greater need for Bibles in other parts of the world.³⁹ This vision for exporting copies of the Scriptures led to a renewed enthusiasm amongst middle-class Christians for distributing KJV Bibles and New Testaments at home amongst the largely unreached poorer neighbourhoods of various towns and cities. Members of BFBS auxiliaries were entitled to obtain a number of copies of Bibles at the cost price, greatly increasing access amongst the population to the Bible.⁴⁰

The BFBS was by far the largest pan-evangelical organisation in the UK at that time. As early as 1824 there were no fewer than 859 BFBS auxiliaries, together with 500 Ladies' organisations promoting its work; in 1832 it had more than 100,000 sub-

³⁶ For example, C. Anderson, *The Native Irish and Their Descendants* (London: William Pickering, 3rd ed. 1846), 68.

³⁷ A. Peel, *These Hundred Years. A History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales 1831-1931* (London: Congregational union of England and Wales, 1931), 135-139.

³⁸ D.E. Jenkins, *The Life of the Rev. Thomas Charles of Bala* (3 vols; Denbigh: Llewelyn Jenkins, 1908), Vol. 2, 492-529.

³⁹ John Leifchild, *Memoir of Joseph Hughes, A.M.* (London: Thomas Ward & Co., 1835), 192-195.

⁴⁰ L. Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth Century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35-39.

scribers.⁴¹ In the present context it is important to note that the one English-language version it published and promoted was the KJV.

In addition to this significant step was the decision to publish the Bible without note or comment, although allowing for cross-references and alternative textual readings in the margins, as had been the practice since Benjamin Blayney's revision in 1769.⁴² After various editions prior to Blaney's work, this revision of the KJV text became the agreed text accepted and increasingly valued by all English-speaking Protestant Christians.

The advent of the BFBS, in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, had in large measure ensured that a high proportion of the population of the United Kingdom who wished to own a Bible could have access to a copy of the KJV. It was not the only Bible version in print, but for the vast majority of Evangelical Christians in Britain, for all practical purposes it was viewed as the Bible.

VII 'Authorised' Version

A fourth and final reason for the high esteem in which the KJV was held was due to its gaining the title—'the Authorised Version'.⁴³ It is clear that this was a gradual process. It began in 1804 when the BFBS was founded. Evangelical

Christians of all denominations had united to form this mission agency. However, High Church Anglicans viewed it as a sinister development. They saw it as a threat to the work of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, the established Anglican agency for distributing the Scriptures. This controversy had arisen at the same time as Napoleon's forces were poised to invade the country and the Establishment was alarmed at such developments.

Thomas Sykes, the High Church vicar of Guilsborough, questioned whether the purity of the society's Bible translations could be maintained when entrusted to 'sectaries'. John Owen, one of the BFBS secretaries, sought to provide reassurance, insisting that the society was restricted to producing versions 'printed by authority'. The constitution of the BFBS was hastily revised in May 1805 to read: 'The only copies in the languages of the United Kingdom to be circulated by the Society shall be the authorised version, without note or comment.'⁴⁴ This phrase, the 'authorised version', was an apologetic device for the BFBS. Its usage increased in popular conversation, and led in 1819 to its appearance in *The Times* newspaper, though still with a lower-case 'a', showing it was not yet a title.

Between the 1820s and the 1850s, there was a steady increase in the usage of this phrase in *The Times* to refer to the KJV, and in the later decade the expression was starting to be capitalised, demonstrating that it had

41 R.H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain 1795-1830* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1983), 91-92.

42 Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 112.

43 I am indebted to David Bebbington for identifying the process by which the adoption of this title occurred.

44 Martin, *Evangelicals United*, p. 101.

emerged as a title.⁴⁵ The Bible text that had appeared in 1611 in such a modest way had now gained a unique status. Now the phrase 'King James Bible' was hardly ever used; it had become the Authorised Version.

VIII Tercentenary

The pinnacle of its status was reached at its tercentenary in 1911 when the prospect of the coronation of George V, put the country in a mood for celebrations. There was royal patronage for the Bible commemorations. The King sent his congratulations to the National Bible Society of Scotland; he took the Queen to a Bible exhibition at the British Museum; and he received a bound Bible from a deputation including the Archbishop of Canterbury, the president of the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, the speaker of the House of Commons, together with other assorted dignitaries. Bible Sunday was observed with special services in many congregations on 12 March in Scotland and 26 March in England and Wales, which culminated in a magnificent national celebration at the Albert Hall in London, on 29 March 1911. The Authorized Version, declared an editorial in *Life & Work*, the periodical of the Church of Scotland, was 'like some fine ancient Gothic cathedral in the midst of the jerry-built streets of a modern town'.⁴⁶

It was not only denominations that praised this Bible version; many books

and pamphlets were also published in its honour. William Muir echoed the sentiments held by many Evangelical Christians when he declared that the Authorized Version had 'raised the nation at one bound to the foremost among the nations of Europe, and more than aught else has kept it there ever since'.⁴⁷ No English-language Bible version prior to the KJV, nor any of the many versions produced in the last century, has or is likely to receive such an exalted status as that bestowed upon the Authorized Version.

IX Need for more revision

This praise, however, was not universal. John Pye Smith, principal of the Independent's Homerton College, and probably the most scholarly Dissenter of his generation, called for a new revision of the Bible text as early as 1809. 'We do not wish to see our common version, now become venerable by age and prescription, superseded by another entirely new; every desirable purpose would be satisfactorily attained by a faithful and well-conducted revision.'⁴⁸ Thomas Curtis, a Baptist schoolmaster and publisher, wrote to Cambridge University Press in 1832 because he claimed they were 'circulating grossly inaccurate copies, if copies they may be called, of the Authorized Version'. He claimed to have identified thousands of errors, not

⁴⁵ Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 6-7, gives the details of this process.

⁴⁶ *Life & Work*, May 1911, 132, quoted by Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 13.

⁴⁷ W. Muir, *Our Grand Old Bible* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1911), 178; quoted by Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 13.

⁴⁸ *Eclectic Review*, January 1809, 31, quoted by Samuel Newth, *Lectures on Bible Revision* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1881), 101.

counting mere typographical ones.⁴⁹

Some critics could be easily ignored but not Curtis. He organised a committee of Dissenting clergymen to assist him in pressing for reform. They produced a pamphlet in 1833, addressed to the Bishop of London, entitled *The Existing Monopoly*. They wished to break the monopoly of the three printing agencies that controlled the production of the Bible. However, Dissenters alone were not powerful enough to produce a change on this subject; but by the 1850s the momentum had shifted in the direction of a revised version.

By the time Anglican scholar J.B. Lightfoot, Hulsean Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, advocated reform, charging the translators of the KJV with 'an imperfect knowledge of Greek grammar' in 1871, it was inevitable that the reformers would win the day. Even Charles Spurgeon, the prominent Baptist preacher supported this initiative. He declared: 'I love God's Word better than I love King James' pedantic wisdom'.⁵⁰ As a result, the first official Bible translation in English since 1611 would be produced. A new era in Bible production and revision was about to commence.

The Revised Version (RV) of the New Testament appeared in 1881 with

the Old Testament appearing four years later. This new version was given a cautious welcome. Joseph Agar Beet, a Wesleyan Methodist reviewer appreciated the retention of 'the archaic tone of the Authorised Version'.⁵¹ Wesleyan Methodists at a conference in Sheffield in September 1904, adopted a resolution that stated 'that the R.V. be used in the public reading of Scripture throughout the Connexion, wherever practicable'.⁵² In Australia interest in the new Bible version, if published articles on the subject are a reasonable guide, was strongest in Victoria. The Christian public in that country appeared ready to accept the new version. Queensland Baptists, for example, in published devotional articles in the early twentieth century, specifically quoted from the R.V.⁵³ English Particular Baptist James Stuart was pleased that the new version had retained the 'music and rhythm' of the old one.⁵⁴

However, other voices were more critical though for different reasons; John Clifford, the leading English General Baptist of that generation, was in a minority of more radical Christians

⁴⁹ Thomas Curtis to the Secretaries of the Cambridge University Press, 27 January 1832, quoted by Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, 111-112.

⁵⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, preface, in Hannah C. Conant, *The English Bible: History of the Translations of the Holy Scriptures into the English Tongue with Specimens of the Old English Versions* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Co., 1859, xi, quoted by Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 9.

⁵¹ Joseph Agar Beet, 'The Revised Version of the New Testament', *The Expositor*, August 1881, p. 106, quoted by Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 10.

⁵² This information was given in *The Queensland Baptist*, October 1904, 145. I am grateful to David Parker for drawing my attention to this source.

⁵³ This point refers to articles in *The Queensland Baptist*. David Parker provided the information on this subject.

⁵⁴ James Stuart, 'The Revised Bible', *Baptist Magazine*, July 1885, 318, quoted by Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 10.

who argued that the Revised Version was 'too conservative of the Old'.⁵⁵ A stronger critique came from those who wished to retain the KJV. Prebendary H.W. Webb-Peploe, a prominent Evangelical Anglican, successfully resisted the circulation of the Revised Version by the Bible Society until 1901.⁵⁶ The KJV, though, retained the support of the vast majority of Protestant Christians in the remainder of the nineteenth century.

X New Era of Versions

In the twentieth century an increasing number of Bible translations took a share of the market for Bibles. A minority of more progressive British Christians were attracted, for example, to the translations of individual scholars such as R.F. Weymouth (1903) or James Moffatt (1913), or after the Second World War to the version produced by J.B. Philips and most recently Eugene Peterson's *The Message* (2002). However, these versions were never seriously considered for use in churches. The most significant of the numerous new translations included the Revised Standard Version, first published in the USA in 1952. It was widely accepted in the UK as well as in the USA because its language echoed the KJV and was also suitable for public reading,⁵⁷ though it received strong

criticism from many conservative Evangelicals.⁵⁸ By 1990 more than fifty-five million copies of this version had been sold.⁵⁹

The Good News Bible (1976), written in more contemporary English and a simplified vocabulary has proved particularly popular in the wider Christian community and in schools in the United Kingdom, but the New International Version (1978) is the one that has attracted the greatest support from Evangelicals,⁶⁰ and now tops the best seller list of English-language Bibles. However, especially in the USA, there has been some scholarly evangelical support, together with strong popular sales figures, for a revised KJV, *The New King James Version* (1982),⁶¹ although some scholars have questioned whether it is accurate to call it a

55 John Clifford, *General Baptist Magazine*, June 1881, 226, quoted by Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 10.

56 Frank Ballard, *Which Bible to Read—Revised or "Authorised"?* (London: H.R. Allenson, 2nd ed. 1898), vii, quoted by Bebbington, 'King James Bible', 11.

57 Daniell, *Bible in English*, 738-743.

58 A good evangelical scholarly example is American Presbyterian O.T. Allis in his *Revision or New Translation? Revised Version or Revised Bible?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948).

59 P.J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 152.

60 D.A. Carson makes this point in his *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 84. It has also been strongly marketed with books like K. Barker (ed.), *The Making of a Contemporary Translation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), advocating its cause.

61 A.L. Farstad, *The New King James Version in the Great Tradition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989). From the same school of thought came a critical appraisal of the NIV in E. Radmacher & Z. Hodges, *The NIV Reconsidered* (Dallas: Redencion Viva Publishing House, 1990).

further revision of the KJV, rather than a new translation.⁶²

XI KJV in the 21st century

Where does this leave the KJV in the twenty-first century? It is likely that support for the 1611 version will decline gradually for the foreseeable future as there are a significant number of older churchgoers in particular who are fiercely loyal to the version with which they grew up, but the vast majority of younger people will prefer newer translations. An example of this occurred at the wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton on Friday 29 April 2011. Despite the passionate commitment to the KJV by William's father Prince Charles, this couple chose the Bible readings from the New Revised Standard Version (1989), the most recent revision of the RSV text.⁶³

If younger churchgoers increasing select more recent Bible translations, how will the KJV be viewed in the wider culture of the English-speaking world? It is most probable that it will be lauded most for its literary excellence. Ann Wroe, in a recent article waxed eloquent about the majestic sound of hearing it read in public for the first time.

The effect was extraordinary: as if I had suddenly found, in the house of

language I had loved and explored all my life, a hidden central chamber whose pillars and vaulting, rhythm and strength had given shape to everything around them. The King James now breathes venerability.⁶⁴

Another equally commendatory article appeared in the British tabloid newspaper *Metro*, in the approach to the 400th anniversary of the publication of the KJV, by journalist Graeme Green, in which he viewed the significance of the KJV from a secular perspective. He wrote:

The tome, which first went on sale on 2 May, 1611, took previous English language versions and created a definitive Bible that became the most influential book ever written, a cornerstone of British society, permeating everything from art and literature to politics and morality, here and around the world.⁶⁵

Of this we can be certain, the KJV has a secure place both in British history and in the culture and religious heritage of the English-speaking world.

⁶² J.P. Lewis, *The English Bible From KJV to NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 329-362.

⁶³ *The Daily Telegraph*, Friday 29 April 2011, 1-3.

⁶⁴ A. Wroe, 'In the beginning was the sound', an article in *Intelligent Life*, a quarterly periodical published by *The Economist*, 4.3 (Spring 2011), 88-93.

⁶⁵ G. Green, 'The King James Bible to celebrate 400th Anniversary', *Metro*, 26 April 2011, accessed on 4 May 2011 at <http://www.metro.co.uk/lifestyle/861738-the-king-james-bible-to-celebrate-400th-anniversary#ixzz1LQrjRyPO>.

C.H. Spurgeon and Suffering

Peter J. Morden

KEYWORDS: *Spirituality, theology of suffering, the cross, holiness, discipleship, ministry, mission.*

I Introduction

On 9 October 1880 the *Boy's Own Paper* published silhouettes of those it considered to be the greatest 'celebrities' of late-Victorian Britain. Unsurprisingly, the collection included the two most notable prime ministers of the age, William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli. Also pictured, in the centre of the nine silhouettes, was the Baptist pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892).¹ The bracketing of Spurgeon and, say, Gladstone can seem strange to modern commentators but, as Patricia Kruppa observes, 'many Victorians would have found it appro-

priate'.² As David Bebbington states, Spurgeon was by far 'the most popular preacher of the day' in an era when religion bulked large in the life of the nation.³ As such he was a 'personality of national standing' in Victorian Britain.⁴

Principally because of the circulation of his printed sermons, Spurgeon's reputation and influence travelled far beyond his British base. As early as 1858, when he was only twenty-four years of age, the North American Review was reporting that Americans returning from a trip to England were invariably asked two questions, namely, 'Did you see the Queen?' and 'Did you hear Spurgeon?' The paper went on to declare that there was

¹ *Boy's Own Paper*, 9 October 1880, in C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Compiled from his Diary, Letters, and Records by his Wife and his Private Secretary* (4 Vols; London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897-99), Vol. 4, 185.

² P.S. Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher's Progress* (New York: Garland, 1982), 1.

³ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 145.

⁴ D.W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 57.

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'scarcely any name more familiar' than Spurgeon's in America.⁵ By 1875 his sermons had been translated into languages as varied as French, Dutch, Telegu and Maori.⁶ Soon to follow were some Russian editions of a few select messages. These were passed by the Tsarist censor and approved by the Orthodox Church for official distribution.⁷ A staggering one million copies were printed.⁸ Spurgeon also made a significant impact in Australia where he became, as Australian Baptist historian Ken Manley states, a 'household name'.⁹ Many additional examples could be adduced to demonstrate his truly global reach. C.H. Spurgeon was a figure of international importance in the nineteenth century.

It is easy to tell Spurgeon's story in a triumphalistic way, but the truth is that his life was marked by significant

suffering. This article outlines the nature and extent of this, and analyses the theology he developed in response. Particular attention is given to the ways his 'afflictions' shaped his 'spirituality' (I am understanding spirituality, along with Philip Sheldrake, as being concerned with the conjunction of theology, communion with God, and practical action; it thus relates to both the inner and outer dimensions of the Christian life).¹⁰

Spurgeon came to believe that suffering resulted in important benefits for Christians, although for this to happen believers needed to remain faithful through their trials. The most important of these benefits was that believers could know closer communion with the suffering Christ as they experienced their own struggles. Suffering also fitted a believer for ministry and mission, giving them a deeper sympathy for others in difficulty and equipping them to be a source of comfort and strength.

Overall, I hope to show that suffering shaped Spurgeon's life and ministry in a range of significant ways. Certainly his experience of God and the content and tone of his preaching ministry would have been very different if he had not suffered in the way that he did. Spurgeon's life and ministry provide a rich resource for those who are wrestling with the topic of suffering today.

5 *North American Review* (Boston: Crosby and Nicholls, 1858), 275.

6 C.H. Spurgeon, 'Twenty Years of Published Sermons', in C.H. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Sword and The Trowel: A Record of Combat With Sin and Labour For The Lord (Sword and Trowel)* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865-92), January 1875, 7; C. Ray, *A Marvellous Ministry* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1905), 27-28.

7 One of these, published in 1880, is held in archives of Spurgeon's College. See 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (2G), Vol. 4, 58 b.

8 M. Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 155.

9 K.R. Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity': A History of Australian Baptists: Growing an Australian Church (1831-1914)* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 109.

10 P. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History* (London: SPCK, 1991), 32. Cf. I.M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 2.

II Spurgeon's Physical Suffering

Spurgeon suffered physically, mentally and spiritually. Physical suffering was a significant feature of his life from 1867 onwards. In the autumn of this year he was taken seriously ill and found, to his consternation, that he was quite unable to preach on a number of successive Sundays.¹¹ He was diagnosed as having rheumatic gout although, with hindsight, it can be seen that he also showed symptoms of kidney disease, identified, in the last years of Spurgeon's life, as 'Bright's disease', i.e. chronic nephritis.¹² In the closing months of 1867 he was in agony. He visited Mentone in the south of France in the winter of 1867-68 in order to recuperate.¹³ The visit was a success and he returned to the French Riviera most winters from this point on until his death, usually spending between one and three months in Mentone every year.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there were, from late 1867 onwards, few days in his life which were entirely pain

free. From 1879 this physical suffering became increasingly acute, culminating in his death at the age of fifty-seven in January 1892.

During this final phase of ministry, the question as to whether or not Spurgeon would be able to take the services at his church on any given Sunday became a weekly drama, one that was regularly played out in the press. Much information was carried in both the religious and the secular papers respecting the state of the pulpit celebrity's health. On Monday 21 March 1881 the *Daily News* reported that a letter from Spurgeon had been read to his congregation the previous day explaining his absence from the pulpit. He had written that he was being 'driven out upon the sea of pain' by repeated blasts from 'the tempest of disease'. 'My pains have at times been overpowering, and I have needed Divine succour to come through them.'¹⁵

Spurgeon was effectively 'shut in' at home, unable even to go downstairs. Sunday preaching had been an impossibility in the first weeks of March and he had frequently missed midweek services too. In the letter reported in the *Daily News*, Spurgeon had written that he was recovering: a 'little longer and it will all be over', he had said.¹⁶ But this was too optimistic.

On Sunday 27 March he was back preaching, but the press described him by turns as 'pale', 'weak' and 'very fee-

11 C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Editor's Illness', in Spurgeon (ed.), *Sword and Trowel*, November 1867, 526-27.

12 *The Times* gave the cause of Spurgeon's death as 'congestion of the kidneys complicated by gout'. *The Times*, 1 February 1892, 'Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Obituaries—Newspaper Cuttings' (Held at Spurgeons [Spurgeon's Childcare], Rushden, Northamptonshire), 1.

13 Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, pp. 237-39. This 1867-68 visit was part of a longer European tour which also took in, amongst other places, Venice and Rome. In subsequent winters Spurgeon would head straight for the south of France.

14 Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, 198.

15 *Daily News*, 21 March 1881, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 4, 77.

16 *Daily News*, 21 March 1881, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 4, 77.

ble'.¹⁷ During the morning service he had insisted that he was now 'quite free from pain'¹⁸ but, according to *The Baptist*, the results of his latest 'attack' were 'unmistakable on his countenance' as he tackled the platform stairs with the aid of a stick. It came as little surprise that he was unable to manage the evening service.¹⁹ Series of events such as these from March 1881 would become commonplace during the ensuing decade.²⁰ Spurgeon's ministry was thus characterised by physical suffering.

III Mental suffering

Spurgeon also experienced mental suffering alongside these physical struggles. A tragedy that occurred at a service at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall in London, on 19 October 1856, was probably a significant trigger for this. Spurgeon preached in a building that was dangerously over-full, with many outside unable to gain entrance.

It is not entirely clear what happened, but it appears some in the crowd inside the Music Hall sought to cause trouble, shouting (erroneously) that there was a 'fire' or possibly that the building's 'galleries were collapsing'. In the ensuing panic seven people

lost their lives and many more were injured.²¹ Following the disaster Spurgeon spoke of his thoughts being like a 'case of knives' cutting his heart 'in pieces'. It was a time of unrelenting 'misery' and 'darkness'. Then, suddenly, in an instant, the 'burning lava' of his brain was cooled.²²

Nevertheless, from this time on he experienced regular bouts of insomnia and mood swings which could be violent and sudden, with ecstasy giving way to weeping and despair. A fellow Baptist pastor, William Williams, once mentioned to Spurgeon that he was going to preach on Proverbs 3:33, not knowing that this had been the text his friend had taken on the night of the Surrey Gardens tragedy. Spurgeon's reaction was immediate. He gave a 'deep sigh' and his previously bright 'countenance' changed before Williams had even finished quoting the verse. The mention of Proverbs 3:33 had, Williams believed, given a revealing insight into the 'furnace of mental suffering' Spurgeon had endured and continued to endure.²³

Others recognised that Spurgeon suffered from some form of depression,²⁴ although the word was not used with any precision. Spurgeon was quite open about this himself. For example, he wrote to his congregation from Mentone on 1 March 1885 about his expe-

¹⁷ *Daily News*, 28 March 1881; *Christian World*, 31 March 1881, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 4, 80.

¹⁸ *Christian World*, 31 March 1881, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 4, 80.

¹⁹ *Christian World*, 31 March 1881; *The Baptist*, 1 April 1881, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 4, 80.

²⁰ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, 351-52.

²¹ I describe this tragedy in more detail in P.J. Morden, *C.H. Spurgeon: The People's Preacher* (Farnham: CWR, 2010), 68-70.

²² Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, 195-96.

²³ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, 220.

²⁴ So J.D. Douglas, *The Prince of Preachers: A Sketch; A Portraiture; And A Tribute* (London: Morgan and Scott, n.d. [1893]), 99.

riencing 'fits of deep depression'. These were, he believed, the result of 'brain weariness'.²⁵ Doubtless these feelings of being depressed were closely bound up with the physical pain, with such feelings being especially prominent in the last twenty years of his life. Nevertheless, depression could strike when least expected, and when physical pain was not the trigger, as in the conversation with Williams about the Surrey Gardens tragedy.

I have shown the material which now takes its place in this article to a psychiatrist, Dr Anil Den, as well as talking more generally to him about Spurgeon's insomnia and mental suffering.²⁶ He advises that when circumstances become too much for a person depression can be reactive; such depression is transient and when circumstances change the suffering lifts. He also advises that another form of depression is endogenous (that is, from the inside), with the root cause an imbalance of brain chemicals. Although this form of depression can be brought on by a traumatic event and exacerbated by other illnesses, it remains even when these other factors are removed.

25 C.H. Spurgeon, 'Letter from Mr Spurgeon', 1 March 1885, *New Park Street Pulpit (NPSP) / Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit (MTP)* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1856-1917), *MTP*, Vol. 31, 132.

26 As revealed in e.g. C.H. Spurgeon to an unnamed friend, September 1873, 'Original Correspondence of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1863-1886', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room, (4G), No. 10, in which he speaks about 'becoming demented with the sleeplessness of a brain over-wrought'.

Surveying Spurgeon's symptoms, Dr Den's opinion is that Spurgeon was suffering from a form of endogenous depression and that, if he had presented with such symptoms today he would certainly have been treated with a mixture of medication and therapy.²⁷ Thinking of Spurgeon as clinically depressed adds to the picture of him as someone who suffered.

IV Spiritual Depression

In addition to physical and mental suffering, Spurgeon often battled an accompanying sense of spiritual depression. In a message preached in May 1885, just months after composing the letter to his church from Mentone, Spurgeon spoke of specifically *spiritual* struggles, what he termed an 'agony of soul'. The sermon was on Psalm 77.9 and the question posed in the text, 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious?'. Spurgeon said,

Pain of body, when it is continuous and severe, is exceedingly trying to our feeble spirits; but agony of soul is worse still. Give me the rack sooner than despair. Do you know what it is to have a keen thought working like an auger into your brain? Has Satan seemed to pierce and gimlet your mind with a sharp, cutting thought that would not be

27 Personal conversation with Dr Anil Den, 22 October 2009 at Spurgeon's College, London. I am also drawing from printed notes provided by Dr Den entitled 'Mood Disorders', which are dated 7 November 2004. It is possible Spurgeon was bi-polar (a condition sometimes termed manic depression), but there is not quite enough evidence to make this diagnosis with certainty.

put aside?... When Asaph prayed for relief, and the relief did not come, the temptation came to him to ask, 'Am I always to suffer? Will the Lord never relieve me? It is written, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds"; has he ceased from that sacred surgery? "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"'.²⁸

The mention of Satan and the reference to Asaph's temptation to doubt God's word highlight the spiritual depression Spurgeon experienced. His comments on this verse were clearly shot through with autobiography and he believed that Psalm 77 mapped out his own experience.²⁹ This spiritual depression was surely closely linked with his physical and mental 'afflictions', indeed, the three different strands of suffering I am identifying were closely woven together. Nevertheless, the suffering Spurgeon highlighted here involved doubting God's gracious character and the promises of his word.

Williams even remembers his friend once, when he was 'very low and depressed', doubting his 'standing in Christ' (that is, lacking assurance that he was truly a Christian).³⁰ On another

occasion, in a message entitled 'Strength And Recovery', Spurgeon spoke of how the soul could sometimes be 'grievously diseased', infected by doubt, fear and 'lukewarmness'. He believed the 'heavenly surgeon' was always waiting to heal believers. Nevertheless, for him the periods of spiritual depression could be very real.³¹ Overall, it should be clear that Spurgeon experienced considerable suffering—physical, mental and spiritual.

V Spurgeon's Theology of Suffering

How did Spurgeon account for the presence of suffering in God's world, specifically in the lives of committed Christians like himself? To begin with he emphasised the fall of the first man and woman and the way this had brought misery and pain into the world.³² There was a stress, then, on human responsibility for suffering, although Spurgeon also regarded its presence in the world as being the result of the devil's activity.³³ What he really wanted to emphasise, however, was that all suffering fell within the scope of God's sovereignty.³⁴ This was

²⁸ C.H. Spurgeon, 'A Question for the Questioner', *MTP*, Vol. 31, S. No. 1843, Psalm 77.9, delivered 31 May 1885, 303.

²⁹ Cf. C.H. Spurgeon's comments on Psalm 77.2 in *The Treasury of the Old Testament* (4 Vols; London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, n.d.), Vol. 2, 726.

³⁰ W. Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (rev. and ed. M. Williams; London: Religious Tract Society, n.d. [1933]), 32.

³¹ C.H. Spurgeon, 'Strength and Recovery', *MTP*, Vol. 30, S. No. 1805, Zechariah 10.12, delivered 18 September 1884, 571.

³² C.H. Spurgeon, 'Honey from a Lion', *MTP*, Vol. 27, S. No. 1591, Romans 5.15, delivered 3 April 1881, 186.

³³ C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Roaring Lion', *MTP*, Vol. 7, S. No. 419, 1 Peter 5.8,9, delivered 17 November 1861, 833-35.

³⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, 'For the Troubled', *MTP*, Vol. 19, S. No. 1090, Psalm 88.7, delivered 12 January 1873, 16-17.

fundamental to him, and he especially stressed this principle as it related to the suffering of Christians.

Thus, in a sermon entitled 'Gratitude For Deliverance From The Grave', preached in 1887, he stated that although a Christian's 'afflictions' were most certainly the result of a 'cruel enemy', the devil's actions were overruled by God and 'made to work for his [i.e. God's] good'.³⁵ In this message he also spoke of the devil as the 'second agent' in suffering and God as the 'Great First Cause'. Others bore the responsibility for suffering, but God was sovereign over it.

The cross of Christ was the supreme example of the outworking of this principle. Here, as in all suffering, God was not to be blamed: the cross was the fault of the devil, as well as being an 'atrocious crime' committed by ungodly people.³⁶ Yet the cross was also 'pre-determined in the counsel of God' and this was the fundamental reason why Christ had died.

The precise relationship between human and demonic responsibility for suffering and God's sovereignty over it was not a conundrum that needed to be explained but a mystery that needed to be believed. Moreover, once believers accepted the mystery of the sovereignty of a loving God over suffering they would find it deeply consoling.³⁷

The cross showed that Christians did not ultimately have to pay for their own folly, neither were they in the hands of the devil. Rather, they were in the hands of God who was gracious, suffering in their place to win them salvation. Working within this framework, Spurgeon held that a believer's trials were strictly limited, both in duration (for suffering would ultimately give way to a heaven guaranteed by Christ's death) and in scope.

With regard to scope, as well as affirming that Christ had taken the punishment that was due to sinful people, so that those who believed would never have to endure such agonies,³⁸ Spurgeon also wanted to insist that God's mercy limited the suffering of believers in other ways. Speaking personally, he declared his belief that he had never 'yet experienced a trouble which might not have been worse'.³⁹ A note at the beginning of 'Gratitude For Deliverance From The Grave' recorded that this message had been preached in connection with the dedication of 'Jubilee House', an addition to the Metropolitan Tabernacle's already extensive buildings which commemorated the fiftieth year of Spurgeon's life. This was a life which, the preacher reminded his hearers, had often been 'threatened by grievous sickness'.

Spurgeon was clear that he had suffered much, but he wanted to affirm what he believed was a greater truth, namely that he had been repeatedly

35 C.H. Spurgeon, 'Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave', *MTP*, Vol. 38, S. No. 2237, Psalm 118.17,18, n.d., 1-2.

36 Spurgeon, 'Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave', 3.

37 Spurgeon, 'Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave', 3.

38 Spurgeon, 'Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave', 8.

39 Spurgeon, 'Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave', 3-6.

'delivered from the grave'.⁴⁰ He was sure, despite his familiarity with suffering, that God had ameliorated or withheld affliction on countless occasions. The sovereign and gracious God had, in fact, been extremely merciful to him. A Christian's sufferings were strictly limited.

Suffering was, therefore, an area in which Spurgeon's essentially Calvinistic theological frame of reference intersected strongly with his spirituality. His focus on God's sovereignty provided an underpinning for his approach to questions of suffering, an approach in which he was able to maintain, firstly, that God was not to blame for 'afflictions', which were the result of the fall; secondly, that God was still in control, being the sovereign 'first cause' of suffering; and, thirdly, that God was still good, limiting the suffering of believers.

The doctrine of final perseverance is also relevant here. If someone had truly trusted in Christ that was proof that they were one of the elect and so would persevere to the end: no suffering could ever separate them from God.⁴¹ Suffering was not only limited in extent, but duration. All of this was a cause for rejoicing, even when the trials were fierce and continued year on year.

VI Suffering and the Cross

At the heart of Spurgeon's theology of

suffering was the belief that the cross, as well as being the supreme example of God's sovereignty over suffering, revealed that God himself had suffered in the person of his Son. Spurgeon regularly reflected on Christ's passion in his preaching and his writing, reflections which were invariably emotionally charged.⁴² A passage from his devotional book of daily readings, *Evening By Evening* provides an example:

'He humbled Himself'? Was He not on earth always stripping off first one robe of honour and then another, till, naked, He was fastened to the cross, and there did He not empty out His inmost self, pouring out His life-blood, giving up for all of us, till they laid Him penniless in a borrowed grave? How low was our dear Redeemer brought!... Stand at the foot of the cross, and count the purple drops by which you have been cleansed; see the thorn-crown; mark His scourged shoulders, still gushing with encrimsoned rills; see hands and feet given up to the rough iron, and His whole self to mockery and scorn; see the bitterness, and the pangs, and the throes of inward grief, showing themselves in His outward frame; hear the thrilling shriek, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' And if you do

⁴⁰ Spurgeon, 'Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave', 1. This dates the sermon as having been preached in either May or June 1884. For details on 'Jubilee House', see Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, 237-52.

⁴¹ Spurgeon, 'Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave', 9.

⁴² For examples of such descriptions, see C.H. Spurgeon, 'Our Sympathizing High Priest', *MTP*, Vol. 32, S. No. 1927, Hebrews 5.7-10, delivered 31 October 1886, 591; *The Treasury of the Bible: The New Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1962), 387-401.

not lie prostrate on the ground before that cross, you have never seen it: if you are not humbled in the presence of Jesus, you do not know Him.⁴³

Christ's suffering here was physical, as shown, for example, by the piercing of hands and feet; mental, as shown by the 'mockery' he endured; and spiritual, as evidenced by, amongst other things, the cry of dereliction. This, of course, corresponded with Spurgeon's own threefold experience of suffering. The difference between Christ and Spurgeon was in the degree of affliction, although one senses that the astonishingly vivid language and imagery Spurgeon employed was shaped not only by his fertile imagination but also by his various experiences of suffering, including his precariously balanced mental state. His descriptions of Christ's passion certainly came from the heart.

Christ's suffering also provided believers with a 'pattern' for faithful discipleship. In a sermon based on the words addressed to Christ on the cross by the religious leaders in Matthew 27:43, Spurgeon insisted that it would 'do his hearers good' to paint the picture of Christ being verbally abused and physically mistreated on the cross in their own minds, adding, 'I shall not complain if imagination heightens the colouring'. Seeing Christ thus would remind believers that Jesus' suffering was redemptive.

However, in this message Spurgeon also wanted to say that Christ's suffer-

ings were a model for Christians who were called to bear the cross and its accompanying shame in their own lives.⁴⁴ He regularly insisted that Christians were called to take up a cross.⁴⁵ A Christian's cross-bearing was not, of course, for salvation, as Christ's sacrifice was once for all time. Nevertheless, Christians still carried a cross in order that God's purposes might be accomplished in them and, through them, that God might be known in the world.⁴⁶

Spurgeon's statements on this subject were often accompanied by evidence. They proceeded not only from his reflections on the biblical text but also from his own experience. In *The Gospel of the Kingdom* he closed his comments on Matthew 10.38 with a direct address to God, 'Lord, thou hast laid a cross upon me, do not permit me to shirk from it, or shrink from it.'⁴⁷

In the light of this material, further strand needs to be added to our understanding of Spurgeon's theology of suffering. Christians were called to cross-shaped discipleship in response to both the example and direct command of Christ. This cross-bearing was, Spurgeon believed, a high calling indeed.

⁴⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, 'Let him Deliver him now', *MTP*, Vol. 34, S. No. 2029, Matthew 27.43, delivered 17 June 1888, 337-38.

⁴⁵ In addition to the other references in this paragraph, see, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon, 'Jesus Declining the Legions', *MTP*, Vol. 33, S. No. 1955, Matthew 26.53,54, delivered 27 March 1887, 191.

⁴⁶ Spurgeon, 'Let him Deliver him now', 338, 348.

⁴⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of the Kingdom. A Popular Exposition Of The Gospel According to Matthew* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1893) (Matthew 10.38), 75.

⁴³ C.H. Spurgeon, *Evening By Evening* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1868) (3 June), Philippians 2.8, 155.

In continuing to set out Spurgeon's theology of suffering, we need to note that for him the cross affirmed that there was a purpose in suffering. One of the points he made as he preached on Christ's afflictions was that Jesus learned 'obedience through the things...he suffered.' He made much of this thought as he preached on Hebrews 5:7-10 in 'Our Sympathizing High Priest'. Moreover, as Christ had learned obedience through suffering, so believers would do the same. Spurgeon made his basic point by way of an analogy: in the same way that swimming could be learnt only in the water, so obedience could be learnt only through suffering.

In a powerful passage, Spurgeon expanded on how he saw this dynamic working in practice. If a Christian prayed for healing for a chronically sick spouse or child only to see their loved one die, how ought they to respond? Resentment or bitterness might be natural responses, but they would be entirely inappropriate for the Christian. Here was an opportunity, said Spurgeon, to 'learn obedience'. The Christian was being called to a deeper faith and a more thoroughgoing obedience, one that endured even in the suffering engendered by fervent hopes disappointed.⁴⁸ 'Who knows what it is to obey God to the full until he has had to lay aside his own will in the most painful and tender respects?'⁴⁹

48 On the specific issue of deepening faith, see 'Thursday Evening at the Tabernacle', *The Baptist*, 6 August 1886, in 'Loose-Leaf Scrap Folders', March 1886—October 1886, Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (2H), 49-50.

49 Spurgeon, 'Our Sympathizing High Priest', 597. He used the swimming analogy

By having a range of motives for faith and obedience stripped away, a believer would learn a deeper faith that was focused on bare trust in Christ whatever the circumstances. This may have been in his mind when he once thanked God in prayer for bringing him low because by this means the 'little buildings on the rock had been swept away, and he had come to the solid granite itself'.⁵⁰ *In extremis*, a believer was left only with God and the promises of his word. This had been the lot of Christ, who had not been spared 'the last ounce of crushing sorrow' on the cross. In such desperate circumstances Christ continued to trust and in this he was the supreme example to believers.⁵¹

Overall, Spurgeon had a theology of suffering in which Christ, and especially the cross, was the fulcrum. The cross displayed God's sovereignty over suffering and his love for the world. It also set forth an example for believers to follow and provided a dynamic by which Christians could grow in obedient faith. Viewed in the light of the cross, suffering was both bearable and beneficial.

VII The Benefits of Suffering

Spurgeon held that suffering could, potentially, result in many benefits for the Christian, with the learning of obe-

again in 'Two Good Things', *MTP*, Vol. 27, S. No. 1629, Psalms 119.71 and 73.23, delivered 17 June 1880, 640.

50 *Christian Commonwealth*, 16 April 1885, in 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Vol. 12, 102.

51 Spurgeon, 'Our Sympathizing High Priest', 597.

dience being just one of these. He believed that, whilst prosperity softened a Christian, adversity had the opposite effect, bracing the soul and strengthening it.⁵² Once again, this was a principle which was deeply rooted in his own experience of suffering. On the last Sunday of 1888 Spurgeon was in Mentone and had a serious accident when his stick slipped at the top of a flight of marble stairs. In the ensuing fall he rolled over at least twice and was badly bruised and shaken, losing two teeth.⁵³

One of the sermons he gave on returning to London was on Exodus 15:22-27 and entitled 'Marah Better Than Elim'. Spurgeon referred to his Mentone fall in the sermon's introduction, saying that, soon after his tumble, an unnamed friend had spoken to him, comparing his experience with that of the Israelites who had encountered the bitter water at the springs of Marah (Exodus 15:23). Spurgeon agreed, but both he and his friend concurred that 'Marah' was actually better than the clean springs of 'Elim', as described in Exodus 15:27. This was because there was more lasting benefit to be gained from the former than from the latter.

As Spurgeon reflected further on his text he made comparison between the two contrasting experiences of God's people. There had been a miracle at Marah, but no corresponding miracle at Elim. God had made a 'decree' for his people at Marah, saying that if they

were faithful to him then they would not be inflicted with the plagues the Egyptians had experienced (Exodus 7-13), but there had been no such decree at Elim.

The contrast in favour of Marah was further shown by the fact that Elim was dealt with in only one verse in Exodus, whilst Marah was given four verses. For the preacher the message was clear: 'bitter' experiences such as his serious fall could be times of God's special blessing, where he dealt with his people in a particularly thoroughgoing, lasting way.⁵⁴

Spurgeon's handling of Exodus 15:22-27 gives evidence that his own personal experience of suffering was shaping his reading of the biblical text. Earlier, in 1880, he had insisted that his own 'affliction' had been spiritually beneficial for him. He believed this, he said,

[N]ot because we have been told so, but because of personal proof; and we assert it now, not as young beginners who are buckling on the harness, and who think themselves certain; but as those who have gone some distance in the pilgrimage of life, and know by actual test and matter of fact that it is even so.⁵⁵

As Spurgeon said elsewhere, 'We

52 C.H. Spurgeon, *The Saint And His Saviour: The Progress of the Soul in the Knowledge of Jesus* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889 [1857]), 419; Spurgeon, 'The Pitifulness of the Lord...', 332.

53 G.H. Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (6 Vols; London: Cassell, 1894 [1892-93]), Vol. 6, 308-309; C.H. Spurgeon to Newman Hall, 20 Jan 1889, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Letters of C.H. Spurgeon* (London: Marshall, n.d. [1923]), 195.

54 C.H. Spurgeon, 'Marah Better than Elim', *MTP*, Vol. 39, S. No. 2301, Exodus 15:22-26, delivered 4 April 1889, 145-46.

55 Spurgeon, 'Two Good Things', 637.

have never reaped such a harvest from any seed as from that which fell from our hands while tears were falling from our eyes.⁵⁶ He believed that suffering was beneficial for believers, he believed this strongly, and, finally, he believed this on the basis of personal experience.

Spurgeon spent considerable time in his preaching setting out specific ways in which suffering benefited the Christian. He held that affliction was often God's way of getting the attention of sleepy Christians. Some believers were apt to stumble through their Christian lives in a spiritual lethargy. Such people needed 'awakening and arousing' and trials did this. For other believers who were making more progress, but were tending to pride, suffering acted as a salutary reminder of the old nature.

A glass of water might look clear, but a little stirring disturbed the sediment and made the water cloudy. So it was with believers—the agitation caused by suffering brought the sin and compromise, which had been present before although not visible, to the surface. Whether a believer was sleepwalking aimlessly through the Christian life or boasting of sinless perfection, suffering acted as a spiritual wake-up call.⁵⁷

Having been suitably awakened, the faithful believer was then led to search his or her heart for possible sin. Spurgeon believed that suffering could be occasioned by specific sin, although he was clear that this was often not the

case.⁵⁸ But whether a believer's sin had been a cause of his or her trials or not, certainly the trials should be accepted as 'chastisement' and used as an opportunity for confession, 'for the best of us have much to mourn in the presence of the Most High'.⁵⁹ Growth in humility and holiness was thus achieved.

In addition, suffering afforded an important opportunity for the development of Christlike character.⁶⁰ It gave, for example, opportunities to show courage, a virtue Spurgeon believed was exemplified by Christ.⁶¹ The point about suffering and courage was brought out in the aforementioned sermon, 'Gratitude For Deliverance From The Grave'. In this Spurgeon declared,

We cannot show our courage unless we have difficulties and troubles. A man cannot become a veteran soldier if he never goes to battle... Rejoice, therefore, in your tribulations, because they give you opportunities for exhibiting a believing confidence, and thereby glorifying the name of the Most High.⁶²

Trials gave an opportunity for a believer to display courage and, also, a believing confidence in God. These

58 Just as Spurgeon believed that accidents were not, usually, to be regarded as God's judgments. See *Autobiography*, Vol. 4, 214.

59 C.H. Spurgeon, 'For the Sick and Afflicted', *MTP*, Vol. 22, S. No. 1274, Job 34.31,32, n.d., 40-42.

60 C.H. Spurgeon, 'God's People in the Furnace', *NPSP*, Vol. 1, S. No. 35, Isaiah 48:10, delivered 12 August 1855, 273.

61 See, e.g., Spurgeon, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, Matthew 20:17-19, 170.

62 Spurgeon, 'Gratitude For Deliverance from the Grave', 2.

56 C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Pitifulness of the Lord...', 325.

57 Spurgeon, 'Two Good Things', 640-42.

were two qualities that Spurgeon prized highly, and without adversity there would be no opportunity for them to be tested and to grow. Patience was another virtue which was both epitomised by Christ and developed through suffering. Christ had shown patience through suffering and in this he was the pattern for believers.⁶³

The connection between patience and suffering was a theme taken up by Spurgeon writing under the pen name of 'John Ploughman'. After asserting that 'the disciples of a patient saviour should be patient themselves', Spurgeon's *alter ego* insisted that affliction was a God-given opportunity to show and develop patience.⁶⁴ Elsewhere Spurgeon confessed he failed to see how patience would be produced 'apart from affliction'. Just as a veteran warrior was the 'child of battles', so a patient Christian was the 'offspring of adversity'.⁶⁵

These comments on patience are similar to those he made with regard to courage. Virtues such as these could be shown only in trials which required their use. Going through the fire of suffering was, therefore, an essential part of the process of sanctification and growth towards Christian maturity.⁶⁶

Christ had shown courage and patience in the face of suffering; Christians were to do the same, thus growing to become more like Christ themselves.

The sort of toughening up that Spurgeon was sure suffering produced was, he believed, essential preparation for future service. Adversity prepared the soul for 'greater heights of service';⁶⁷ for 'future usefulness' it was essential that 'present sorrow' was born.⁶⁸ This last mentioned comment was from a sermon entitled 'Certain Singular Subjects' in which he also used the phrase 'sanctified trials'.⁶⁹ The idea of afflictions being sanctified to the believer was an important one for him.⁷⁰

Two Christians could have similar experiences of suffering and yet respond in markedly different ways. There was a real danger that suffering would make a believer impatient, hardened and bitter. It could also, potentially, lead them to despair. Worst of all, a believer might blame God or slip into what Spurgeon described as a 'kind of atheism', saying that if God was real he would not allow such suffering.⁷¹ For the 'fire' to purify and not consume it had to be sanctified to the believer. For this to happen God had to be at work in a believer's life as they

63 C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Sheep before the Shearers', *MTP*, Vol. 26, S. No. 1543, Isaiah 53:7, n.d., 349-53.

64 C.H. Spurgeon, *John Ploughman's Talk; Or, Plain Advice for Plain People* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, n.d.), 'On Patience', 36-40.

65 Spurgeon, 'Two Good Things', 640.

66 C.H. Spurgeon, 'The Sitting of the Refiner', *MTP*, Vol. 27, S. No. 1575, Malachi 3:3, n.d., 4; C.H. Spurgeon to W. Cuff, 7 March 1891, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 152.

67 C.H. Spurgeon to W.J. Mayers, 25 July 1874, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 170.

68 Spurgeon, 'Certain Singular Subjects', 251.

69 Spurgeon, 'Certain Singular Subjects', 251.

70 Cf. Spurgeon, *Saint and his Saviour*, 361.

71 C.H. Spurgeon, 'Patient Job And The Baffled Enemy', *MTP*, Vol. 36, S. No. 2172, Job 1:22, delivered 28 August 1890, 604-10.

experienced trials.

In the sermon, 'The Sitting Of The Refiner', the 'refiner' is clearly thought of as being Christ, acting by the agency of the Holy Spirit.⁷² But a Christian was still active in this process. He or she had to respond to God's work by accepting suffering 'humbly'⁷³ and 'willingly'⁷⁴ just as Christ had accepted his suffering.⁷⁵ Following the example set by the earthly life of Christ, Christians were to cooperate with all that the risen glorified Christ wanted to do in their lives through the refining work of suffering. If they did cooperate in this process, then they would become purified through affliction. Where believers were enabled to have the right attitude to suffering, they would become more like Christ and more useful for Christ as a result of their trials. If approached in the right way, suffering would lead to growth towards Christlike holiness.

VIII Suffering and Communion with Christ

Suffering, then, painful as it was, could also convey many benefits, but Spurgeon prized it most for its potential to bring Christians into closer commu-

nion with their Lord. In a sermon entitled 'Job Among The Ashes', he insisted that a believer's suffering could lead to a clearer sight of God. Prosperity was a 'painted window' which shut out 'the clear light of God'. Only when the paint was removed did the window become 'transparent', enabling God to be seen with a new clarity. This had been Job's experience: he had lost everything and this 'paved the way' to his receiving a fuller revelation of God.

The principle on display was that in 'the absence of other goods the good God is the better seen'. Again, Spurgeon stressed that the suffering had to be 'sanctified' for this dynamic to work: affliction did not lead to a clearer view of God in every case. However, where God was at work and a believer responded faithfully to this, then spiritual perception would be heightened. Those who gained a spiritually 'enlightened eye' would learn to thank God for the painful process of suffering by which this sharpened spiritual vision had been attained.

Spurgeon turned to the New Testament to provide another example to set alongside that of Job: 'Who would not go to Patmos if he might see the visions of John?' The deprivations of exile were the context in which John had received his revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it was the witness of both Testaments that suffering could lead to a new vision of God, one which made the trials eminently worthwhile.⁷⁶

⁷² Spurgeon, 'The Sitting of the Refiner', 1, 4.

⁷³ Spurgeon, 'For the Sick and Afflicted', 38-41.

⁷⁴ C.T. Cook (ed.), *Behold The Throne Of Grace: C.H. Spurgeon's Prayers And Hymns* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n.d. [1934]), 'Praise at all Times' (3 November 1889), 81.

⁷⁵ Spurgeon, 'Jesus Declining the Legions', 186-87.

⁷⁶ C.H. Spurgeon, 'Job Among the Ashes', *MTP*, Vol. 34, S. No. 2009, Job 42:5,6, delivered 19 February 1888, 100, 107.

Moreover, this was also Spurgeon's own testimony. In 'The Pitifulness Of The Lord...' he declared,

[T]he Lord has a choice way of manifesting himself unto his servants in their times of weakness. I speak what I do know; for I have trodden...the path upon which shines the inward personal revelation of God. He draws the curtain about the bed of his chosen sufferer and, at the same time he withdraws another curtain which before concealed his Glory!⁷⁷

Scripture and Spurgeon's personal experience agreed. God revealed himself to suffering believers, and did so in a particularly 'choice' way.

In 'Job Among The Ashes' Spurgeon had spoken of how a fuller revelation of God enabled a new closeness to him. The sermon is unusual for him in that it lacked a strong Christological focus. Elsewhere, however, there was a strong stress on suffering as a means to increased closeness to Christ himself. Jesus could be seen more clearly in and as a result of an experience of suffering, and, crucially, he could be known more deeply through it too. In 'The Pitifulness Of The Lord...' Spurgeon insisted that,

[T]hose of us who have done business upon great waters and have endured abundant pain count them happy that endure, even while they are enduring. The people of God find themselves more buoyant in the saltiest seas of sorrow than in other waters. The cross of Christ

doth indeed raise us nearer to God when it is sanctified.⁷⁸

Suffering, when it was considered as a cross given by Christ, drew a believer closer to God. As Spurgeon continued his message he spoke specifically of closeness to Christ. 'Sorrows reveal to us the Man of Sorrows. Grievs waft us to the bosom of our God.' For him, there could be no greater prize, for the 'most delicious of sensations outside of heaven is to faint away on the bosom of the Lord'.⁷⁹

How did Spurgeon believe this dynamic worked? Part of the answer was that 'sorrow and adversity' drove the 'children of God to their knees',⁸⁰ thus fostering increased communion. Similarly, suffering would lead the faithful Christian to search the scriptures as he or she sought comfort and help.⁸¹ A believer, then, was led to seek Christ more diligently in the midst of trials.

This was only one half of the dynamic, however, for Spurgeon was sure that as a suffering believer drew near to God, then God would draw near to them, doing so especially in the person of his crucified and risen Son who was present to the believer by the Spirit. Jesus had shown compassion to suffering people in his earthly ministry, so he would have compassion on

⁷⁸ Spurgeon, 'The Pitifulness of the Lord...', 328.

⁷⁹ Spurgeon, 'The Pitifulness of the Lord...', 329.

⁸⁰ Spurgeon, 'Certain Singular Subjects', 251.

⁸¹ C.H. Spurgeon, 'My Comfort In Affliction', *MTP*, Vol. 31, S. No. 1872, Psalm 119:50, delivered 7 July 1881, 644-45.

⁷⁷ Spurgeon, 'The Pitifulness of the Lord...', 329.

his suffering people in Spurgeon's day;⁸² Jesus had suffered agonies on the cross; so he would be present to those Christians who suffered.

In 'Trial By The Word' the preacher offered the following analogy. A faithful mother, he declared, loved her young child at all times. Nevertheless, it was when the child was sick or injured that her full 'tenderness' was seen. 'If you would read all her heart, you should see her when [the child] scarcely breathes, when she fears that every moment will be its last. Then all the mother is revealed. How she fondles it, and what a store of sweet words she brings forth.'⁸³ Spurgeon's imagery was both intimate and daring, but he believed it was entirely justified, employed as it was to describe the closeness which could exist between God and a faithful, suffering believer. Again, as he spoke of God drawing near, it was Christ whom he especially had in mind, for Christ's suffering gave him a special 'sympathy' with other sufferers.⁸⁴ In this way suffering led to 'near and dear communion' between the believer and Christ.⁸⁵

As this communion was enjoyed, Christ would not only comfort and strengthen the Christian, but the believer would gain yet deeper insight and knowledge of Christ. In 'Communion With Christ And His People', an address given when Spurgeon presided

at the Lord's table at a small, intimate service at Mentone, he declared,

Certain of us have had large fellowship with the Lord Jesus in affliction. 'Jesus wept': He lost a friend, and so have we. Jesus grieved over the hardness of men's hearts: we know that grief. Jesus was exceedingly sorry that the hopeful young man turned away, and went back to the world: we know that sorrow. Those who have sympathetic hearts, and live for others, readily enter into the experience of 'the Man of sorrows'. The wounds of calumny, the reproaches of the proud, the venom of the bigoted, the treachery of the false, and the weakness of the true, we have known in our measure; and therein have had communion with our Lord Jesus.⁸⁶

Once again, the note of personal testimony is unmistakable. The thought that Christ comforts believers in 'affliction' is present, but the dominant motif in this extract appears to be that a believer entered into the sufferings of Christ when he or she suffered. A believer's suffering led them to an increased depth of sympathy with Christ, and a greater knowledge of Christ himself. In Spurgeon's thinking and experience, communion with Christ was always a dynamic concept. As far as the communion experienced through suffering was concerned, a

82 Spurgeon, 'The Pitifulness of the Lord...', 333-34.

83 Spurgeon, 'Trial by the Word', 77-78.

84 Spurgeon, 'The Suffering Saviour's Sympathy', 417.

85 Spurgeon, 'The Pitifulness of the Lord...', 329.

86 C.H. Spurgeon, 'Communion with Christ and his People', in *Till He Come: Communion Meditations* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1896), 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 317.

clearer sight of Christ would lead to increased communion, which would in turn lead to an even fuller revelation of the crucified God. So the dynamic would continue. Suffering had a vitally important role in developing communion with Christ for Spurgeon.

IX Suffering and Ministry

Spurgeon further insisted that believers' afflictions fitted them to be a source of comfort and strength for others. Suffering thus shaped not only the inner dimension of Christian spirituality but its outward expression as well.

Once again, this dynamic—suffering strengthened believers to help others—did not happen automatically. Just as suffering had to be 'sanctified' in order for it to do the believer good, so God had to be active in and through believers if they were to help others, and believers had to cooperate with God in this and be willing to be used by him. Nevertheless, when suffering was sanctified in this further way, Christians could become a rich source of blessing to fellow, struggling pilgrims.⁸⁷ There were, Spurgeon believed, numerous instances of this dynamic at work in scripture.

Regarding the Psalmist, David, Spurgeon said, 'What a mercy it is for us all that [he] was not an untried man! We have all been enriched by his painful experience... May it not be a blessing to others that we also are

tried? If so, ought we not to be right glad to contribute our quota to the benefit of the redeemed family?'⁸⁸ Spurgeon's point was that David's painful experiences, as shared in many of the Psalms attributed to him, had been of great benefit to those (like Spurgeon himself) who had read them and received help from them.

Those who suffered in Spurgeon's day could be glad that they too had the opportunity to minister comfort and strength to others. The supreme example of the sufferer reaching out to help others in affliction, however, was not David but Christ himself. Spurgeon spoke of Jesus learning not only obedience but also 'sympathy' through sufferings.⁸⁹ Christ had repeatedly reached out in compassion to others,⁹⁰ even doing so when he was on the cross.⁹¹ Suffering believers were to follow his example.⁹²

Christians who were, or had been, 'afflicted' in their journey of faith were able to help other struggling believers in a number of different ways. If they patiently endured through intense suffering their example might act as a spur and encouragement to others.

88 C.H. Spurgeon, *My Sermon Notes: A Selection from Outlines of Discourses Delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle... From Genesis To Proverbs I to LXIV* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d. [1884]), No. 54, Psalm 143:9, 327.

89 Spurgeon, 'The Suffering Saviour's Sympathy', 409.

90 Spurgeon, *Gospel of the Kingdom* (Matthew 14:14), 113.

91 C.H. Spurgeon, 'Christ's Plea for Ignorant Sinners', *MTP*, Vol. 38, S. No. 2263, Luke 23:34, delivered 5 October 1890, 313, 317.

92 Spurgeon, 'The Suffering Saviour's Sympathy', 410.

87 This theme has been expounded by a range of Christian spiritual writers. Its classic expression is probably found in H. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994 [1979]).

Spurgeon believed that some were especially chosen to suffer and so 'to be monuments of the Lord's special dealings; a sort of lighthouse to other mariners'.⁹³ By showing fortitude and faithfulness in suffering a Christian would give an example which others could follow.

Spurgeon was himself regarded as an example of someone who bore great suffering with particular patience and heroism. This was certainly how he was viewed by many of his students.⁹⁴ It was not enough, however, to suffer silently. The lessons of suffering had to be actively shared. Spurgeon sought to do this through his books and preaching.⁹⁵ He also got alongside people more personally.

This latter point can be seen through letters he wrote to those who were afflicted. In *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, the editor, C.H. Spurgeon's son, Charles Spurgeon, included a section headed 'Words of Sympathy'.⁹⁶ For this section, twelve letters were selected, eleven of which were written to bereaved friends. In

these, Spurgeon sought to help those who were suffering.

The letters are revealing. In them Spurgeon expressed his own grief at various situations faced by his family and friends. He assured his son, Charles, that he would 'never forget the day' he heard of the death of one of Charles' children, his own grandchild.⁹⁷ On another occasion Spurgeon wrote to Thomas H. Olney saying that he 'felt stunned' by news of the death of Thomas's brother, William Olney, one of Spurgeon's deacons: 'I could not realise it; indeed, I cannot now', he said.⁹⁸ He also offered comfort. This included practical help, sending a cheque to help defray funeral expenses, for example.⁹⁹ He repeatedly assured grieving friends of his prayers,¹⁰⁰ and sometimes recorded the nature of his petitions in the letter. 'I beseech the Lord to minister comfort both to you and your sorrowing wife', Spurgeon wrote to William Cuff, a former student, following a family bereavement.¹⁰¹

He gave encouragement too. He was

93 Spurgeon, *My Sermon Notes... From Genesis to Proverbs*, No. 37, Job 3:23, 230.

94 J.C. Carlile, *C.H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1933), 130-31.

95 For further examples from C.H. Spurgeon's writing, see, e.g., *John Ploughman's Talk*, 'On Patience', 36-40; *Evening By Evening*, 2 Timothy 2:12 (July 3), 186.

96 C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 166-72. Cf. other letters to those who were suffering, e.g., C.H. Spurgeon to unnamed friend, 24 July 1873, No. 9a; C.H. Spurgeon to unnamed friend, 3 June 1882, No. 44, both in 'Original Correspondence of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1863-1886'.

97 C.H. Spurgeon to Mr and Mrs C. Spurgeon, 11 September 1890, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 166.

98 C.H. Spurgeon to T.H. Olney, October 1875, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 167.

99 C.H. Spurgeon to E.H. Bartlett, 14 December 1887, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 169.

100 E.g. C.H. Spurgeon to T.H. Olney, October 1875; to W.J. Mayers, 25 July 1874, in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 167; 170.

101 C.H. Spurgeon to W. Cuff, '30 November [no year]', in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 170.

especially quick to say that he believed the Lord himself would comfort his friends in their grief,¹⁰² and wanted people to know, in line with the theological framework outlined in Section V of this article, that their suffering did not fall outside of God's sovereignty. Indeed, suffering could be a sign of God's special love. To Cuff he wrote,

It must be a very severe stroke to you, and it is a sign that our Father loves you very much and thinks a great deal of you. I had a watch once which I allowed to lie at ease and never worried it with cleaning for I thought it worthless; but one which keeps time to a second gets wound up every night with a key which touches its inmost springs, and sometimes it gets taken to pieces—for it is worth it.¹⁰³

Such a passage can sound like inappropriate moralising, but the letter appears to have been well received by the recipient and, indeed, treasured. The fact that Cuff made this and other letters available to Charles Spurgeon with permission to publish is, in itself, evidence of this.¹⁰⁴ William Williams wrote positively of the help Spurgeon gave to suffering Christians, saying that his friend 'was as familiar with the

glades of grief and the dark narrow gorges of depression as any man, or he could never with such consummate art have ministered comfort to the suffering...'.¹⁰⁵

Spurgeon had himself learnt the lessons he sought to share with others; suffering had become a crucial aspect of the way he related to God. People knew this, and consequently they knew that when he spoke about suffering his words were not abstract theologising, rather they had the force of personal experience behind them. J.C. Carlile's comment on Spurgeon's battles with suffering is worth quoting: 'The greater part of his career was lived in fellowship with physical pain. How bravely he endured his cross, and made suffering contribute to the comfort and the strengthening of others.'¹⁰⁶ These letters help illustrate this point, and show some of the specific ways Spurgeon sought to help.

He also believed that the lessons of suffering could be shared in evangelism. On one occasion he pictured a believer, who had displayed Christian graces when under severe trial, being questioned by an unbeliever.

'I saw how happy you were, dear friend, when you were in trouble. I saw you sick the other day, and I noticed your patience. I knew you to be slandered, and I saw how calm you were. Can you tell me why you were so calm and self-contained?' It is a very happy thing if the Christian can turn round and answer such a question fully. I like

102 E.g. C.H. Spurgeon to T.H. Olney, October 1875; to J.W. Harrald [n.d.], in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 167, 171-72. Cf. C.H. Spurgeon to W. Baldock, 6 October 1886, 'Various Spurgeon Letters', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room, (K1.9).

103 C.H. Spurgeon to W. Cuff, '30 November [no year]', in C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 170.

104 C. Spurgeon (ed.), *Letters of C.H. Spurgeon*, 'Introduction', 9.

105 Williams, *Personal Reminiscences* (rev. edn.), 24.

106 Carlile, *C.H. Spurgeon*, 130.

to see him ready to give a reason for the hope that is in him with meekness and fear, saying—‘This is my comfort in my affliction.’ I want you, if you have enjoyed comfort from God, to get it packed up in such a form that you can pass it on to a friend. Get it explained to your own understanding, so that you can tell others what it is, so that they may taste the consolation where-with God has comforted you.¹⁰⁷

It was not just other Christians who could be helped by a believer’s suffering. Rightly shared, a believer’s faithfulness in difficulty could have an evangelistic impact on the non-believer. Spurgeon’s approach to suffering thus connected both with those who were already Christ’s people and those who had yet to experience ‘God’s consolation’ for themselves. Suffering not only shaped the way he related to God but also the way he related to others. The life and ministry of C.H. Spurgeon was decisively moulded by his personal suffering and the ways he responded to it. Spurgeon’s story might be a story of triumph, but it is not a story of triumphalism.

X Conclusion

‘The rod of God teacheth us more than all the voices of his ministers’, said

¹⁰⁷ Spurgeon, ‘My Comfort in Affliction’, 643.

Spurgeon in his sermon, ‘Trial By The Word’.¹⁰⁸ Such a comment can seem surprising coming from one who had such a high view of preaching, but it shows the vital importance of suffering to Spurgeon’s theology and spirituality. His life and ministry were heavily marked by suffering that was not only physical but also mental and spiritual. He emphasised the benefits that accrued to the believer through ‘sanctified afflictions’. Suffering enabled a believer to grow in virtues such as courage and patience, virtues that were displayed supremely by Christ in his passion. Most importantly, suffering was a crucible in which increased communion with Christ was fashioned, something that was especially precious to Spurgeon.

Christians whose lives were marked by suffering could be a particular source of comfort and strength to fellow believers. Spurgeon was rightly regarded as someone who had persevered through great suffering, and he himself recognised that he had suffered more than many Christians. He and others believed that this gave him a special sympathy with those who were afflicted. The lessons of suffering—for example, that a gracious God comforts sufferers, drawing near to them in Jesus—were those he sought to pass on to others. Overall, the reality of suffering loomed large over his ministry.

¹⁰⁸ Spurgeon, ‘Trial by the Word’, 76.

The Gospels and Cultural Adaptation in Mission

Frank Koppelin
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KEYWORDS: *Revelation, scripture, Babel, missions, gospel, culture, Koran, Hellenistic culture*

I Missions in light of cultural diversity

The diversity among people groups and cultures is, according to the biblical witness, not principally a consequence of sin. Rather, it is desired by God. The diversity and variety between cultures is mentioned in the early chapters of the Bible, which lay the foundation for the teaching on sin found in the entire Holy Scriptures, and is not to be understood negatively as a consequence of sin. This diversity is also not to be understood as a consequence of God's judgment that confused languages at the building of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). By confusing languages, God wanted to achieve exactly what prior thereto he had given to mankind as a command, namely the spreading of humanity over the entire earth ('fill the earth', Gen. 1:28; 9:1).

This brought about the division of humanity into a multitude of families and peoples as well as occupations, abilities, and cultures.

With the building of the Tower of Babel, the establishment of a world culture was sought, which has since then always been the goal of Satan. This is seen in the book of Revelation and in the person of the Anti-Christ in the New Testaments. This is what is said of the 'beast,' which has his power from the 'dragon' (Rev. 13:1-10): 'He was given power to make war...[and]...was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation...' God, on the other hand, wants neither a united world city nor a united world government nor a united world humanism. God and his Word guarantee the unity of the world without a visible structure on earth. God 'scattered' mankind 'over the face of the whole earth' (Gen. 11:9).

From the sons of Noah came 'the people who were scattered over the earth' and the 'nations' spread out

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(Gen. 10:5). For this reason, the formation of individual peoples via family trees can be explained (Gen. 10:1-32), and at the end of such explanation, it is said that 'from these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood' (Gen. 10:32). God is therefore the creator of all peoples, because 'from one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live' (Acts 17:26; similarly, Dt. 32:8; Psalm 74:17).

Christians are people who are freed from all cultural bondage. They no longer have to recognize human traditions and commandments next to God's commandments. This is made particularly clear in Mark 7:1-13, where Jesus strongly criticises the Pharisees because they had elevated their human culture to the level of God's binding commandments. However, Christians can judge other cultures in the light of the Bible only if they have learned to discern between their own culture, even if it is a pious culture, and the commandments of God that cross over cultural bounds.

Mark 7:1-13 again is the best starting point for looking at this issue. Very reputable and pious motives prompted the Pharisees to enact supplemental guidelines binding for everyone in addition to, and even against, God's Word. Jesus vehemently criticizes the Pharisees, because they have thereby made themselves into law-givers next to God: 'They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men' (Mark 7:7; Mt. 15:9). Because Christians belong solely to

Christ and are solely subordinate to his Word, they cannot look at their own culture and the cultures of others only critically. Rather, they are obliged out of love to be attuned to others' cultures.

In I Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul establishes the necessity to be attuned to others' cultures when conducting evangelization with the very point that he is free with respect to all men:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

It is apparent that a Christian can live in his own culture in such a manner that he does not notice one of two results—that in the best case he is misunderstood, and in the worst case, he is a hindrance (1 Cor. 9,12) to others to understand the gospel. Christians are therefore not only responsible to see to it that the message of salvation through Christ is proclaimed. They are also responsible to see to it that the message of salvation through Christ can be understood. That is why the

Bible is able to be translated into every conceivable language, and the gospel can and should be expressed in every dialect and cultural form.

World missions do not bypass the preexisting sociological facts. Rather, missions strategy orients itself by them. For this reason, Paul started churches in metropolitan areas and centres of commerce and transportation. He left it to these churches to penetrate the surrounding areas. Paul himself started new churches in areas that had not been reached with the gospel. He mostly started churches in centrally located cities, soon installed elders whom he had trained, and then soon moved to other locations. He left the entire penetration of the region to the churches in the cities. Regarding the church in Thessalonica the following is said,

And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it.... (1 Thess. 1:7-8).

II A Comparison with the Koran

For Christians it goes without saying that the Holy Scriptures may be translated into every language and that missions work does not consist of reading out holy texts in their original language(s). Even the Sunday sermon and every form of proclamation of 'God's Word' within Christianity are based on the idea that a read Bible text requires

commentary for the hearer. The earlier Lutheran and pietistic saying that in worship one goes 'under the Word' and that it is the responsibility of the one preaching to proclaim 'God's Word' is not honoured by simply using, as close to the original as possible, as many and long Bible texts as possible. Rather, it is important to speak the message of the Bible as relevantly and as understandably as possible into the life of the hearers.

We have seen that this sign of the Christian faith is addressed, even required, by the Holy Scriptures. Jesus and Paul proclaim the Word of God by propagating its content in new forms, not by simply reading out existing texts. In Acts 17:16-34, we find an outstanding example of how one can express Old Testament and New Testament contents in the language and thought of another culture.

A comparison of the Bible and the Koran makes it evident that this idea is not self-evident for a holy scripture. Koran Arabic is unique in its sound and has fascinated millions, and it is very difficult to translate. However, this Arabic text solely remains 'god's word', and for this reason millions of Muslims pray their daily prayers in this holy language, which most of them naturally do not understand. Alongside this is the fact that for hundreds of years, the Koran was not allowed to be translated. It was not until the twentieth century, in the course of missionary and political awakening, that the Koran was translated by Muslims themselves and disseminated. It is to be noted that every translation of the Koran is viewed as a commentary and not as 'god's word'.

Comparison of the Understanding of Inspiration between the Bible and the Koran, i.e., the Understanding within Islam¹

Bible	Koran
God and man are both authors.	God alone is the author.
God is committed to His own Word.	God is not bound to his word; rather, he is sovereign over it.
Reflects the human personality of the authors	Has nothing to do with personality
Many and varied authorship	No human author; only a recipient
Large literary variety ²	Practically a uniform style
No perfection in the language used	Perfection in the language used
No holy language; multiple languages used	Holy language
Obligation to translate	Translation is for all intents and purposes not possible.
Textual criticism is allowed and is a part of history.	Textual criticism has not been allowed and has been suppressed.
Textual critical versions printed	Uniformity of transmission stated by belief
Created over thousands of years	Revealed in the matter of a few years
Contains many details about its historical origin	Contains practically no historical details regarding its origin
Many historical details (e.g., chronologies, geography)	Scant concrete historical details

¹ Details in Thomas Schirmmacher, *Koran und Bibel* (Hänsler: Neuhausen, 2009) (English translation forthcoming).

² Comp. Thomas Schirmmacher, *Die Vielfalt biblischer Sprache: Über 100 alt- und neutestamentliche Stilarten, Ausdrucksweisen, Redeweisen und Gliederungsformen (The Diversity of Biblical Language: Over 100 Old and New Testament Types of Style, Expression, Modes of Speaking and Tactical Forms)* (Bonn: VKW, 1997¹; 2001²).

III The Recipients of the Four Gospels

In the following, we will attempt to demonstrate that the Bible, with the incredible fact that it contains the life story of the founder of Christianity in quadruplicate, at the same time thereby provides testimony to the necessity that the gospel has to be proclaimed to each target group in new and varying ways. At the same time, the Gospels also substantiate that the

missionary work of the first generation of Christians had exactly this characteristic.

The Gospels were also indisputably compiled in order to proclaim the gospel. They were also meant to provide, in addition to the oral 'evangelisation', a written proclamation of the gospel. That is, after all, the reason for their name! While gospel (Greek: *evangelion*, good news) is a general indication of the good news of redemption by Jesus Christ, a Gospel tells the story of Jesus in a special sense—and it is only from such multiple reports that one can come refer to the plural term 'Gospels'. It is significant that the authors are referred to as evangelists.

In the cases of Matthew and John, the Gospels stem from apostles, that is to say, from the circle of the twelve disciples who lived with Jesus. Mark was a co-worker with the Apostle Peter, and Luke was a co-worker with Paul. As a basis, the writers of the Gospels used oral or even written material retained from the times when they listened to Jesus teaching, as was the custom for Jewish rabbis and their disciples; they also used the testimony of witnesses (Luke 1:1-4). All this material was collected and arranged by the authors of the Gospels and framed with their own reports and comments.

In order to be able to better understand a written document, it is, in any event, helpful to know the recipient of the document. The Gospels also were intended for a certain circle of recipients, which we will look at more closely. What do biblical studies and introductory New Testament scholarship roughly tell us about this?

No Gospel expresses clearly for whom it was written, even when Luke,

in the forward to his Gospel, names a highly venerated Theophilus (Luke 1:3). Although Theophilus is initially named as a recipient, according to more common practice, it was more likely that he was the financial backer or promoter of the Gospel. In any case, he was surely not the sole or literal recipient.³ For that reason one can look at the contents of the Gospels in order to come to a conclusion regarding the recipients. In the following, all four Gospels will be investigated with regard to their recipients.

1. The Gospel of Matthew

According to the traditional view, Matthew wrote his Gospel to the Jews. Zahn mentions the background of the Gospel as an 'historical apologetic of the Nazarene and his congregation to Judaism'.⁴ In so doing, Matthew's Gospel is a document that is directed toward Jews and Jewish Christians.⁵

There are also some internal considerations that make this conclusion clear. An often and fondly repeated argument is that the readers were obviously familiar with Jewish customs and practices, and these did not have to be explained. The entire Gospel presupposes the Old Testament as a known

³ Gerhard Hörster, *Einleitung und Bibelkunde zum Neuen Testament (Introduction and New Testament Biblical Studies)* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1993), 52.

⁴ Theodor Zahn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Introduction to the New Testament)* vol. 2. 3. ed. (Leipzig: Deichert'sche, 1907), 268, 294, 303.

⁵ Wilhelm Michaelis, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Introduction to the New Testament)*, (Bern: BEG, 1946).

entity and is based upon it.⁶ Even the concept of the Kingdom of God, which plays an important role in other Gospels, is translated into a Jewish formulation that avoids using the name of God and is therefore expressed as the 'Kingdom of Heaven'.

Even the famous Fragments of Papias⁷ should not be too lightly placed in the category of the improbable. Papias mentions that the Gospel of Matthew was present in the Hebrew language and Aramaic language, respectively.⁸ The Jewish background becomes even more clearly evident, since in the Greek-speaking world, this Gospel was initially rarely read.

2. The Gospel of Mark

According to tradition, Mark wrote down the sermons of Peter. Mark was with Peter in Rome, and Mark had his notes with him when he wrote the Gospel, after being urged to write by the congregation in Rome.⁹ Mark concentrated on what was conveyed to him by Peter.

Mark's Gospel is conspicuous evi-

dence of a document, the recipients of which did not have a Jewish background. Customs and practices are explained by Mark (Mark 7:3), Latinisms¹⁰ are present (e.g., Mark 5:9), and from this one can see that Mark was writing to a Roman audience. While one should deal with this thesis with some reservation, it does admittedly fit well into the picture.¹¹

3. The Gospel of Luke

Luke, as already mentioned, includes a dedication in his Gospel. Since this was common in Hellenistic culture, here is evidence for the fact that he wrote for a Hellenistic culture.¹² Luke's emphasis lies clearly on the global claims of the gospel (e.g., the angel's announcement at the birth of Jesus; Luke 2:10, 14). Thus one can say that Luke's Gospel was written to Greeks and Gentiles, respectively.¹³ Especially when one reads the Gospel with the Book of Acts, this thought is visible: What is at stake is that the gospel is preached in all the world (Luke 24:47). For this reason, one can agree with Craig Blomberg when he writes: '...he perhaps knowingly tried to reach a broad audience.'¹⁴

Luke's Gospel is distinguished by an elevated Greek style. Apart from the

6 Hörster, *Einleitung und Bibelkunde*, 42; comp. See more below.

7 Quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* III,39,16; comp. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Introduction to the New Testament)*. 21. edition (Heidelberg: Quelle + Meyer, 1983), 91ff.

8 See the following discussion by Erich Mauerhofer. *Einleitung in die Schriften des Neuen Testaments (Introduction to the Writings of the New Testament)* vol. 1. 2. Edition, (Stuttgart: Hänssler Publishing House, 1997), 53-58.

9 Craig L. Blomberg. *Jesus und die Evangelien (Jesus and the Gospels)*, (Nuremberg: VTR, 2000.), 118f.

10 Werner Georg Kümmel *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 69 for examples.

11 cf. also Gerhard Hörster, *Einleitung und Bibelkunde*, 33.

12 cf. Armin Daniel Baum. *Lukas als Historiker der letzten Jesusreise (Luke as Historian of Jesus' Last Journey)*, (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1993).

13 cf. Mauerhofer, *Einleitung*, 157, 161.

14 Blomberg, *Jesus und die Evangelien*, 149.

term ‘amen,’ there are no Hebrew words to be found in it.¹⁵ The language and the style indicate that the Gospel is knowingly directed toward Greek-speaking readers. Luke himself might very well have come out of a Greek-Hellenistic Gentile background, as is seen in Colossians 4:10-14. Luke is mentioned there, among others (4, 14); however prior thereto Paul expressly names those of Jewish background who are accompanying him (verse 11).

4. The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John occupies a special position. It complements the first three Gospels, and John describes the intention of his Gospel in John 20:30-31. He intends to give readers certainty that Jesus is the Christ. From these words it appears that the Gospel of John was certainly intended for the church.¹⁶ John wanted to give the church a footing and certainty for their faith.¹⁷ For this reason, one sees in the letters again and again the testimony that seeks to express the fact that ‘I was there!’

¹⁵ Hörster, *Bibelkunde und Einleitung*, 45.

¹⁶ Klaus-Michael Bull, *Bibelkunde des Neuen Testaments (Biblical Study of the New Testament)*. Neukirchen—Ulun: Neukirchner, 1997), 41.

¹⁷ Also Mauerhofer, *Einleitung*, 245.

¹⁸ E.g., Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission* (Frankfurt et al: Peter Lang, 1999). Matt: 21-48, Mark: 37-48; Luke: 49-60; John: 77-95; Andreas J. Köstenberger, Peter T. O’Brien. *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 11. Downers Grove (IL), 2001. Matthew: 87-110, Mark: 73-86, Luke: 111-126; John: 203-226; Thomas Schirrmacher, *World Missions—The Heart of the Christ-*

The Four Gospels as Evidence that the Proclamation of the Gospel was Accommodated to the Target Group

For the recipients of the Gospel the following picture can be conceived:

Gospel	Probable Target Group
Matthew	Jews
Mark	Romans
Luke	Greeks (Gentiles)
John	The Church

With this, there is evidence marshaled from within the New Testament itself that the message of Jesus Christ is not meant to be read unchanged in one holy original language, but rather that translation, selection, and explanation are necessary to ensure that a particular target group can understand the gospel message according to their own cultural and language.

This would be a good point for a transition to an investigation of the missionary thought found within the four Gospels. It has been demonstrated exegetically numerous times that in all four Gospels, in various ways, the central theme is missions as proclamation of the gospel. Here we see that missions also has to do with proclamation among the Gentiles and is part of the goal to reach the entire world.¹⁸ The Gospels propagate what they themselves already do.

ian Faith, edition afem—mission scripts 18 (Bonn: VKW, 2001).

Leaders from Disciples: The Church's Contribution to Leadership Development

Russell L. Huizing

KEYWORDS: *Augustine, Anabaptists, Bonhoeffer, imitation, incarnation, servanthood, teaching, contextualisation, Christology*

Leaders From Disciples: The Church's Contribution to Leadership Development

The holy grail of leadership research is successfully identifying and developing leaders. Meta-theories specifying great individuals, specific traits, environmental contingencies, behavioural adjustments, management systems, and relational influences have all been proposed as answers to this search.¹ Much of ecclesial leadership has followed these patterns by attempting to adapt non-ecclesial leadership models to an ecclesial context.²

¹ Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* 6th ed (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006).

² Mary Ellen Drushal and Jerry R. Flora, 'Exemplary Christian Leadership: Beyond

An excellent example of this is the adaptation of the servant leadership theory proposed by Greenleaf.³ The theory's self-described pursuit of 'legitimate power and greatness' suggests that its underlying servant paradigm could be at odds with a Christian servant paradigm (cf. Lk. 22:25-27). Unfortunately, many ecclesial leadership models that draw upon non-ecclesial research rely upon the model's pragmatism and fail to question its underlying philosophical paradigms.⁴

This does not suggest that we should abandon the truths that are

Mastery to Joy', *Epiphany International* 14, no. 1 (2008): 40-41.

³ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977).

⁴ Although see Theresa Kaetkaew Punna-chet, 'Catholic Servant-Leadership in Education: Going Beyond the Secular Paradigm', *International Studies in Catholic Education* 1, no. 2 (2009): accessed September 2, 2010, doi: 10.1080/194225309031137921.

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established through non-ecclesial leadership research. However, it does suggest that ecclesial leadership has not only a distinct contribution to make to organizational leadership studies but also an obligation to develop a unique ecclesial leadership theory drawn from its sacred texts. With nearly 47% of the New Testament containing narrative about the ministry of Jesus and nearly 23% of the New Testament written by Paul, one of its most influential early leaders, ample resources to identify a uniquely Christian ecclesial leadership theory exist.⁵

Jesus took a band of relatively untrained individuals and within a short period had qualified them to lead his mission to change the world—which they promptly began to do. Theologians typically refer to his method of doing this as discipleship. This approach was relational, intentional, informal, within the context of community, and outward focused.⁶

Though the discipling method of Jesus certainly involved times of teaching, Jesus' discipleship model should not be thought of as strictly a teacher-student model.⁷ The final command given to his disciples was to go and make more disciples (Mt. 28:18-20) which encompassed the dissemination of information through teaching but also—and perhaps more importantly—the observation of those teach-

ings in 'attitudes, values, skills, and behaviours which are appropriate for all those who are followers of God'.⁸ This was the model of follower expansion instituted and commanded by Jesus. This does not mean that only leaders are called to multiply disciples—all followers are under the final command of Jesus. However, it is through the faithful fulfilment of this model of discipleship that new leaders develop and are recognized by the community.

One early Christian community example of this leadership development is Paul (cf. Acts 9:27, 11:25-26, 13:1-3). His pastoral epistles are of special importance as they represent a recognized leader of the church instructing other leaders of the church how to develop the next generation of leaders. As might be expected, Paul passes on to these leaders the model of leadership that he himself was imitating, that of Jesus,—one in which the faith is passed on to new followers through teachings that are observed (2 Tim. 2:2, Tit. 2:1-7).⁹

I Surveying Disciplemaking

Discipleship, then, appears to be the primary initiative not only in increasing the number of followers of Jesus but also in the development of Christ-following leaders. Though researchers should not construe the Bible as a manual with a neat discipleship outline, if

5 Felix Just, *New Testament Statistics* (2005, September 2), Retrieved November 12, 2010, from Catholic Resources: <catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT-Statistics-Greek.htm>.

6 Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, 'Making Disciples and the Christian Faith', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (2005):240-250.

7 Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 247.

8 Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 250.

9 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'The Structured Ministry of the Church in the Pastoral Epistles', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 66, no. 4 (2004): 582-596.

the primary initiative of the disciple of Jesus is to make other disciples of Jesus, then the characteristics of discipleship ought to be implicit in the narrative and didactic material of the New Testament.¹⁰ A brief survey of the New Testament material on discipleship will show this.

1 Matthew

The disciples of Jesus, as portrayed by Matthew, consistently seemed to think of discipleship in primarily institutional or charismatic terms.¹¹ However, rather than disciples being great individuals who charismatically lead others, Jesus unswervingly presented a picture of disciples who were non-offensive, humble, forgiving, generous, servants who recognized their own weaknesses and the weaknesses of others and were willing to put others ahead of themselves in order to accomplish the mission.¹² Of course, Jesus himself modelled the greatest example of this on the cross. It is exactly in the cross that we see that discipleship as Jesus instituted it, not simply some mystical experience. Rather, it is an all or nothing statement of faithfulness and obedience.

It is in this light that the Sermon on the Mount is understood as something more than a spiritualized allegory. Instead, it is Jesus' statement that dis-

cipleship has a visible influence on the daily practices of the individual, which in turn affects spiritual formation.¹³

Throughout church history, various underlying presuppositions of the Sermon on the Mount have led to four distinct perspectives on the sermon's relationship to discipleship: (a) commands to be followed in order to do God's will, (b) what doing God's will results in, (c) a best-case perspective that no follower can be expected to fully enjoy, or (d) examples of ethical behaviour to open the eyes of disciples to right living.¹⁴ All four views can be held in tension with each other rather than trying to identify the one best view.

Irrespective of which presuppositional perspective is held, one would be mistaken to believe that following Jesus' call to discipleship would lead to social or religious recognition. On the contrary, following Jesus in faith and instituting the life changes inherent in following him is likely to lead to social marginalization and place one at odds with the religious establishment.¹⁵

2 Mark

Discipleship as presented in the

10 John F. O'Grady, *Disciples and Leaders: The Origins of Christian Ministry in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

11 Rollins G. Grams, 'Not "Leader" but "Little Ones" in the Father's Kingdom: The Character of Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel', *Transformation*, 21, no. 2 (2004): 114.

12 Grams, 'Not "Leader"', 121-123.

13 Joshua Thomas Searle, 'Is the Sermon on the Mount Too Unrealistic to Serve as a Resource for Christian Discipleship and Spiritual Formation?', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 9, no. 2 (2009): 42.

14 Daniel Patte, *Discipleship According to the Sermon on the Mount: Four Legitimate Readings, Four Plausible Views of Discipleship, and Their Relative Values* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

15 Warren Carter, 'Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 59, no. 1 (1997): 58-75.

Gospel of Mark is strongly Christ-centric. From the opening sentence to the ending verse (whether v. 8 or v. 20), Jesus is the central focus of this book. Clarity of focus is an important precursor to the disciple truly recognizing Jesus for who he is (Mk. 8:22-30).¹⁶

Mark further emphasizes this focus by contrasting the frailty and faithlessness of the twelve with the eagerness of outsiders like Bartimaeus.¹⁷ Even when Jesus himself is most sorely tempted in Gethsemane, he remains faithful by submitting himself to the will of the Father.

Such times of hopelessness are quite distinguished from the disciple's response to the storms on the lake where faithlessness was on display.¹⁸ The times of difficulty in the life of Christ highlighted the implicit struggle associated with following Jesus and the intentional effort required to remain faithful to him.¹⁹

Despite Mark's emphasis on focusing on Jesus, such a focus ought not to lead to a spectator role. Mark is clear that welcoming Jesus in and showing

him hospitality is a right response to what the disciple learns by focusing on him.²⁰ Through these illustrations from the life of Jesus, the disciple of Jesus is challenged to do likewise in the name of Jesus in culturally and socio-economically diverse contexts.²¹

However, even this hospitable response to Jesus, and through him to the world, is no collegial façade. The calling, mission, and servant-mindedness of the disciples lead them into the role of priest, interceding as a reflection of Jesus between the world and God.²²

Ultimately, the Gospel of Mark contributes to the understanding of discipleship by focusing on the presence of Jesus, extending his practices to the disciple, furthering his transformation in the life of the disciple, and deepening the disciple's knowledge of him.²³

3 Other New Testament Insights

Though Matthew and Mark represent the primary sources for most scholarship on discipleship, the entire New Testament is filled with insights of which only a sampling is possible. A consistent theme in the discipleship sources of the New Testament is what Nelson called the paradox of disciple-

16 Marvin Meyer, 'Taking Up the Cross and Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 37, no. 2 (2002): 232.

17 Leroy Andrew Huizinga, 'Solus Christus: The Markan Contrast Between Jesus and His Disciples', *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 35, no. 6 (2008): 408-409; Leif E. Vaage, 'An Other Home: Discipleship in Mark as Domestic Asceticism', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 71, no. 4 (2009): 751-752.

18 Huizinga, 'Solus Christus', 409.

19 Vaage, 'An Other Home', 744-745.

20 Annang Asumang, "'And the Angels Waited on Him" (Mark 1:13): Hospitality and Discipleship in Mark's Gospel', *Conspectus (South African Theological Seminary)*, 8 (2009): 5.

21 Asumang, 'And the Angels', 20-22.

22 Demetrios Trakatellis, "'Akolouthi Moi/Follow Me" (Mk. 2.14): Discipleship and Priesthood', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 30, no. 3 (1985): 271-285.

23 Suzanne Wats Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

24 Peter K. Nelson, *Leadership and Discipleship: A Study of Luke 22:24-30* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994).

ship.²⁴ The disciple who wants to be great must become a servant who expects trials through which Jesus will bring about exultation.²⁵ Although the disciples are called to be God's slaves, they remain leaders. The faithful disciple is to reign with Christ always in the context of servanthood.

In line with this theme of paradoxical discipleship, examples in Scripture of leaders rising from within the community of followers tend to emphasize individuals outside the ranks of leadership taking on new and necessary roles of leadership.²⁶ Furthermore, the promotion of these 'outside' leaders is not based upon some charismatic display of spiritual gifts. Rather, the distinguishing mark of the ecclesial leader—and ultimately of all spiritually maturing believers—is that of jars of clay who are filled with the fellowship of sharing in suffering with Christ.²⁷ The boast of the disciple—and the ecclesial leader—is a boast of weakness through which God can be glorified.²⁸

Discipleship then becomes an imitation of the cross of Christ rather than an imitation of qualities and characteristics of great individuals.²⁹ To be sure, through the trials God will bring about restoration, reconciliation, redemption, resurrection, and ultimately vin-

dication. This is what makes the trials of the disciple bearable and even transformational—the life of Christ on full display in the resurrection.³⁰ Thus, the life of the disciple becomes a retelling of the ultimate story of Christ who gave up the glories of heaven embracing humility, humanity, obedience, and ultimately death so that through his resurrection and reign God the Father might have his glory on full display.³¹

II The Characteristics of Disciples

The general contours of discipleship begin to take shape with this survey of discipleship source material. However, as Dale noted, there are quite diverse examples of leadership and discipleship characteristics among the twelve apostles alone: (a) Peter, the leader with initiative who needs direction, (b) Andrew, the leading follower, (c) James and John, the ambitious leaders who are faithful disciples, (d) Philip, the cautious leader and pragmatic disciple, (e) Thomas, the questioning leader and devoted disciple, (f) and Judas, the leader with potential who failed.³²

As can be seen, defining specific characteristics that will be relevant to every disciple of Christ or even just to a subset of ecclesial leaders will necessarily be broad in its description. Still, certain characteristics do seem to

²⁵ Nelson, *Leadership and Discipleship*.

²⁶ C. K. Robertson, 'The Limits of Leadership: Challenges to Apostolic Homeostasis in Luke-Acts', *Anglican Theological Review*, 87, no. 2 (2005): 273-290.

²⁷ James Thompson, 'Authentic Discipleship: An Introduction to 2 Corinthians,' *Restoration Quarterly*, 19, no. 1 (1976): 4-6.

²⁸ Thompson, 'Authentic Discipleship', 6.

²⁹ Timothy Matthew Slemmons, 'Philippians 3:17-4:1', *Interpretation*, 64, no. 1 (2010): 80.

³⁰ John Lewis, 'Renewed Journey: A Study of Philippians 3:10-11', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33, no. 4 (2009): 360-362.

³¹ Lewis, 'Renewed Journey', 362.

³² Robert D. Dale, 'Leadership—Follower-ship: The Church's Challenge', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 29, no. 2 (1987): 25-27.'

surface consistently when drawing together the New Testament teachings on following Jesus.

The local church is the field in which discipleship is planted and harvested. Only within the local church can paradigmatic elements of discipleship occur: (a) living in Christ, (b) loving one another, (c) labouring for the Kingdom, and (d) ecclesial practices such as evangelism, worship, teaching, and fellowship.³³

The life of discipleship, however, is not simply a programmatic self-help curriculum. Instead, it should be seen primarily as a covenantal commitment.³⁴ This is because the life of a disciple of Jesus is not based on learning, knowledge or personal characteristics, per se, but is a whole-life surrendering of the self for Christ's service.³⁵ Chennattu showed that the covenantal nature of discipleship could be clearly seen in the covenant meal and dialogue recorded in John 13-17 as well as the reestablishment of the covenant in John 20-21. This covenantal commitment is necessary because the disciple will be asked not only to learn from teaching but also to learn by doing.

Coleman noted the important distinction between teaching and train-

ing.³⁶ Teaching is primarily a cognitive exercise whereby disciples come to an understanding of why they should act in a particular manner. Training, on the other hand, is praxis oriented, assisting the disciple to act upon the knowledge gained through teaching. This praxis of the disciple leads to greater cognitive learning from experience and thus deeper cognitive understanding leading to further praxis.³⁷ The combination of both the cognitive and praxis is critical to the concept of discipleship, as is clear from Jesus' original commissioning statement—'teaching them to obey everything' (Mt. 28:20, NRSV).

This praxis-teaching of the disciple is drawn directly out of the description of post-ascension discipleship provided by John's Gospel, where the disciples' continuing relationship with Jesus is described with verbs of acceptance, involvement, and engagement within the context of the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ Throughout church history, the structure of this praxis-teaching has taken on different traditions: (a) contemplative, (b) holiness, (c) charismatic, (d) social justice, (e) evangelical, and (f) incarnational.³⁹

Despite the differences in the approaches represented by these dif-

33 Chris Shirley, 'It Takes a Church To Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 50, no. 2 (2008): 213-220.

34 Rekha M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006); Wojciech Kowalski, 'The Call to Discipleship: A Challenge to Personal Commitment', *African Ecclesial Review*, 42, no. 3-4 (2000): 130.

35 Kowalski, 'The Call to Discipleship', 130.

36 Lucien E. Coleman, Jr., 'Training Leaders In the Local Church', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 26, no. 3 (1991): 25.

37 Coleman, 'Training Leaders', 32.

38 Patrick Sean Moffett, 'The Spirit of Discipleship', *Human Development*, 29, no. 1 (2008): 35.

39 Thomas Frederick, 'Discipleship and Spirituality From a Christian Perspective', *Pastoral Psychology*, 56, no. 6 (2008): 557-558, accessed September 2, 2010 doi: 10.1007/s11089-008-0148-8

ferent traditions, discipleship remains characteristically contextual. This characteristic makes discipleship applicable to even the most difficult of circumstances. For instance, Ting and Watson found that even in persecution, spiritual formation can occur.⁴⁰ This formation occurred for those who reflected on being part of the larger body of Christ, came to an acceptance of their own frailty, saw God as their Provider, and expanded their concept of suffering to deal with the current persecution circumstances.⁴¹

However, one would be badly mistaken to interpret these characteristics of discipleship as willpower-driven deeds that result in self-actualization. Instead, these characteristics flow out of a lifestyle responding in worship to what God has done for the disciple through Jesus.⁴² The difference between willpower-driven and worship-responsive approaches to discipleship is not a small one. A willpower-driven approach may result in disciples that see their discipling as a mark of accomplishment. A worship-responsive approach leads rather to a disciple fully dependent on God's doing the work of continuing to nurture and grow the individual.⁴³

More importantly, 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 seems to suggest that it is in

the context of worship that the non-believer is most likely to recognize the revelation and presence of God. As such, discipleship naturally leads to mission and evangelism.⁴⁴ A discipleship rooted in a response of worship in the context of the local body that is covenantally committed to praxis-teaching will lead to a spiritual formation that is explicitly evangelistic in that the disciple's entire life becomes an expression of the gospel.

This moves far beyond a truncated gospel message that is implicitly self-centred and self-improving to a gospel that sees God fulfilling all his promises through Jesus who forgives us and frees us from our sins so that we and all creation with us can be reconciled to God.⁴⁵ Ultimately, what this leads to is an imitation of Christ from birth to death to resurrection to ascension.⁴⁶ The disciple of Jesus imitates him in a miraculous new birth, in death to sin, in proclamation of victory over evil, and in ruling under his authority.

Any definition of discipleship must then be at the same time about becoming a disciple as well as being a disci-

40 Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting & Terri Watson, 'Is Suffering Good? An Exploratory Study On the Religious Persecution Among Chinese Pastors', *Journal of Psychology & Theology*, 35, no. 3 (2007): 202-210.

41 Ting & Watson, 'Is Suffering Good?', 206.

42 E. Byron Anderson, 'Worship: Schooling in the Tradition of Jesus', *Theology Today*, 66, no. 1 (2009): 21-32.

43 Anderson, 'Worship', 31.

44 Manfred Waldermar Kohl, 'Mission—The Heart of the Church For the New Millennium', *International Congregational Journal*, 2 (2001): 87-107.

45 Samuel R. Schutz, 'The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism: A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33, no. 4 (2009): 292-305; Timothy Keller, *The Gospel In All Its Forms* (2008, May 23), retrieved November 20, 2010, from Leadership Journal.net: <www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/spring/9.74.html>

46 Brian F. Linnane, 'Dying With Christ: Rahner's Ethics of Discipleship', *Journal of Religion*, 81, no. 2 (2001): 247-248.

ple.⁴⁷ It includes both the phenomena in a non-believer's life leading up to entrance into the faith and the cultivation and growth of the disciple.⁴⁸ It includes the cognitive information that is passed along to all the disciples and the praxis of the disciple to the extent that both thoughts and actions lead to further spiritual transformation.⁴⁹ 'It is a general call for everyone and also an intense process for a select few.'⁵⁰ Ultimately, it is the process whereby an individual, in an ecclesial context, becomes more like Christ.⁵¹

III Historical Exemplars

The benefit of living in contemporary Christianity is that there is literally thousands of years' worth of examples of discipleship placed on historical display. Much like the myriad of references to discipleship in Scripture, this work necessarily must limit the examples given. However, an example from several different eras of Christianity may assist in showing the flexible contextualization of discipleship.

1 Augustine—The Ministry of Discipleship

Possidius provided what might be

called a sequel to Augustine's widely popular (even in the fifth century) *Confessions*.⁵² Whereas *Confessions* was Augustine's account of his life prior to faith and what he had become in Christ, Possidius' *Vita* is an account of Augustine's life as a believer and an ecclesial leader written shortly after Augustine's death. Most of Possidius' material comes from his own personal eyewitness account of Augustine, as well as what would appear to be reliable secondary sources.⁵³

Most of the book comprises chronological accounts of Augustine's time in ministry. Sandwiched between these are significant insights into his character. Especially in the sections dealing with Augustine's character, Possidius showed the impact that Augustine's example had on others. For example, Augustine was required to serve as a civil judge, a responsibility that he loathed.⁵⁴ However, Augustine performed this responsibility with the utmost integrity in the hopes of influencing the citizenry through it.

Possidius also presented Augustine as a bishop who spoke up on behalf of those with little voice and one who consistently contributed to the cultivation of the larger body of Christ.⁵⁵ Throughout these recollections of Augustine, Possidius paints him as practising simplicity, holiness, hospitality, discipline, and forgiveness.

47 James G. Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', *Bibliotheca sacra*, 160, no. 638 (2003): 220.

48 Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', 220.

49 Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', 220.

50 Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', 220.

51 Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', 219-234.

52 Edward L. Smither, "'To Emulate and Imitate:' Possidius' Life of Augustine as a Fifth Century Discipleship Tool', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 50, no. 2 (2008): 159.

53 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 159.

54 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 162.

55 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 162.

Though the *Vita* is applicable to all believers, it appears that Possidius is writing specifically with ecclesial leaders in mind.⁵⁶ Given how Possidius described Augustine as valuing imitation as a primary facet of discipleship, it is not difficult to see Possidius' intention in writing the *Vita* as extending the discipleship of Augustine to others.⁵⁷

Though Augustine is thought of primarily as one of the great minds of Christianity, the picture that we get from Possidius is one of a bishop deeply concerned with shepherding his flock in a way reflective of the Great Shepherd. In this way, *Vita* becomes a helpful and early expression of Christian discipleship.

2 Anabaptists—Radically Reformed Discipleship

The name Anabaptists is somewhat more familiar than the individuals who initiated this Christian movement. Weaver provided an overview of the approaches to discipleship of some of the Anabaptists' early leaders (specifically, Michael Sattler, Conrad Grebel, Hans Denck, and Balthasar Hubmaier).⁵⁸ Weaver hypothesized that, based on the sources from these early Anabaptist leaders, one can deduce that they saw discipleship as going beyond simply imitation and into the realm of solidarity.⁵⁹ Thus, the disciple does not only know and act in the way

that Jesus would act, but the disciple is actually present in the work of Jesus and Jesus is present in their work.⁶⁰

Developing out of the Christology of the church being the body of Christ, each disciple becomes more than simply a resemblance to Christ and becomes an actual incarnation of the Head of the church.⁶¹ This basis for discipleship was quite different from other Reformation perspectives that saw the individual as well as the church gathering as simply the visible representation of the church.⁶² The Anabaptist tradition also differentiated itself from a 'minimal' perspective adopted by the Catholic Church.

Distinct from these two approaches, the Anabaptist explanation of discipleship was one of radical, all-encompassing commitment to complete unity and representation with Christ in all facets of life. However, the agreement on solidarity with Christ did not mean that early Anabaptists were completely in accord. Some emphasized the incarnation of Christ's earthly ministry while others emphasized the incarnation of the character of Christ.⁶³

Irrespective of these differences, the Anabaptist tradition sought to emphasize an imitation of Christ that was of such a nature that to look at the believer was to look at an incarnation of the work and ministry of Christ himself.

3 Bonhoeffer—Loving the Unloved

Dietrich Bonhoeffer provided a modern

56 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 166.

57 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 167.

58 J. Denny Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined: Four Sixteenth Century Anabaptists', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 54, no. 4 (1980): 256.

59 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 256.

60 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 256.

61 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 256.

62 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 278.

63 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 279.

example of discipleship. Jensen noted the transforming effect of Bonhoeffer's life as he came to understand more deeply what imitating Christ in the midst of great evil looked like.⁶⁴

In Bonhoeffer's early writings, he seemed to hold a more traditional Lutheran approach to Judaism, which saw millennia of difficulties for Jewish culture as a penalty for the Jewish involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus.⁶⁵ However, with the Aryan Clauses, Bonhoeffer was brought face to face with the inconsistency of his beliefs. His brother-in-law's father died shortly after the Aryan Clauses were established. The Clauses forbade any Jewish person from performing religious duties. Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law came to him asking if he would perform the funeral service for his Jewish father. After some consultation, Bonhoeffer refused to do the service.

However, over time, he came to regret this and later asked his brother-in-law to forgive him for his decision. As the plight of the Jewish people in the German occupied territories became more evident to Bonhoeffer, he came to realize the necessity of aligning himself with the vulnerable.⁶⁶

This alignment with those opposed to Jesus may have come out of Bonhoeffer's unique (for his day) theology of justification and sanctification.⁶⁷ Bon-

hoeffer understood justification to be not merely a declaration of justification in which the believer receives a portion of righteousness but instead is immersed into Jesus who is righteousness.⁶⁸ Sanctification was the holistic transformation of a disciple's life such that the believer now lived in righteousness.⁶⁹ Thus, Bonhoeffer would say,

Just as justification watered down to a judicial concept unconnected to human reality cheapens the grace involved in the call, so sanctification, if only addressed as a concept of following but unconnected to concrete actions will cheapen the grace given in following. In other words, discipleship, like the call, is costly.⁷⁰

Therefore Bonhoeffer's own spiritual formation may have led him to see his alignment with the vulnerable as an act of discipleship that was a natural aspect of both justification and sanctification. His desire to live out his justification led Bonhoeffer to aid even those opposed to Christ in order that justice would prevail so that the righteousness of Christ revealed itself through Bonhoeffer's actions.

4 Contextualized Discipleship

Each of these examples places great emphasis on contextualization for dis-

64 David H. Jensen, 'Religionless Christianity and Vulnerable Discipleship: The Interfaith Promise of Bonhoeffer's Theology', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 38, no. 2/3 (2001): 151-167.

65 Jensen, 'Religionless Christianity'.

66 Jensen, 'Religionless Christianity'.

67 Mary VandenBerg, 'Bonhoeffer's Discipleship: Theology For the Purpose of Christian

Formation', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 44, no. 2 (2009): 339.

68 VandenBerg, 'Bonhoeffer's Discipleship', 340.

69 VandenBerg, 'Bonhoeffer's Discipleship', 342.

70 VandenBerg, 'Bonhoeffer's Discipleship', 344.

ipleship. Throughout Christian history, it has been widely recognized that Scripture is one of the primary means of God revealing himself to humanity and as such is an important and necessary guide to understanding the world we live in. From this perspective, Scripture is an obligatory resource for the disciple to understand topics as diverse as urbanization, consumerism, citizenry, generosity, patriotism, and evangelism.⁷¹

However, contextualization of discipleship, as can be seen by the historical examples provided, cannot simply be about hermeneutics.⁷² Nor can only the 'peripheral' aspects of Christianity be contextualized. As the historical examples begin to show, there are no 'peripheral' aspects. Instead, every truth of Christianity must be reassessed from the immediate context, which will necessarily add another facet of revelation of who God is and how he reveals himself.⁷³

This deeply contextualized discipleship will lead to a uniquely contextualized theological development, which will express itself in contextualized confessions.⁷⁴ The reason why Augustine and Bonhoeffer seem so different in the ways they reacted to the enemies of Christ is not because of theological differences. It could be argued that

Augustine is Bonhoeffer's theological grandfather! Instead, the differences arise out of the unique contexts in which each of them was developing his imitation and incarnation of Christ within. Song summarized this contextualization well;

Discipleship in context rises out of a dynamic interplay between text (passed down by tradition) and context. By paying attention to both the Bible and the context in which people live, we are then able to bring the task of disciple-making in a *culturally relevant* and *biblically faithful* manner.⁷⁵

Thus, one can find discipleship occurring within contexts as diverse as suffering, violence, persecution, conflict, and marriage.⁷⁶ Rather than thinking that this suggests a scattered and unsystematic understanding of discipleship, it actually highlights the ever-present necessity of contextualizing discipleship into every phenomena, organization, and corner of life.

71 Walter Brueggemann, *The Word That Redescribes the World: The Bible and Discipleship*, P. D. Miller (Ed.) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006).

72 Benno Van den Toren, 'Growing Disciples in the Rainforest: A Contextualized Confession For Pygmy Christians', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33, no. 4 (2009): 307.

73 Van den Toren, 'Growing Disciples', 307.

74 Van den Toren, 'Growing Disciples', 309.

75 Minho Song, 'Contextualization and Discipleship: Closing the Gap Between Theory and Practice', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 30, no. 3 (2006): 253 (italics original).

76 Isaiah Dau, 'Following Jesus in a World of Suffering and Violence', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 31, no.4 (2007): 358-368; Ting & Watson, 'Is Suffering Good?', 202-210; Luisa M. Saffiotti, 'Discipleship As Peace-Building: Living and Ministering in Right Relationships, Becoming Instruments of Transformation,' *Human Development*, 27, no. 2 (2006): 5-9; Jane E. Strohl, 'Marriage as Discipleship: Luther's Praise of Married Life', *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 47, no. 2 (2008): 136-142, accessed September 10, 2010 doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6385.2008.00379.x.

IV Discipleship and Ecclesial Leadership

What all this suggests is that the relationship of discipleship to ecclesial leadership is not simply one of variables. Though ecclesial leadership characteristics can be classified, one cannot possibly be content to be an ecclesial leader outside of the rubric of discipleship. In order to be the leader that God has called the ecclesial leader to be, there must be an imitation of Christ. Such an imitation within the context of leadership is the very heart of discipleship.

The ecclesial leader cannot think of discipleship simply as a means among other means that can be chosen from to lead others. Discipleship, to the extent that it is an imitation of Christ, is the means of leading others. Within different contexts and traditions, this may look different, but its goal remains the same—becoming like Christ in such a way that we incarnate his body in a physical, visible, and tangible manner.

It is in this light that the command from Paul to Timothy to pass on to others what has been observed so that they can pass it on to others (2 Tim. 2:2) becomes one of the key statements of discipleship. As Christ's Great Commandment and Great Commission are passed on to new generations of believers—not simply in word but in practice—disciples who love God fully and their neighbours equally as themselves are being made and thus

Christ is being fully reflected. It is in this pursuit that disciples are continually becoming and being.

It is from within the ranks of those faithful to the call of God on their life that the next generations of believers are drawn, and thus discipleship—though not making ecclesial leaders out of every disciple—becomes the fundamental method of leadership development. As disciples are guided and admonished by those who lead them to become more and more like Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1), great leaders will be cultivated in the image of Christ and their actions will incarnate his presence. In this way, not only will great ecclesial leaders imitate Christ, but also through their actions, Christ himself will be acting through them, providing the greatest leadership of all.

One particularly important area of further research surfaces from this study. As noted above, research exists that describe the characteristics of many ecclesial leaders through church history. However, each one tends to look at the leader to the exclusion of all others. At some level, this is dictated by the different contexts that ecclesial leaders live within. However, understanding more clearly how historical ecclesial leaders understood their imitation of Christ as expressed in their leadership will assist in having a better grasp on how contemporary ecclesial leaders can contextualize their own leadership experiences.

Afro-Christian Expression of Sex and Sex Organs: A Critical Moral Challenge to Contemporary African Christianity

Benson Ohihon Igboin

KEYWORDS: *Contextualisation, euphemism, religion, knowledge, education, church, sacred, shame, perversion*

I Introduction

When one minister and an Old Testament Postgraduate student presented a seminar in this hall late last year, nothing more than his audacious direct mention of the male's sex organs elicited reactions. It seemed to us that he felt no qualms in using the word 'penis' which appeared four times on a page in his paper.¹ This present reaction is provided because the student is

specialising in Old Testament Theology, which for some serious reasons, avoids direct mention of sex and sex organs. We hope to show that there are objections to his linguistic expression in that paper. We do agree with scholars in linguistics who have been able to prove that 'a word means that which we want it to mean'.² It is true that we may not find a problem with the direct mention of sex and sex organs in a biology class, but we are always 'conscious of the fact that the meaning or meanings an individual attaches to a particular word or term usually depends, very much, upon his mental

1 E. O. Omojola, 'Theological Hermeneutics of Healing in the Old Testament', a Postgraduate seminar paper presented at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, (2008), 14.

2 M. Y. Nabofa, 'The Problems of Communicating Afro-Mystical Experience' in A. P. Dopamu, O. Awolalu and S. G. Delamartar (eds.), *Dialogue: Issues in Contemporary Discussions* (Arifanla-Akute: Big Small Books, 2007), 138.

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situation, versatility of and exposure to knowledge, his level of consciousness, discipline and philosophy of life and death',³ religious and cultural inclination, affiliation and environment. This, to our mind, applies also to the usage of a word or term because it gives a direction to interpret, understand and give meaning to it. Therefore, we shall speak about 'the selective linguistic representation of (a given) text in another language-culture in the most relevant way possible in the view of the specific audience in mind'⁴ with particular reference to our discussion.

This paper centres on sex from both African and biblical viewpoints. The discussion on sex is important to the two religio-cultural milieux. It is important because they lay a basis which has continued to influence the world today especially where their doctrines are practised. They are important also because they form the moral canons for the evaluation of what is obtainable or practised in contemporary society. They are important because they not only deal with the existential foci on both societies, but also reflect on the metaphysico-spiritual dimensions of their cosmos.

There appear to be striking similarities between the Jewish-biblical and African (Yoruba and Edo) perspectives on the linguistic expression of sex and sex organs. Even though sex is a com-

plex phenomenon, the sex instinct is the most profound of all human instincts, second only to self-preservation.⁵ This means that sex is a universal human instinct, although not limited to humans only. What makes human sex instinct different from other primal animals is the ability to control the sexual urge and maintain, to a very large extent, the morality of sex. This demonstrates that sex is not merely biological, it is also social and spiritual. Sex, therefore, is sacred and 'the urge to protect sex by man is by divine prompting as the prompting to make it permissive, carnal'.⁶

Since sex is not only biological but also social and spiritual, this paper will explore briefly sex expressions in the biblical and African perspectives in order to demonstrate that the morality that guides sex in its linguistic and practical expression is being eroded within the Afro-Christian circle in adopting a secular style of sex education.

II Linguistic Expression of Sex in the Bible

According to David Adamo, the word sex does not appear in the Old Testament.⁷ However, this does not mean

3 Nabofa, 'The Problems of Communicating', 137.

4 E. R. Wendland, 'Notes on a Lyricized Version of the Lord's Prayer in Chichewa' in J. C. Loba-Mkole and E. R. Wendland (eds.), *Interacting with Scriptures in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2005), 81.

5 S. I. Fabarebo, 'Diversity of Sexual Morality—The Yoruba Experience' in M. T. Yahya et al. (eds.) *Issues and Practices of Religion in Nigeria* (Jos: NASR, 2006), 364.

6 Fabarebo, 'Diversity of Sexual Morality', 364.

7 D. T. Adamo, 'Sex and Old Testament in African Context', a paper presented at the Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies conference, Delta State University, Abraka, (2005), 1.

that there were no sexual activities or that sex is not important in the Old Testament. There is a range of sexual activities mentioned in the Old Testament, but euphemistic terms are used to describe them. Some of the terminologies used will be explored below.

In its non-prurient realism, the Bible uses the verb 'to know' to express sexual intercourse. In Genesis 4:1, we read: 'And Adam knew Eve his wife', verse 25, 'And Adam knew his wife again.' In 1 Samuel 1:19, '... and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife....' From the verses above, the verb 'to know' means 'more than an abstract knowledge or knowledge from the awareness of mere existence of something but experiential knowledge or participatory knowledge by a man or a woman'.⁸ This can be confirmed in the result of 'knowing' their wives. The act of 'knowing' their wives was immediately followed by conception and bearing of children, which demonstrates that there is an actual sexual union between the husbands and their wives. Thus, Cain, Abel, Seth and Samuel are the children conceived and delivered through the sexual union of their parents as testimonies to the biological dimension of sex, expressed euphemistically.

The verb 'to know' is combined with 'to lie with' in some instances. Thus, in Numbers 31:17, we read: '...kill every woman that had known man by lying with him'. In verse 18: 'But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves'. In verse 35, we read about the number of 'women that had not

known man by lying with him'. In Judges 19:25, '...they knew her, and abused her' was used to describe a sexual union albeit an illicit one. Since the Bible does not specifically mention that the three verses in Numbers 31 mean the women concerned are prostitutes, we also do not want to imply such; even though the preceding paragraph talked in terms of husbands and wives and here we have 'man.' However, sexual union is implied in both instances as demonstrated in the explanation of knowledge.

The same is implied in 'lie with'. This is captured by A. M. Macdonald when he said that 'lie with' is archaic, yet means 'to have sexual intercourse with'.⁹ To lie with can also mean to sleep with carnally (Lev. 18:20). In Leviticus, 'to lie with' is used with 'to lie down' as an expression of sexual intercourse. In Leviticus 18:23, we read: 'Neither shall thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto....' In Leviticus 20:16, any woman that would 'lie down thereto' was to be guilty of bestial union for which the penalty was death.

Another term used to describe sexual intercourse is 'to go in/out' or 'to come into'. In Genesis 16:2, Sarah, Abraham's wife advised her husband to 'go in to' Hagar. In verse 4, Abraham 'went in to' Hagar; the latter conceived as a result of the 'going in to' and gave birth to Ishmael. The same term is used when Judah advised Onan, his son to have sexual intercourse with Tamar,

8 Adamo, 'Sex and Old Testament', 2.

9 A. M. Macdonald, *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* (Edinburgh: W & T Chambers Ltd, 1977), 759.

his daughter-in-law and wife of Er, his late son. In Genesis 38:8, 'And Judah said unto Onan, "Go into thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.'" In verse 9, Onan 'went in into his brother's wife....' In the course of time, Judah himself 'came in to' Tamar. In verse 16, Judah appealed to Tamar to allow him to 'come in to' her. Three months later, it was discovered that Tamar was pregnant as a result of Judah's 'coming in to' her. After the settlement, in verse 26, Judah 'knew her again no more'. In other words, he did not 'sleep' with her again.

Jacob's use of figurative expression of sexual union is scintillating. In Genesis 49:4, Jacob cursed his first son Reuben, 'because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defilest thou it: he went up to my couch.' The terms 'bed' and 'couch' refer metaphorically to Jacob's privacy with his wife. A marital bed or couch is supposed to be utilised legally and morally by the owner. But Reuben 'slept' with his father's wife; his father's couch.

In the levirate marriage arrangement, 'her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife' (Deut. 25:5). In Judges 15:1, Samson expressed his desire to 'go in to my wife into the chamber' while God forbids the Israelites to 'go in to any dead body' (Lev. 21:11). The term 'to go out from' is used to refer to a man's semen during sexual intercourse in Leviticus 15:16. The word 'defile' is used in many instances in the Bible to refer to sexual activities, howbeit abominations. For instance, Ezekiel 33:26 speaks about defilement of a neighbour's wife: they that 'defile themselves with mankind' (1 Tim. 1:10); 'filthy dreamers defile the flesh' in Jude

8 refers to illicit or immoral sexual intercourse. The terms 'abomination' and 'humble' also refer to sexual activities (Ezek. 22:10, 11). The words 'go near' or 'touch' are also used in Genesis 20:4, 6.

The Old Testament does not directly use the biological terms for male and female sex organs. Instead, they are described due to their sacred nature. 'The précised words used for sexual organs are used according to Hebrew psychology-corporate personality.'¹⁰ In Genesis 2:15, we read about the nakedness of Adam and Eve. Being naked, before the Fall, they were not ashamed, embarrassed or discomfited. After they had eaten the forbidden fruit, they came to realise they were naked and had to sew leaves to cover their private parts (Gen. 3:17). Ezekiel spoke about the abomination of discovering or uncovering one's father's nakedness (Ezek. 22:10) to refer to immoral or unacceptable sexual intercourse as elucidated in Leviticus 18.

According to Norman Shields, nakedness refers to reproductive organs which possess some form of mystery. 'That mystery is probably the basis of the fact that improper sexual intercourse was referred to as an uncovering of the nakedness of another person.'¹¹ This implies, according to him, that since sex is a mystery, such a mystery can be properly experienced only within marriage relationship, and should be limited to it. The nakedness being a hidden and mysterious phenomenon must be covered with

¹⁰ Adamo, 'Sex and Old Testament', 3.

¹¹ N. Shields, *Christian Ethics* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2004), 194.

clothing. Shield elaborates:

The fact that Shem and Japheth walked backwards to cover Noah, who had exposed his private parts under the influence of alcohol, suggests they understood that the reproductive organs should be concealed from one's offspring and probably from others as well.... Such nudity inevitably removes something of the mystery of sex from all who see it. Those who, by appearing in public either unclothed or scantily clothed, abandon the sense of mystery that attaches to our sexuality and in doing so actually devalue it and seriously depart from the divine purpose for mankind.¹²

Other terms used to describe sex organs are foreskin and flesh. In making a covenant with Abraham, God used 'the flesh of your foreskin' to refer to the male's private parts (Gen. 17, 11, 14, 23-25). Zipporah, Moses' wife, in obedience to the covenant circumcised her son by cutting off the foreskin (Ex. 4:25); Moses re-emphasised the Abrahamic covenant (Lev. 12:3) to the children of Israel, and Habakkuk condemned drinking to the point of exposing one's nakedness or foreskin (Hab. 2:15, 16). Habakkuk emphasises that it is a shameful thing for somebody to be drunk and expose his/her nakedness, as in the case of Noah (Gen. 9:22ff).

The Bible also uses 'thigh' or 'loins' to describe sex organs. For instance, in Genesis 24:2, 9, Abraham demanded that his servant swear by laying his

hand on his thigh and the servant obeyed. This swearing also emphasises the mystery in the sex organs as elucidated by Shields above. In Genesis 46:26 and Exodus 1:5, the Bible reckons the number of Jacob's family that migrated into Egypt, and describes the children as those who 'came out of his loins'. This appears to be in fulfilment of God's blessing on Jacob at Bethel, where God said that 'kings shall come out of thy loins' (Gen. 35:11). Jacob also put sackcloth on his loins when he heard that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast (Gen. 37:34). Moses gives the description of the size of the priests' dressing when he says: 'And thou shall make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness, from the loins even to the thighs they shall reach' (Ex. 28:42).¹³ In the case of an accusation of adultery, 'thigh' is used to refer to the woman's private parts (Num. 5:21, 22).

The foregoing exposition attests to the fact that the Bible deliberately refuses to use the direct terms for sex organs or sexual activities. This is not to say that the Jews did not have their terms for them. However, contextually, the non-use of the direct terms is explained in view of the sacred nature of the organs and their activities. This thought is shared by Adamo when he states that the implication of not using the direct terms 'might be as a result of the important and sacred function of sex in ancient Israel. This sacredness is the fact that sex functions as a means of procreation, perpetuation and oath-taking' (Genesis 24:2-3).¹⁴

¹² Shields, *Christian Ethics*, 194-195.

¹³ See also 1 Kgs. 12:10, Is. 21:3, Jer. 13:11

¹⁴ Adamo, 'Sex and Old Testament', 2.

The sacredness and the mysteriousness of sex organs can be assumed further to show the presence of God in them. For instance, Abraham and Jacob invoked the presence of God when they made their servant and children to swear by their thigh respectively (Gen. 24:2-3; 47:29). This demonstrates that sex organs are authentically symbolic, mysterious, sacred, powerful and fearsome.

III Linguistic Expression of Sex in Africa

The fact that Africa is heterogeneous has been repeatedly chronicled. In spite of the heterogenous nature of African societies, there are striking similarities in their cultures. In this study, we are concerned with the Yoruba and Edo people of Nigeria. The scope is chosen because of our acquaintance with the former, having being born there and worked with the people for almost a decade. As a Nigerian, the researcher belongs to the Edo nation. Apart from the above, the Yoruba and the Edo share many cultural features such as sexual morality. However, it must be stated that they have different languages, although there is some common understanding of each other's languages.

Adamo noticed that there are similarities in the way the terms referring to sex are used in the Old Testament and in African context. He argued that the direct words for human private parts are never used in the public; otherwise such a person who uses them will be regarded as possessing 'a dirty mouth'.¹⁵ Among the Yoruba, '*ba a sun*'

means 'to sleep with'; 'A man *ba* his wife *sun*.'¹⁶ To sleep with one's wife is a euphemism of sexual union since society frowns at the direct mention of the sexual act.

Another term common among the Yoruba is *ba se po*. This means 'to do it together' which literally means 'have a sexual union with'. The Yoruba also describe sexual union as *ba lo po*, which can be translated as 'to use it together'. Another term used by them is *koja lara re*, which means to 'pass through his/her body'. *Ojojumo ko lobirin n ri oko re* which means 'it is not every time a woman sees her husband' or *je ka sere omo* which means 'let's play the game that leads to children' are euphemisms for sexual intercourse.¹⁷ Even though they have direct terms for the private parts, they also use euphemisms in describing them. For example, they say: *nkan omo okunrin/nkan omo obirin*, which means 'man/woman's thing'.

The Edo people also use euphemisms and metaphors to describe sex and sex organs. For example, they describe sexual activity as *oren mi non*, meaning 'he/she knows something for him/her'. Here, as in 'knowledge' explained in the preceding lines, it is not just abstract knowledge but experiential knowledge in terms of sexual union. More than that, the term in many cases is used to refer to a sexual situation that involves a husband and a virgin wife. To deflower one's wife, which enjoys a pride of place in most traditional African settings, is to

15 Adamo, 'Sex and Old Testament', 4.

16 Adamo, 'Sex and Old Testament', 4.

17 An interview with Mr. Adedoyin, C. A., a Headmaster, 7th December, 2008.

'know' the woman. So, to *'en mi non'* is to know the person experientially. Another term which is common is *me en kpen ri*. This means to 'sleep with'. They also say *omi ose gho*, meaning, 'he/she sees his/her wife/husband'. They can say: *oye vbo*, 'he/she goes there'. In referring to the private parts, they say, *emi egbe omohe/oghuoho*, meaning 'thing of a man/woman's body'. Another term is *egede* which means loins or *okhoo*, which ordinarily means anus but is used to refer to the private organs.

In both Yoruba and Edo beliefs, sex and sex organs are regarded as sacred. This informs the many taboos associated with sex and sexual activities. As M. Y. Nabofa argues, 'a mysterious negative power exists in the female reproductive organs and any blood that issues out from it...is believed... to be capable of rendering whatever and wherever it touches unwholesome ritually'.¹⁸ To show their sacred nature and reverence, John Mbiti calls them 'the gates of life'.¹⁹ As such they must be respected since everyone came to earth through them. Not only that, it is common to see women curse their stubborn children by their 'body' and such curse is believed to be very efficacious. 'The efficacy of women's sacred utterances of supplication and curses especially on their children is not in doubt, among the Yorubas. The potency rests in the Yoruba notion of *'adabi'*, i.e. except it is not so. That is

to say, unless men do not suck women's breast or *come out of her*.²⁰

There is the belief that some forces are behind drought or excessive rainfall. Thus, women would come out at night fully naked and curse with their 'body'. In many instances however, there are instantaneous changes in the weather. The sacredness of sex is further entrenched in the socialisation process of the children. Children are expected to be sexually innocent until their wedding night when 'the groom's mother would be at hand to teach the two how *to do it*'.²¹ This is further observed by Kisembo as follows:

[B]ecause the generation of life was a matter of concern for the whole community, there were strong sanctions against people who indulge in sex for selfish (i.e. destructive) reasons. Sexuality and its powers were understood as permeating every level of human existence: interpersonal relationships and matters of ritual. Sexuality was looked upon as mysterious and sacred. If it were misused, evil surely resulted. Initiation rites prepared the adolescents for the rights of his/her sexuality to get married and raise a family.²²

Covering one's nakedness is a spiritual as well as a moral duty. The sex organs are sacred and as such must be kept away from the preying eyes of

18 M. Y. Nabofa, 'Blood Symbolism in African Religion' in S. R. Sutherland (ed.) *Religious Studies*, 21/3, (1985).

19 J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), 146.

20 Anon. (unpublished), 'Womb to Tomb: Yoruba Women Power over Life and Death.'

21 Fabarebo, 'Diversity of Sexual Morality', 367.

22 Cited in L. Magesa, *African Religions: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997).

everybody. The way one dresses is a stark portrayal of the reverence one shows for the sex organs. Thus it used to be abhorrent to see nude or half-nude people in broad daylight. The way one sits down, especially women, also suggests the level of sacredness attached to the sex organs. Thus, when a woman is improperly seated, that is sitting with her legs wide open, such that her 'body' can be seen, she is immediately cautioned to sit right. The people also hold that because of the mysterious nature of sex, sexual activities should be done in the night when everyone else is asleep.²³ There is also the belief that seeing husband and wife engaging in sexual activity is not only shameful, it is also dangerous. This is also confirmed by Malinowski when he writes: 'I maintain that sex is regarded as dangerous...that is tabooed and ritualized, surrounded by moral and legal norms, not because of any superstition of primitive man or emotional view of or instinct about strangeness, but for the simple reason that sex really is dangerous.'²⁴

Although the preceding lines have demonstrated that great respect is shown to sex and sex organs in Africa, it is also true that a few people disregard their sacrality. This set of people who have been described as possessing a 'dirty mouth' mention sex and sex organs by their direct names without qualms. It is a common knowledge that many of the contemporary Yoruba

musicians desecrate sex and sex organs. This is also demonstrated by some of their writers.

However, there are proverbs which mention the sex organs by their direct names; such proverbs in most cases are didactic in nature. As it were, proverbs are the special communicative preserve of the elders, for it is held that when wisdom is lost, the proverb is the horse used to search for it. For example, Fuji musician Abass Akande Obesere is notorious for 'insulting' the woman's 'body'. F. H. Kazeem's 'The Vagina as Symbol of Power in the Yoruba Culture' enunciates that 'the phallus represents, in its erect and fertile form, a symbol of male reproductive power... the vagina on the other hand cannot be a less veritable instrument to figure the strength'²⁵ of the woman. J. O. Ojoade asserts *obo mi yon, a ma e si pe ja pan la*, meaning 'vagina is sweet, but not for licking'.²⁶ This exceptional case does not in any way obliterate the traditional belief in the sacredness and mystery of sex and sex organs.

Even though sex is legally and morally allowed in marriage, it does not mean that there are no deviants. For example, among the Yoruba it is said, '*A mokun jale, bi oba aye o ri o Oba oke n wo o*', meaning, 'you who steal in the cover of the night, know you assuredly that if the earthly king does not see you the heavenly king (God)

²³ B.O. Igboin and S. Awoniyi, *Perspectives on University Dress Code* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 2006), 38.

²⁴ Fabarebo, 'Diversity of Sexual Morality', 371.

²⁵ F. H. Kazeem, 'The Vagina as Symbol of Power in the Yoruba Culture' in U. J. Yakubu (ed.), *Journal of Cultural Studies: Ethnicity and African Development*, 2/1, (2000): 364.

²⁶ Cited in Fabarebo, 'Diversity of Sexual Morality', 371.

does'.²⁷ This may find a parallel in Proverbs 9:17-18 which enunciates, 'stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.' This means that even though 'illicit pleasure is sweeter than legal' the end product is the loss of life or the eternal damnation of the soul.²⁸

From the Old Testament and African views of sex and sex organs, we can summarise that they are sacred, yet not divinised. The Hebrews and the Africans honour sex and sex organs and believe in 'the divine ordination of human sexuality'.²⁹ They believe that the primary purpose of sex is the generation or procreation of life, which must be done within marriage. 'Sex, therefore, is neither god nor a demon'.³⁰ As a result of the mystery of the sex organs, it is commanded that they should be properly covered. Those who expose their sex organs are reprimanded and nakedness is regarded as shameful. These similarities 'between Africa and biblical Israel may be traced back to the fact that they both belong to the same class of people, i.e. people of primal world view'.³¹

27 Fabarebo, 'Diversity of Sexual Morality', 371.

28 *Adam Clarke's Commentary*, Deluxe Bible Microsoft.

29 J. O. Akao, 'The Old Testament Concept of Sexuality' in D. T. Adamo (ed.), *African Journal for Biblical Studies*, XXII/I, (April, 2005): 57.

30 Faith and Life Press, *Homosexuality in the Christian Life* (Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1995), 31.

31 Akao, 'The Old Testament Concept of Sexuality', 58.

IV Afro-Christian Evaluation of Contemporary Expression of Sex and Sex Organs

Most, if not all, of the negative influences on African culture are commonly attributed to the contact with colonialists. Thus, the West should be blamed for all the bad or immoral behaviours being exhibited by the Africans today. We take exception to that line of thought. It is true that most of what transpired in ancient Africa was not documented. However, from the oral evidence available, it is the case that Africa did not have a rosy past in terms of sexual morality. This position is portrayed by the rich vocabulary or register on such immoral activities. Africans believe that whatever exists has a name. Therefore, they have names for various sexual moral and immoral behaviours. This is ossified by the very strict moral taboos that are believed to have metaphysical or spiritual import.

This is not to say that the western contact with Africa did not negatively affect the latter. The argument is that there are inherent tendencies in Africa that courted such negative influences, which to our mind provided the soil upon which the so-called western seed of corruption is sown. For example, it is not the West that brought adultery, rape, homosexuality, fornication, incest, etc. to Africa. This is why the traditional Africans have taboos to guide against these perverse behaviours and also purificatory rituals in case there are offenders. This calls for African ethics on sexuality.

We accept, however, that the rate of sexual perversion and its dimensions have been heightened by western con-

tact; even though it is also necessary to concede that Africans practise a western materialistic type of Christianity. It can be said with evidence that many western Christians share similar Christian and African views of the linguistic expression of sex and sex organs.

Gary Thomas argues that the secular society has much influence on the church. As such, 'most of us are introduced to sex in shameful ways'.³² One of those shameful ways is the invasion of pornography into the Christian sanctuary, to which many Christians have become addicted. According to Thomas, 'homosexuality, premarital sex, fantasy-laden masturbation, hardcore pornography—none of that constitutes "sex" as we're defining it here. Redefine sex as it was in Eden, as it was when Adam "knew" Eve and began to populate the world.... God doesn't turn his eyes when a married couple goes to bed.'³³ Thomas' linguistic expression of sex in the foregoing, to our mind, is as biblical as African, much as it is also western.

The Christian cannot be protected from the reality of the evolution of secular knowledge on sexuality. A true theology and Christian ethics must respond to it in light of the Bible. Thus, the term sexuality, although it had a simple meaning, has become 'notoriously fuzzy'. The term 'is evaluatively laden and its exact sense and reference are often culturally specific.'³⁴

The real challenge however comes

in the attempt to follow 'pop' Christianity that does not distinguish between the secular and the religious/spiritual—in other words, the brand of syncretistic Christianity that includes both the sacred and the profane in its scope. In this brand of Christianity, it is not uncommon to observe emasculation and effemination, nudity and various sex perversions. Such Christianity also uses direct terms to mention sex and sex organs which usually arouses laughter and applause. To many of these types of congregation, this is modernity! The basis for such an audacious pronouncement is that sex education should be taught in the church. It is agreed that we are living in an over-sexualised culture where nudity, pornography or blue films are explicitly dramatised through the television, motion films, music and Internet, but it is our contention that the church must oppose the graphic method of sex education portrayed by the secular world.

We hold it as a fact that part of what has led to sexual abuse both within and outside the church is the disregard for Afro-biblical linguistic expression of sex and sex organs. The evolutionary accretions and post-human philosophy are facts which have led to the loss of the sacrality of the body in general and its private parts in particular. The post-human philosophy which many Christians unfortunately, but subtly, are adopting states that the body is obsolete. Stelarc argues that the body, understood from human and evolutionary levels, is obsolete when juxtaposed with the technological knowledge at our disposal, especially cybernetics. In this argument, to retain the body is to hallow it. Thus, he recoils from 'the re-

32 G. Thomas, *Sacred Marriage* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 200.

33 Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 201.

34 P. B. Clarke, and A. Linzey, (eds.) *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 753.

emergence of the mystical' in the guise of a return to 'cultural rituals that have long outlived their purposes'.³⁵

In defence of his 'the body is obsolete' thesis, Stelarc argues that humanity is superannuated; its biological hardware un-adapted to the infosphere. He therefore declares: '*Evolution ends when technology invades the body*. Once technology provides each person with the potential to progress individually in its development, the cohesiveness of the species is no longer important.'³⁶ He adds:

It is no longer meaningful to see the body as a site for the psyche or the social but rather a structure to be monitored and modified. The body not as a subject but as an object—*not as an object of desire but an object for redesigning*.³⁷

Stelarc's post-human philosophy is reductionist: his view is that the body, in its objective form, is a structure that can be re-designed to fit the bearer's desire. Re-designing the body can first and foremost take place when the sacred and the mysterious, or the metaphysical and linguistic import, are destroyed. One of the modern ways of objectifying, monitoring, modifying and re-designing the body is through transsexualism—an exercise that is believed to make the soul and the body of the transsexual congruent through

hormone and sex reassignment therapies. In transsexualism, the transsexual's external sex organs, viewed as obstacles to the unification of the body and the soul are evacuated and replaced with artificial organs of the opposite sex.³⁸

For the Christians, everything done with the body—whether good or bad—has great eschatological consequences. This includes the linguistic expression of sex and sex organs. The 'traditional' African Christian still argues that 'a good Christian... is one who concretizes in his or her life situation, these basic religio-moral values of Christianity'³⁹ as enunciated above. While we are not averse to sex education (which has become a plague in many denominations), we support the idea of an African Christianity that bases its sex education on strong moral values. Edwards and Matter are apposite here when they argue that the kind of sex education in the church or even in primary and secondary schools that use explicit words for sex organs is crassly inappropriate.⁴⁰ They also condemn such detailed biological drawings of sex organs in sex education which they believe, and we agree with them, are symptomatic of pornographic attraction.

³⁵ Cited in P. McCarthy, 'The Body Obsolete' in *High Performance*. No. 24, (1983): 18.

³⁶ Stelarc, 'Prosthetics, Robotics and Remote Existence: Postevolutionary Strategies' in *Leonardo*, 24/5, (1991): 591.

³⁷ M. Dery, *Escape Velocity: Cyber Culture at the End of the Century* (London: Horder and Stroughton, 1996). 107.

³⁸ B.O. Igboin. 'Transsexualism: Theologico-Philosophical Study', Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to Ambrose Alli University, 2010.

³⁹ A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican II* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987), 728.

⁴⁰ Cited in J. A. Onimhawo, and P. O. Ottuh, 'The Church and Sex Education' in D. T. Adamo (ed.), *African Journal for Biblical Studies*, XXII/II, (October, 2005): 72.

This probably elicited the reaction of Mike Judge who avers that ‘this kind of teaching is completely inappropriate for primary school children. It is very damaging to teach sex education without a suitable moral focus. We have seen that this kind of education has had little impact on the number of children having sex, the number of teenage pregnancies or the number of abortions amongst youths over the past few years.’⁴¹

Our position thus far may be misconstrued as if it carries a fundamentalist or conservative perspective, which states: don’t talk about sex, be silent about sex. A. G. Khathide espouses the position of this school of thought in the following way: ‘We often find that when we talk about sex in public, we are faced with comments like, “Don’t talk about sex, we are Christians,” or “Don’t talk about sex, we are Africans.”’⁴² Khathide believes that such cultural attitude ‘afflicts’ the mainline churches that do not readily provide direction in sexual matters. He states,

Perhaps the reason why the church finds it difficult to handle sex and sexuality-related issues is because we have considered sex as belonging to a domain outside the sovereignty of God. Though many find it hard to admit, it is true that human beings, including the church, regard sex as belonging to the

devil—something that is associated with darkness, evil and wickedness.⁴³

While Khathide makes a valuable observation, it is very important to note his attention to the Bible as the basis for a theology of sexuality. We have argued in the lines above that even though both the Hebrews of OT days and Africans honour sex and sex organs, they by no means divinise them. As Akao explains, God is described in human form and man and woman are created in his image, yet God is indisputably ‘beyond the polarity of sex’.⁴⁴ This makes sex a purely created human affair, which is neither ‘a god nor a demon’.

While avoiding extremes in this matter, we must note that the language used for sex and sex organs is of great importance in our relationship to God who gave sex as a gift to humankind. Thomas again espouses this thought beautifully, taking into account its linguistic import:

What a woman is allowing inside her, what a man is willingly entering—in a Christian marriage, these are sanctified bodies; bodies in which God is present through his Holy Spirit; bodies coming together, celebrating, but in a spirit of reverence and holiness.⁴⁵

So if Christians and/or Africans do not talk about sex in the public, it is not simply because it is demonic, but

41 Cited in Onimhawo and Ottuh, ‘The Church and Sex Education’, 73.

42 A. G. Khathide, ‘Teaching and Talking about our Sexuality’ in M. W. Dube (ed.), *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programme*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003), 1.

43 Khathide, ‘Teaching and Talking about our Sexuality’, 3.

44 Akao, ‘The Old Testament Concept of Sexuality’, 57.

45 Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 209.

rather, they believe the language should reflect respect for it. That some Christians/churches teach sex education without the necessary moral quality, theological and eschatological insight, it seems to us, is anti-African and unbiblical. The example of the apostle Paul's approach will suffice here.

V Paul's Linguistic Expertise as fundamental to Afro-Christianity

It is important to enunciate that sex and sex education are not new to Christianity. Sex issues bothered the Corinthian church so much that a letter had to be written to Paul to clarify certain misgivings and confusions. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul was answering one of the questions contained in the church's letter. Verse 1 paints a picture of the situation: 'Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.' The complexity of this verse cannot be denied and scholars have many different interpretations of it.

One of the interpretations suggests that phrase, 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' implies that a man or a woman should not marry at all. Another school of thought, to which we subscribe, interprets the phrase as meaning that Paul is not admonishing Christians not to marry, but that the issue discussed is strictly sexual activity.⁴⁶ For us in this enterprise, the word

'touch' which elicits various controversies, is a euphemism for sex. This point has been elucidated above. S. O. Abogunrin agrees when he states: 'like the Yoruba expression *'Sun mo Obirin/Okunrin* (to move near a woman/man) [it] refers to actual sexual experience with a woman or a man. The problem is obviously whether a man should have sex or not.'⁴⁷

Adeniyi Adewale and Rogers Jr. and Rogers III⁴⁸ also agree that 'to touch' means sexual intercourse. In defending his position, Adewale argues that it is possible that the Gnostic heresy was tearing the Corinthian church apart over the issue of sex, because as Brown indicates, 'in the second century A. D. Gnostics took the position that the spirit alone matters: some said what one does with the body is unimportant; others said the body must be treated ascetically.'⁴⁹ Adewale also observed that such an ascetic position is no longer strange to some churches in Africa whereby there can be fasting for forty to seventy days, during which period Christians are to abstain from sex. This long fast, he adds, has created and is still creating tension in many Christian families especially

⁴⁶ W. H. Mare, '1 Corinthians' in F. E. Gaebelien (ed.) *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol 10, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

⁴⁷ S. O. Abogunrin, *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1991), 83.

⁴⁸ C. L. Rogers Jr., and C. L. Rogers III, *The Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 360.

⁴⁹ Cited in O. A. Adewale, 'Building a Biblical African Christian Views of Sex: An Understanding of 1 Corinthians 7:1-5' in D. T. Adamo (ed.) *African Journal for Biblical Studies*, XXII/1, (April, 2005): 32.

where one of the couple attends a different church.

What we have tried to establish is that Paul implies in verse 1 that 'to touch' refers to sexual intercourse. The root word for touch, *haptō* could mean 'light' or 'kindle' as in fire. This shows that to 'touch' a woman/man can kindle a physical interest when both are exploring romantic relationships before marriage.⁵⁰ Then in verse 2, Paul gives the reason to get married. This has been interpreted by some theologians to mean that Paul meant marriage instead of sexual union. Paul, it seems to us, understands that when physical contact grows between two opposite people who are not married, fornication or adultery may ensue. Thus, he teaches that it is only within marriage that sex can be had. Therefore, in order to avoid fornication or immorality, it is expedient for a man to have his own wife and a woman her own husband.

Verses 3, 4 and 5 elucidate this point further. Paul teaches that 'the husband must fulfil/render his duty/due benevolence to his wife' just as the wife should to her husband. The euphemism for sexual union here is to 'repay what is owed'. This means that the husband owes his wife a duty to have conjugal relationship with her just as the wife has the same 'sexual duty' to her husband. This duty/obligation is owed after marriage. As a result of the duty they owe each other within marriage, none is expected to exercise

arbitrary authority over his/her spouse since both have become as it were, 'one flesh.' Since arbitrary authority over one's body in marriage is ruled out, Paul teaches that a husband and a wife should not defraud/deprive each other of sexual union except when they have mutually agreed to do so within a reasonable time frame. The only reason Paul gave for such 'conjugal holidays' is for the couples to commit themselves to prayer, after which they should resume their normal sexual intimacy, in order to ward off satanic temptation of incontinency.

Paul's euphemism for a non-consummated sexual urge as shown in verse 9 is 'to burn'. He teaches that it is needful to hasten the process of getting married rather than to be in constant libidinous state that cannot be experientially expressed. The word 'burn' refers to

the God-created physical interest a man and a woman have for each other. It is part of the design of the creation which He uses to draw two people together, to whom He has assigned the gift of marriage. The point of the verse is that two people, who are already in a growing, God-glorifying relationship, ought to resolve the problem of burning by marriage.⁵¹

The foregoing analysis of the use of euphemisms in sex education as exemplified by Paul, we believe, captures the religio-cultural sensibilities of Afro-Christians. It contrasts strongly with the sex education curriculum today.

50 Family Radio School of the Bible, *1 Corinthians: A Study of the Spiritual and Material Conflicts of Today* (n. p.: Family Radio School of the Bible, n. d.), 88.

51 Family Radio School of the Bible, 93.

Sex education, which is emphasized by the world today, is a pornographic exercise. People have lived thousands of years without sexual lessons, things which only fill and excite our minds with garbage (Rom. 13:14; Col.3:16). The excuse that is often given by those who insist on such things is that young people will learn bad things if not taught otherwise. But why will they learn? What are they exposed to? Unchecked T.V. programs? Unholy movies? Worldly music?⁵²

Tony Campolo highlights the ills of the television as a means of sex education in America, which is true also of Africa.

Television also has had a major impact on the sexual mores and folkways of America. Messages about sexuality, often involving sadomasochism and the denigration of woman, are common fare on TV.... The MTV cable network brings to teenagers videos that depict orgiastic promiscuity and sexual bondage as normal mode of behavior. The impact of all this has been overpowering and is not likely to be overcome by an occasional Sunday school lesson on a healthy and biblically prescribed sexuality.⁵³

However, Akinwale suggests that Africans and Christians should not shy away from talking about sex. In fact, 'the theologians, the Bible scholars as well as church ministers has (sic) to take the lead in this crusade by preaching and teaching openly about sex in the church'.⁵⁴ We may appreciate Akinwale's feelings about sex education on the basis that Paul's response to the letter from the Corinthian believers was addressed to the church. Perhaps, the letter was read in the church by the pastors, thereby inadvertently talking about sex. Nevertheless, one major omission in Akinwale's strong stance and advocacy is that he does not consider the linguistic import of sex education from the prism of its moral, sacred and eschatological consequences.

VI Conclusion

Theologically, and in respect of inculturation, that is, reading the Bible in the context of African culture, there seems to be no way that the direct mention of sex organs can be regarded as appropriate and acceptable. This is because, it seems to us, that the Bible itself, the basis and manual for 'theological inculturation', for very serious reasons deliberately avoids it. In serious social and religious situations, African culture also deliberately avoids it.

52 Family Radio School of the Bible, 90.

53 T. Campolo, *Is Jesus A Republican or a Democrat?* (Texas: Word Publishing, 1995), 89.

54 Akinwale, 'Building a Biblical African Christian Views of Sex', 40.

Salvation, Pseudo-modernism, Suffering and Hope: A Study of I Kings 17

John Lewis

KEYWORDS: *Postmodernism, technology, texting, despair, Elijah, drought, response*

I The Drought of Pseudo- Modernism

Over the past fifteen years the Christian church has concerned itself with the dynamics of Postmodernism. While conservatives initially saw it as a threat to biblical religion, post-modernism soon became a necessary tool for the restructuring of churches seeking to connect with the pulse of a rapidly changing society. In many respects, with the exception of a few excesses, it has proved to be a worthwhile enterprise. However, as we enter into the second decade of the twenty-first century we must ask if these rapid changes have led society out of post-modernism and into a new reality, 'post' postmodernism.

Indeed, one could say that as rapidly as postmodernism moved in and took us all along with it, it has

moved out and left its offspring. Alan Kirby, for example, has asserted that postmodernism is dead and buried. 'In its place comes a new paradigm of authority and knowledge formed under the pressure of new technologies and contemporary social forces.'¹ Indeed, technology, Global Warming and the War on Terror, have drawn the world into a new paradigm. Pseudo-modernism is the reality that encompasses it all.

Supreme importance is placed on the recipient of the text. Evidence of this is seen in the multitude of 'text-in to comment and/or vote' reality TV programs. The postmodern Christian immediately thinks of interaction. However, 'interactivity' is inappropriate here, 'since there is no *exchange*: instead, the viewer or listener enters—writes a segment of the programme—then departs, returning to a passive

¹ A Kirby, http://www.philosophynow.org/issue58/The_Death_of_Postmodernism_And_Beyond (accessed, 10 Feb 2011).

role.² Indeed, submissions are vetted for their ability to fit the needs of the programme, leaving only the illusion of involvement. What the viewer has, instead, is the experience of technology. Consequently critics, like Kirby, view the products of pseudo-modernism to be exceptionally banal. Indeed, he believes that 'a shallowness dominates all'. According to Kirby the pseudo-modern era, at least so far, is a cultural desert.³

There has been created, therefore, a tension between the highly sophisticated means of gathering information and communicating and the 'vapidity or ignorance of the content conveyed by it—a cultural moment summed up by the fatuity of the mobile phone user's, "I'm on the bus"'.⁴

Yet for Kirby the problem goes deeper and is more alarming. He sees pseudo-modernism as being characterised by a kind of fatalistic anxiety mixed with ineptitude. Technology has given us access and the chance to respond immediately, but we are not more knowledgeable or wiser. He pictures a world endlessly texting responses to the nightly news while watching the natural world melt and disintegrate and terrorist blowing up what's left. While all this is occurring there emerges an urgent need to present TV programmes about how to clean your house, bring up your children or remain solvent.

It now appears the time to meet people in their responsiveness so as to draw them into a dialogue of responses that ultimately leads to a dynamic interaction with Jesus Christ. Karl Barth may well be, once again, a valuable mentor who guides our journey. Under the heading of *The Doctrine of Providence*, in his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth 'investigates the relation of Creator and creature'.⁵ 'In providence God allows the creature a meaningful role as the subject of the history which forms the external basis of covenant history.'⁶ Importantly for Barth, humanity has a listening role in which God's Word is heard and received. It is Christological, in that this Word must be heard through Jesus Christ, with philosophy being rejected outright. Significantly, it is a Word to be acted on. In contrast to the ways of pseudo-modernism, the person must never be content with passivity, but engage in the world as a servant on an errand, as God works through the believer in the theatre of action.⁷

Geoffrey Bromiley points to the role of the individual in the providential rule of God. Indeed, the actions of individuals 'serve to advance the whole'.⁸ 'By the providential disposing of God, events in the lives of individuals are woven into the story of their individual relationship with God in Christ, and of

2 Kirby, *The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond*.

3 Kirby, *The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond*.

4 Kirby, *The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond*.

5 G. W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 141.

6 Bromiley, *Karl Barth*, 142.

7 Bromiley, *Karl Barth*, 143.

8 G.W. Bromiley, 'Providence' in Bromiley, G.W. (ed), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia-V 3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1021.

the service that they then render in the further advancement of His word and work.⁹ Thus Scripture portrays a scene of God seeking responses, and working through those responses to fulfil his ultimate purposes. This way through dialogue is often perplexing, complicated, and loaded with surprises. Yet throughout, humanity is guaranteed a role in the divine drama by a thoughtful and gracious God who weaves a multitude of strands to accomplish his grand design.

The Bible is filled with narratives which arose from responses to God. Covenant history was played out and progressed at significant moments of response that led to meaningful dialogue; standing in clear contrast to the banal self-interest and shallowness of pseudo-modernism. In our passage under consideration response that leads to faithful allegiance to Yahweh in the context of anxiety, is the key to the narrative.

We are introduced to a world of anxiety and peril, where rivers are dry, food is scarce, and death is pervasive. In this famine of body and soul, of darkness and despair, a spark is lit and hope emerges. A miracle takes place. Someone hears the impossible from God and believes.

II Out of the Desert

The context of Elijah's ministry is a divided kingdom specialising in apostasy and shallow responses to complex issues. Evil pervades the landscape as faithfulness to Yahweh is ditched for the promises held out by the local

deity, Baal. Indeed, Ahab's dynasty sought to fuse the Yahweh worshippers and the Baal worshippers into a single people under the same national god.¹⁰ Despite the political advantages promised by such an alliance, the result is devastating. The people cut themselves off from the source of life and begin to wither and die. Covenant unfaithfulness is met with a lonely abandonment.

However, it is not the people who have been abandoned, as some may have supposed. It is Yahweh who stands without a partner. The covenant relationship that talked of milk and honey and descendants as numerous as the stars, is replaced by cracked earth and dry wells. Yahweh may now be pictured in this narrative of despair; as a widow who sees no future for herself or her child. Only faith in Yahweh's Word, and a resolute conviction to act on that faith, will redeem this sorry state.

Chapter Seventeen of 1 Kings begins with a proclamation to King Ahab from Elijah that God has decreed that there will be a drought in the land. The announcement is abrupt and to the point. Elijah is not even introduced as a prophet; he simply speaks God Word and expects to be listened to. However, his message indicates that he needs no introduction. He speaks with authority and his assertion of Yahweh's divine rule cannot be argued with.

In the context of an agrarian society the news is devastating. Drought will bring death and a nation to its knees.

9 Bromiley, 'Providence', 1021.

10 K. J. Kung, 'Baal' in G. W. Bromiley, (ed), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 378.

No amount of military strength or political manoeuvring will alter a thing. While the god Baal was believed by the wayward king Ahab to be the provider of rain and its resulting prosperity, the evidence clearly points to the contrary. Their hopes and assurances in the god of the nations are shown to be a vain diversion and an assurance based on a powerless and empty idol.

Yahweh will not be deterred. With his Name flies hope and promise. God will bring their arrogant self-assertions to a desert and replant it with the scene of his sovereign hand. Anxiety will give way to hope and shallowness to the riches of covenant. There is a clear assertion that all narratives must ultimately subsume themselves under Yahweh's design. Over the surface of this parched land that gasps for its last breath, God's determination to love will come as a cool change to illicit life and hope.

III The Tale of Two Responses

The clue as to our role in this grand narrative is found in the movement of Elijah. In stark contrast with Ahab, who has clearly ignored God's commandments, Elijah responds with resolute enthusiasm. And why not? The promises are alluring. In an age of drought and famine a brook will be provided and there he will be fed. The story might well end there. Sinful Ahab and his lot will die of thirst while Elijah, the faithful follower, dwells in a kind of paradise on earth. However Elijah, as faithful as he is, is also caught up in the devastation of the land. Through his faithful servant, God will

enter into the valley of the shadow of death and reveal himself in sparks of revelation that will stand as beacons, beckoning the reader away from the banal and close to the heart of God. Through silent pain faith will echo loudly and provide the means of redemption.

IV A Flicker of Light in the Valley of Death

Elijah is again given his instructions. However, the context of the command is profoundly different. Instead of miraculous ravens Elijah will be met by a widow living in her eleventh hour. He is to go to Zarephath of Sidon in Phoenicia, home of the Baal cult. That Yahweh is ruler over all is clearly implied by Elijah's journey. Indeed, God does not seek to protect his nation from outside incursions. He is the creator of all and will dominate all.

The reader might well prefer the simple destruction of sin, yet the narrative takes its audience on a careful journey to the heart of hopeless despair to find the voice of God in faith. Yet despite what appears to be an avalanche of miracles the reader must not forget that life comes to only one small family unit and death still pervades the region. Indeed, Elijah does not enter the scene as some kind of super hero, but as a faithful advocate of the love of God who brings life, hope and transformation, even at the hour of death. As the bell of despair tolls for each one, as most assuredly it will, the voice of God often comes quietly. Yet, as with here, it is enough.

The prophet arrives at his destination and a new dialogue begins. The

optimist of faith, who is listening astutely to the voice of God, interacts with such poverty of existence that life can only be consumed by the present, since tomorrow does not exist. This clash of realities leads to a conversation that initially appears out of place. Elijah seeks refreshments from a widow gathering sticks for her and her child's last meal. What we find in the prophet, however, in this scene of crises is a call to faith based on the promises of God. This is not a miracle man driving a situation to the edge before he 'brings one out of the hat', but a thoughtful follower of Yahweh who has heard his voice, carefully discerned the situation, and is ready to move and proclaim the good news that while death pervades, God is alive.

To be sure, the widow is not to fear but trust in the provision of God. While the famine lasts the food will keep coming. The widow acts on Elijah's promise and is not disappointed. It is a bold step of faith based on the conviction that what God has said will come to pass. This provision of God's Word, and the means for survival, is a clear allusion to the redemptive theme of the exodus, still in Israel's collective memory. Therefore the covenant imperative is again asserted here: while sin brings death, God brings life to all who honour him by responding attentively and acting on his promises. However, we are soon averted from any thought that prosperity is merited on account of our

acts of faith.

Soon after the widow's son becomes ill and dies. She assumes her tragedy has resulted from her sin. Yet the narrative quickly shifts our thinking away from self to God, who delivers the boy from death to life in response to the heartfelt prayer of Elijah. The narrator draws the reader to the conclusion that while sin brings death, life is delivered from a gracious God who does not necessarily act predictably in response to acts of righteousness, but through faithful, prayerful and attentive hearts. While Sidon's child has died, life comes from God through bold and passionate faith. Indeed, hope is found in courageous faith. It is a small flicker of light on the edge of oblivion, but it is enough. The way has been opened for the redemption of Israel and the salvation of many.

V The Dialogue of Response

In a pseudo-modernistic world of anxious banality and shallow text messages, we hear the voice of God. He speaks to a dry and desolate land of compromise and capitulation to the gods of our age. By this voice we are drawn into a dialogue of response and participation in the divine imperative. It is a response that requires depth of thought, decision, and courageous faith that hears and acts on the promises of God. By way of this outrageous and bold conviction the way is open for the renewing work of God.

Review Articles

Reviewed by Ajith Fernando
Roger Steer
Inside Story: The Life of John Stott

Reviewed by Leonardo De Chirico
*Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week from the
entrance into Jerusalem to the resurrection*

Reviewed by Norman T. Barker
Ronald G. Goetz
Clear And Definite Words

William J. Abraham
*Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and
the Foundations of Christian Belief*

Inside Story: The Life of John Stott

Roger Steer

Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009.

ISBN 9781844744046

Pb pp288

Reviewed by Ajith Fernando, National Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka

THOSE WHO ARE UNABLE to or do not have the patience to plough through the large two-volume biography of John Stott by Timothy Dudley-Smith will be happy to see this shorter, well-researched and inspiring biography by experienced biographer (George Mueller, Hudson Taylor), Roger Steer. Chronologically arranged, the Contents pages also have a helpful timeline. Perhaps because of the popular style, there is no index at the back, which would have enhanced the value of this book.

Steer begins with a description of Stott's privileged upbringing in the home of eminent surgeon Sir Arnold and Lily Stott, and of his time spent as a youth at exclusive boarding schools, Oakley Hall School in Gloucestershire and Rugby School in Warwickshire. He describes his conversion while at

Rugby School under the ministry of Eric Nash (nicknamed 'Bash') and his father's lack of enthusiasm about his evangelical faith, his disapproval of his pacifist tendencies and his unhappy and reluctant consent to his decision to train for the Anglican priesthood without joining in the war effort (pp. 37-40, 44-55). This was while a student at Cambridge University from where he graduated with double 'firsts'. His father's lack of enthusiasm and opposition to the direction of his young life are described as a source of great pain to John. Even at this early stage, you find the dogged determination to do what he believed to be right that characterised his subsequent life and ministry.

One of Stott's great contributions was through his penetrative presentations of key theological ideas to the

church which has greatly influenced the direction of the evangelical movement over the past fifty years. This biography gives considerable space to this and also presents the historical background of the development and propagation of these theological themes. Stott's contribution to the National Evangelical Anglican Conferences (NEAC) in UK (1974, 1977, 1988), the Lausanne Congress in 1974 and the Lausanne movement which followed from the Congress are described. We read of the process that went into development of the groundbreaking Lausanne Covenant of which Stott was the principal drafter (pp. 159-167). This covenant, which became a standard rallying point for evangelicals, among other things, helpfully described the relationship between evangelism and social concern.

The description of Stott's lifelong ministry at All Soul's, Langham Place in London, first as a full-time priest and then in an emeritus capacity, is very instructive. It presents a church that was clearly focused on evangelising people outside the church, actively involved in social concerns, and exemplifying the practice of biblical exposition. His decision to remain officially connected with the church even after retirement presents a model of long-term community accountability which is all too rare these days. While the evangelical world knows Stott as one who pioneered the emphasis on evangelical involvement in society, he is presented in the book as a person who also had a passion for evangelism and the gospel right to the end (pp. 255-256). It is, therefore, not surprising that he considered 'his masterpiece', *The Cross of*

Christ, as the book that represents his heart and mind more than any other of his writings (pp. 216-220).

Steer's descriptions of the factors that went into the development of his theological convictions are helpful. In his early forties he struggled with whether the conservative approach to scripture was tenable. We are told how this was resolved through the help of some books and people, the strength of the testimony of history and the sharpening of his understanding of hermeneutics (pp. 119-121). We also read of his progression from a somewhat unsympathetic attitude to the charismatic movement to a more sympathetic approach (pp. 122-126, 233-35). He even publicly apologised for this and for his attitude towards his former curate Michael Harper, who left All Souls after identifying himself within the mainstream charismatic tradition (p. 168).

Stott's great contribution to an evangelical theology of social engagement and to the developing world is traced to the Bible: 'Its emphasis on love for the poor I take as an unavoidable call' (pp. 254-255). His concern for the poor was already evident during his years as a student at Rugby. Desiring to understand the poor, as a young curate he went on an expedition of a few days and nights to the hostile places in London where the homeless lived. He had not shaved for several days; he wore old clothes, took no money with him and lived on the streets as a destitute (pp. 72-77).

Another aid to his success in applying biblical truth to the contemporary world was what Stott called 'double listening'—devoting one's energy to understanding both God's Word and

God's world (pp. 208-209, 236-238). This conviction resulted in the founding of the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity of which Stott was leader for many years (pp. 208-209). Here Christians are equipped to live Christianly in society. As an exercise in double listening, we learn that Stott often used the active involvement of experts in fields to which he was applying scripture (pp. 209-210, 245-246). He often asked others for their opinions, and sometimes changed his views and revised what he had written because of what another had said (pp. 245-246). There is a report of the adoption of the idea of commitment to the 'simple lifestyle' within the Lausanne movement, though some preferred to speak in terms of a 'simpler lifestyle' (pp. 162-163).

Described in some detail is the controversy surrounding Stott's public disagreement with Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones at a meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in 1966. Lloyd-Jones called evangelicals to leave denominations mixed with evangelicals and non-evangelicals, and Stott contradicted this in his comments from the chair of that meeting (pp. 130-134). Both were criticised for their comments! We see that Stott and Lloyd Jones remained friends, enjoying mutual esteem until Lloyd Jones died (pp. 190-191). Also described is the painful controversy surrounding Stott's openness to the possibility of annihilation as opposed to eternal conscious torment. This was made public in *Essentials: a Liberal-Evangelical Dialog*, co-authored with liberal theologian David Edwards (pp. 225-228).

Space is given to describe his warm friendship and partnership with Billy

Graham (pp. 97-110, 164-167), and the British Royal family, which he served for many years, as Chaplain to the Queen (pp. 119, 203-204, 236). In many places in the book are descriptions of his relationship with his capable and dedicated secretary, Frances Whitehead. She has rendered an invaluable service through her competent behind-the-scenes support (see especially pages 90-94, 248-249, 271-273). She has served him in this capacity from 1956 to the present.

We learn that, though he was a life-long bachelor, Stott had desired to be married and even had two girlfriends. He had to accept the reality that he would have to live with the loneliness and unfulfilled desires of a single life. His celibate lifestyle gave special credibility to his rejection of homosexual partnership and his call to homosexually-oriented people to practise sexual abstinence (pp. 210-212). As a bachelor he wrote, 'I think I know the pain of this.' His singleness was one of three renunciations that Stott said he made. The other two were giving up an academic career and giving up prospects of climbing in the ecclesiastical hierarchy by being a bishop or an archbishop (pp. 128, 271-272).

In several places we are given hints of Stott's study and devotional habits. There are many references to his hide-away on the Welsh coast, the Hookses, which he bought in 1954 and where he spent extended periods in study and writing (pp. 86-88, 92, 247-249). He fitted in with rustic life there, clearing weeds and washing dishes. The Hookses has now become a retreat centre for small groups and writers. Also described is the disciplined quiet time he maintained (pp. 246-248). We find

that he read the Bible through each year using Robert Murray McCheyne's Bible reading calendar. We learn of his legendary intercessory prayer life using a note book packed with papers and pamphlets which travelled the world with him. His voluminous correspondence with hundreds of people, including many younger leaders in Asia, was a major cause for his personal influence on so many. Often in the book there are references to his bird-watching hobby. This resulted in his book, *The Birds Our Teachers*, where he uses the life of birds to illustrate spiritual principles (pp. 243-244).

Stott was, first and foremost, a preacher of the Word. His classic treatment on the topic, *I Believe in Preaching* (US Edition: *Between Two Worlds*) is summarised (pp. 199-203), as are most of his other significant books. We learn that when he made the journey to the pulpit to preach, he says 'over and over again, "I believe in the Holy Spirit"' (p. 123). He made a memorable statement about the importance of preaching to interviewer Tim Stafford in 2006: 'When I enter the pulpit with the Bible in my hands and in my heart, my blood begins to flow and my eyes to sparkle for the sheer glory of having God's Word to expound. We need to emphasise the glory, the privilege, of sharing God's truth with people' (pp. 267-268). Background notes on the circumstances surrounding the writing of many of his other books are also given.

One of Stott's most enduring contributions to the Asian church has been his giving us an example of humble, servant leadership where the aim is not to build one's empire but to enrich the kingdom of God. Here he has been a mentor to many younger Christians

who affectionately called him 'Uncle John'. We are told how he himself lived a simple life with the bare necessities and gave away his royalties for literature and education projects in the emerging churches. Well stocked seminary libraries and a host of scholars with doctorates bear witness to the effectiveness of the different groups that together form what is now known as the Langham Partnership (pp. 257-258).

Steer gives, in some detail, the story behind the 'Manila Manifesto' (pp. 230-232). At the last moment Stott was given the assignment of drafting the preliminary conference statement of the Lausanne II Congress in Manila in 1989. Known as the 'Manila Manifesto', this document was to be based on the talks given at the conference and serve as a clarification of the Lausanne Covenant; it was also to include applications of some of the principles stated in the Covenant. In the short time available, Stott stayed up many nights and completed this draft. Towards the end of the conference, some felt that the whole statement should be dropped and some short affirmations should be given instead. After battling with this issue in the presence of God at night, Stott announced to the committee the next morning that he was willing to discard the document, which he had worked so hard to produce, and replace it with the short list of affirmations suggested. This reviewer was part of the committee that drafted this document, and to me this was a prime example of godly surrender of personal plans for the overall good of the kingdom. Not mentioned in the book is the fact that most of the members of the drafting commit-

tee from the Global South supported the longer version! Finally, a compromise was reached and the short affirmations were printed just before the longer document.

It is evident that the biographer has tried hard to find the weaknesses of his subject. But there was not much that he could find. Many of the weaknesses are related to his strengths, such as his reluctance to be vulnerable in public, his over-emphasis on reason, his inflexibility (he is described as incredibly stubborn but humble p. 246), and his finding it hard to understand those who were not disciplined or intellectually alert (pp. 277-282). Yet in the midst of these what emerges to the forefront are his godly character traits. Frances Whitehead, after being his secretary for over fifty years, answered the question about whether he had a dark side, saying, 'No, he is thoroughly consistent. He is what he professes. He wants to please God and that's all he

cares about—doing God's will, living for his glory, being faithful' (271).

It is hard for this reviewer to review objectively a biography of one of his heroes. I can say, however, that I was instructed and inspired by it. It is an excellent introduction to the life, ministry, beliefs and character of one of the most influential Christians in recent times. Stott's life and ministry are a challenge to the flashy leadership style, with the trappings of earthly success and affluence, which is growing in popularity in South Asia today. This book shows how his great influence was recognised by even by the secular media. For example, the *Time Magazine* listed him in their hundred most influential people in the world (p. 264). Stott did achieve an enormous amount without the trappings of earthly success and affluence. He is an inspiring model of an alternative servant leadership style that approximates more to the style of Jesus than the other.

*Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week from the entrance into Jerusalem
to the resurrection*

Original German edition: Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011

US edition: San Francisco: Ignatius Press

ISBN 978-1-58617-500-9

Reviewed by Leonardo De Chirico

IT IS TOO EARLY TO say whether it will become a theological classic, but *Jesus of Nazareth* (second part): by Benedict XVI is already a commercial success. The first printing of 1,200,000 copies in twenty-one languages (and some *e-book* editions as well) makes it a good business for both author and publishing houses. Launched in time to be an

ideal gift for the Easter season, it will probably sell more than the first volume that was published in 2007 and that sold two million copies. The first volume covered the life of Jesus from his birth to the great miracles and sermons, whereas this second one recounts the apex of Jesus' ministry, i.e. his passion, death and resurrec-

tion. Though the two books present different elements of the Gospels, there is close continuity and coherence in Ratzinger's approach to Jesus' life.

One important feature of the Pope's portrait of Jesus has to do with biblical hermeneutics. How do we read the Gospels? Ratzinger knows that the historical-critical school has nurtured scepticism, if not agnosticism, towards the Gospels as reliable accounts of the life of Jesus. The outcome has been the alleged chasm between the Jesus of history (unknowable in the main) and the Christ of faith (based on 'mythological' theologizing by the authors). While not renouncing the historical-critical methods and extensively conversing with liberal exegetes (mainly Germans), Ratzinger wants to recover the faith-element inherent in the Gospels, both as an essential ingredient of their formation and as a fundamental principle of their interpretation.

He calls for a hermeneutical 'both-and' approach to the Gospels, i.e. open to critical-historical readings but within the context of a hermeneutics of faith. In the preface he argues that his sketch of Jesus' life is an exercise of what Vatican II intended for biblical interpretation. In fact *Dei Verbum* (the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation) n. 12 says that the reading of the Bible should search out the manifold characteristics of the text within the whole of Scripture and under the 'judgment of the Church' whose living tradition is the on-going stream of revelation.

One note of comparison is worth mentioning. The Evangelical scholar I.H. Marshall identifies three ways in which contemporary biblical scholar-

ship is concentrating on areas more congenial to evangelicals: the recognition that all biblical books are theological documents with a theological message; that they are all literary texts to be studied in their final form rather than in terms of sources; and that they should be studied canonically as part of the Bible as a whole (*Beyond the Bible. Moving from Scripture to Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker 2044, pp. 19-20). *Dei Verbum's* approach (and therefore Ratzinger's) comes close to this, especially in its emphasis on the unity of Scripture and the legitimate place of faith in the reading process.

Yet it is different in equally important issues. First, it wants to retain historical-critical methods by modifying them rather than denouncing their anti-supernatural presuppositions and their arrogance to supersede Scripture. Second, while pushing aside the final judge of a self-claimed universal 'reason', it installs another final judge in the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church. *Tota Scriptura* (the whole of Scripture) is recognized but is not allowed to be *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) in that Scripture is viewed always as a part of a wider reservoir of Revelation which is authentically guarded and taught by the Church.

Let us first consider some strong points. Benedict tends to practise what John Calvin called the 'harmony of the Gospels', i.e. the attempt to read the Synoptics and John's Gospel together as much as possible, thus complementing each other rather than giving conflicting accounts. Outward discrepancies between the Gospels are generally treated as differences in emphasis, in perspective, and in intention. If taken together, the Gospels give a fuller pic-

ture rather than a fragmented one. Admirable also is the constant reference to the Old Testament as the overarching framework for the words and deeds of Jesus. He also affirms the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus and strongly advocates for its pivotal significance for the Christian faith. These are all welcome features of Ratzinger's book.

A few points of contention are also worth noting. For instance, one overt concession to historical-critical methods pushes Ratzinger to say that the Lord's eschatological discourse has been constructed through different redaction stages and is not the actual words of Jesus as they were spoken. There is also a persistent sacramental reading of the episodes of Jesus' life as if they were naturally connected to the Roman Catholic understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrifice of Jesus and the Church. This is true, for example, as far as the narratives regarding the entry to Jerusalem and the announcing of the destruction of the temple are concerned. Then, commenting on the priestly prayer in John 17, Ratzinger finds clear hints to the apostolic succession in the Catholic way. Finally, touching on the sensitive issue of the responsibility of the Jews in the death of Jesus, he denies any and goes on to say that Christians do not need to worry about the evangelization of the Jews because 'all Israel' will be saved, thus leaving the reader with the idea that purposeful evangelism is not for the Jews.

Perhaps the most serious problem with Ratzinger's account has to do with expiation. Since the cross occupies a central place in the Gospel narrative, the book ponders on it quite

extensively, expounding the doctrine beyond the Gospels themselves. His treatment agrees with what he had already presented in his 2005 encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) and tries to balance God's justice and God's love, looking at the cross as the mystery in which the two are combined. Yet even in his profound comments there are two points which are missing: propitiation and penal substitution. While God's justice is often referred to, no place is given to God's wrath (e.g. Luke 3:7; John 3:36) and the role of the cross in appeasing it.

The harsh words of Jesus about God's judgment are somewhat sentimentalized. Moreover, while expiation is exegeted in its 'covering' aspect, no attention is given to the legal exchange that took place at the cross. While Isaiah 53 is used as a background narrative for the meaning of the cross, it is not understood in penal substitutionary terms. The meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus being for 'many' or for 'all' further complicates the point. The issue here is different from the Calvinist-Arminian debate about the extension of the atonement. Ratzinger's preoccupation with carefully defining the words is more in line with the 'catholic' (i.e. universal), inclusivist view of all mankind being linked to the cross of Jesus, taking therefore a universalist slant.

Pope Benedict XVI has admirably written a Gospel portrait of Jesus of Nazareth that wishes to present the 'real' Jesus. More than the 'real' one, however, the picture that comes out of the book is that of a 'saint' Jesus, i.e. a figure that is astonishingly adherent to Roman Catholic expectations.

Clear And Definite Words

by Ronald G. Goetz

Edited and compiled by Rebecca Clancy and Larry Mattera

Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2010

ISBN 13:978-1-60608-150-1

pb, pp 144. Bibliography

Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief

William J. Abraham

Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press 2010

ISBN 978-1-60258-246-0

pb, pp 98. Bibliography and Index

Reviewed by Norman T. Barker, Brisbane, Australia

THESE TWO SLIGHT volumes raise vital issues concerning the knowledge of God. Abraham deals with Wesley's epistemology while Goetz's posthumous work is a stinging rebuke to the many 'mainline' theologians who reject the thought that we may have any real knowledge of God, or even that there is a God to have knowledge of. I find it interesting to put them side by side and then take them up in reverse historical order. Goetz deals with the *what* of our knowledge of God, whereas Abraham's discussion of John Wesley concerns the *how*. Assuming that there is a God to know, how may we know him?

Goetz's book is a posthumous work, edited by his daughter, Rebecca Clancy, in conjunction with Larry Mattera. It provides a brief overview of the central theses of well-known and less well-known theologians of the modern era. It charges that much modern and postmodern theology has been fatally affected by a spirit of scepticism, agnosticism, even atheism—a blatant contradiction of the task of *theology* which means literally 'discourse about,

or science of, God'. Goetz's complaint is that much modern theology is highly sceptical of saying anything about the real being of God. For those who have found it difficult to make sense of reputed leaders of Christian thought, Goetz provides a brief outline of the main tenets of their theologies, as well as his own criticisms.

He begins with Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich as two seminal theologians of the modern era, who have cast an enormous shadow over contemporary 'mainline' theology. It seems that evangelical scholars do not warrant a mention. In spite of the starvation diet fed by the theological left, we are urged not to swallow the 'anachronistic obscurantisms' of the theological right. Evangelicals, however, will find much to instruct them, excite them and challenge them both in Goetz's presentations and in his criticisms.

Clear and definite words is a passionate exposé of those who have followed in the wake of Bultmann and Tillich and taken their theologies to what many of us may think is the natural conclusion. He attributes to Bultmann

and Tillich at least some Christological conviction, however contradictory this was to their philosophies. While they reduced theology to a description of the human condition, the scepticism and nihilism that now mark the academic world have radically affected those called to think and write about God and his saving action in the world.

Goetz considers Gordon Kaufman and Sallie McFague as Tillichian or post-Tillichian theologians in the United States, but believes their 'respective theologies are minimal'. He tackles the post-liberal theologian, William Placher, a 'moderate Barthian' for his allegedly contradictory attitude to apologetics and proposal for a 'tolerant pluralism'.

The present refusal of much modern theology to say anything ontologically about God Goetz considers a great disservice to the cause of Christ. The theologian exists to serve the church's understanding of its faith and its mission to the world. But 'disparate traditions and elements—syncretism, eclecticism, pluralism—have become the meat and drink of the modern and post-modern world'. Goetz' burden, following in the steps of Karl Barth, is for theology to speak *clear and definite words* about the object of Christian faith, God himself. Evangelicals can only say 'amen' to his plea.

Goetz holds to the 'awful mystery, the eternal otherness of God' (the God who remains hidden even in his revelation—Luther), but affirms that by the incarnation God has made himself an object in the world. The mystery demands that our words about him cannot be univocal—used precisely as in ordinary speech. But neither can our language about God be equivocal, so

caught up in the mystery of God that all it can say is what he is not, never what he is, in the style of the mystics. Therefore we must seek a 'middle way'. This he finds in Aquinas' way of analogy, which recognizes the impossibility of univocal discourse, but holds to the possibility of a true and faithful witness to God.

After trenchant criticisms of modernist and post-modernist theologians whose thought became captive to their philosophies, contra Barth, he seems to allow that there may be a place for an apologetic, but of a different kind. He finds a principle in Jesus' refusal to justify himself, but then to offer the testimony that would seal his death (Mark 14:61); this is an indication that 'we first take a fideist stance and then demonstrate that stance in self-sacrificial solidarity with unbelievers' such as Jesus demonstrated in his death for us.

This diatribe comes not from some fundamentalist or evangelical, but from within the theological establishment itself. Goetz, who died in 2006, was active in the Karl Barth Society of North America and editor-at-large of *The Christian Century*, advocate of mainline theology. Like his mentor Barth he has thrown his own bombshell into the playground of today's theologians.

Although he acknowledges that it has its evil side, Goetz stands in awe of modern technology. He seems to think that our technology testifies to some innate superiority, and confuses technological achievements with personal and social *shalom*. He seems to share Barth's incipient universalism. He affirms that 'the more Christianity is suspicious of the human genius that

makes for culture, the more God's universal love is made incomprehensible.' Any thought of a dividing line between believers and unbelievers, or a special activity of the Holy Spirit in bestowing the gift of faith, is anathema to him.

Here many evangelicals will take issue with him, on the basis of the Scriptures. While some of his sentiments regarding the believer's solidarity with the world of unbelief are commendable, he calls into question the ultimate division between the people of God and those who refuse to come to God. A Christian who has any real sense of the undeserved grace of God in Jesus Christ cannot take a position of superiority—but must at the same time recognize that Scripture witnesses to a *we/they* situation.

The author of the second book, William J. Abraham, is a United Methodist pastor and Wesleyan scholar. 'Athens' represents philosophy and the rational, 'Algersgate' the experiential and the inner life of the spirit. He begins with Wesley's Aldersgate experience, recognized as marking the pivotal place of conversion in early Methodism. Evangelicalism shares this conviction of the crucial place of personal conversion in which the sinner trusts the promises of God and comes to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Wesley's eighteenth century has been dubbed *The age of reason*, the spirit of the Enlightenment exalting human intellect and making negative judgements about the Christian faith. The Enlightenment spirit found religious expression in Deism which denied God's intervention in history. It influenced the tone of Christianity in

Britain, which descended into formalism and went hand in hand with deep personal and social problems. The Enlightenment continues to affect deeply Christian theology, as reflected in Goetz. Abraham comments that 'the intellectual opposition to robust forms of the Christian faith is as real today (if not more so) that it was in the eighteenth century.'

Wesley applied his mind to the then current challenges to the Christian faith. Rooted in his own evangelical experience, he found more secure grounds for the reality of God in his experience of the grace of God and the resulting radical change of heart, mind and conduct that were part of that experience.

The analysis of this experience yielded three cogent arguments for the reality of God, taken singly and jointly. First the evidence drawn from the fulfilment of the divine promise of salvation preached to him by the Moravians and fulfilled now in his own experience; then the evidence from his new personal awareness of divine forgiveness and pardon for sin; and finally, the evidence from the power of God in our lives.

Abraham seeks to bring Wesley's proposals into conversation with more recent work in the epistemology of theology, and to retrieve and restate Wesley's insights for today. Rather than confidence in reason and an 'innate idea of God', Wesley regarded human beings as 'deeply disorientated intellectually'. By nature he is a 'mere atheist'. It is the direct action of God by the Holy Spirit that renews our minds to take hold of the promise of God by faith. Faith is 'an act of trust generated by a God-given capacity to see and

become aware of what God had done for us in the death of Jesus Christ'. By contrast, modern scholarly sceptics, even within the fold of Christianity, decry the reality and role of the Holy Spirit.

For Wesley, the Christian life was an experience of the power of God, which led him to argue for the reality of God from conspicuous sanctity and holiness in the lives of believers. He 'wrote eloquently of the impact of a holy life'. Abraham quotes Paul Moser: 'God is committed to our moral transformation... Knowledge of God is not a spectator sport.' As part of the argument from the evidence of God's power, Abraham takes up the issue of the 'extraordinary gifts of the Spirit'. Abraham is more favourable than Wesley to the reality and impact of charismatic phenomena. To my mind Wesley represents better than Abraham St. Paul's appraisal of the relative value of these gifts.

Abraham discusses at length Wesley's view of Scripture authority, a portion I found somewhat difficult to follow, as he accuses Wesley of confusing epistemology with ontology. He finds in Wesley's suspicion of natural theology a precursor of many Methodists who have been attracted to the theology of Karl Barth.

Wesley saw God's providence in the assaults on traditional arguments for belief in God. He longed that men of understanding should seek a more secure support from the internal evidence of Christianity and predicted that 'in a century or two, the people of England will be fairly divided into real Deists and real Christians'.

In accord with Wesley, Abraham declares that conversion cannot be reduced to some sort of emotional, ecstatic experience. I conclude with his beautifully balanced description of its various facets: 'In conversion we rely on the promises of God; we hear the voice of God within through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit; we begin to perceive the truth about ourselves and about God, as it is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ; we see the power of God at work in others; and we begin to experience the power of God, however feebly, in ourselves. In the end we encounter the full splendour of God in the special revelation of His Son brought home inwardly through the secret action of the Holy Spirit. Once this occurs, we are in the New World of Faith' with its implications for outgoing Christian love and service while we explore 'the full ramifications of divine revelation for everything we know and ponder'.

Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Richard A. Robinson
David Parker (Ed.)
Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People: Papers on the Uniqueness of Jesus and Jewish Evangelism

Reviewed by Nicholas G. Piotrowski
Christopher J. H. Wright
The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission

Reviewed by Derek Tidball
Peter J Morden
'Communion with Christ and his people': The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon

Book Reviews

ERT (2011) 35:4, 376-377

Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People: Papers on the Uniqueness of Jesus and Jewish Evangelism,

Edited by David Parker

ISBN 978-1-84227-669-3

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011.

Pb, pp xii + 291

Reviewed by Richard A. Robinson, Jews for Jesus San Francisco, CA USA

The fourteen essays in this volume represent papers given at the World Evangelical Alliance's Theological Commission consultation on Jewish evangelism held in Berlin in August 2008. This was a follow-up conference to 1989's Willowbank meeting (discussed in chapter one), also on Jewish evangelism. This conference nearly two decades later continues to keep the evangelization of Jewish people on the theological agenda of the church.

The essays divide nicely into several categories. First comes an overview of the statements now and in the past. The final

statement adopted by the participants at the 2008 conference, 'The Berlin Declaration on the Uniqueness of Christ and Jewish Evangelism in Europe Today', is included after which the first chapter gives an overview of Willowbank and developments since.

Theological issues come in for treatment beginning in chapter two, 'The Uniqueness of Christ for Salvation with Implications for Jewish Mission', and chapter three on 'Irreconcilable Views of Salvation in Early Christianity and Early Judaism', and chapter four, devoted to the special issue of 'John's Gospel and Jewish Monotheism'.

Historical matters are treated in chapter five, 'Martin Luther and the Jewish People with Implications for Jewish Missions'; chapter six on 'The Early Pietistic Movement's Contribution to Jewish Evangelism'; and chapter seven, 'Urgent Issues in Jewish Evangelism Around the Year 1900'. Still in the historical section, reflections on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust comprise chapter eight (' "No Exit" for the Jews: Germany's Romantic Nationalism and the Modern Reality of Anti-Semitism') and chapter

nine, 'Messianic Jewish Reflections on the Holocaust and Jewish Evangelism'.

Finally, whereas the earlier theological essays dealt with standard categories such as soteriology, the final chapters discuss recent theological trends especially important for Jewish evangelization: chapter ten on 'Two Covenant Theology and its Implications for Jewish Missions'; chapter 11 on 'Implicit Universalism in Some Christian Zionism and Messianic Judaism'; chapter 12 concerning 'Replacement Theology with Implications for Messianic Jewish Relations'; and chapter 13 which considers 'Karl Barth, Mark Kinzer and the Jewish People, with Implications for Jewish Evangelism'.

A final essay, 'Available Resources and Current Practices in Jewish Evangelism', rounds out the volume.

Space allows room to mention only a few things that stood out for this reviewer. In his chapter on two-covenant theology, Henri Blocher approvingly quotes Andrew G. Shead, who writes about 'the increasing tendency to read the new covenant passage in a way that minimizes or denies any substantive difference between it and the Mosaic covenant, a tendency shown especially by German-speaking and American scholars involved in Christian-Jewish dialogue' (page 195). Although Shead may be speaking about passages in Paul and Luke, Hebrews 8 is likewise a critical passage, especially since some recent Messianic Jewish and non-Jewish scholars have read Hebrews 8 as speaking solely of the Temple and sacrificial system rather than other aspects of the Mosaic covenant. (An additional consideration in this question would be the 'unity of the law' in the Judaism of the time.)

In the chapter on Barth and Kinzer, Eckhard Schnabel notes that 'If Paul had told Jewish people who had come to

believe in Jesus as the Messiah that they should continue to follow the ritual stipulations of the Torah, and if he personally had obeyed the dietary and Sabbath laws, this reputation [that Paul taught against the Law, Acts 21:28] would have no basis in reality' (p. 267). I am glad for Schnabel's vigorous critique of Kinzer's 'postmissionary Messianic Judaism', but I do not know that the first-century was so simple for Paul or anyone else. Jewish behaviour was not simply theologically conditioned; it was also part of the social fabric such that it represented the basic lifestyle of first-century Jewish even considered just from the cultural standpoint. If Paul was found in the synagogues even in largely Gentile cities each week, we may suppose he 'kept the Sabbath' in some sense. This issue calls for continued discussion. However, I can surely agree when Schnabel says that 'Kinzer's view of "mission" is strange, to say the least' (p. 271) and when he writes that 'For Kinzer, followers of Jesus are no longer "fishers of people" (Mark 1:17) but fish who swim among the other fish' and that in Kinzer's world, believers 'are not ambassadors, they are home secretaries' (p. 271).

This book is warmly recommended to all concerned with (Jewish) missions and evangelism. For those new to the subject, the initial overviews will set the context of the discussion, while all will benefit from the up-to-date and nuanced thinking of some of today's leading evangelical scholars.

ERT (2011) 35:4, 378-379

**The Mission of God's People: A
Biblical Theology of the Church's
Mission**

Biblical Theology for Life Series

Christopher J. H. Wright

Grand Rapids, USA: Zondervan,
2010

ISBN 978-0-310-29112-1

Pb., pp 301, indices

*Reviewed by Nicholas G. Piotrowski, PhD
candidate, Wheaton College, Wheaton,
USA*

ERT readers need no introduction to Chris Wright. The International Director of Latham Partnership International (the resource-distributing arm of which receives all the royalties from this book) has contributed extensively to this journal and written several oft-discussed books. In one such book, *The Mission of God* (reviewed in ERT 33.2 [2009]: 188-90), Wright lays out a 'missional hermeneutic' which 'proceeds from the assumption that *the whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation*' (51, italics original).

In *The Mission of God's People* Wright employs this substantial exegetical foundation to inquire into why the church exists and the tasks to which it is called. If the whole Bible describes 'God's mission [to bring] humanity from being a cacophony of nations divided and scattered in rebellion against God...to being a choir of nations united and gathered in the worship of God' (46), then the mission of God's people must involve the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. God's mission (purpose and goal) bears directly on the church's

mission (reason for existence). 'It is not so much that God has a mission for his church as that God has a church for his mission' (148).

Additionally, *God's People* can be seen as an expansion upon the affirmations made public in the Lausanne Covenant (accessible at www.lausanne.org) and a plea for 'integral missions'. Integral missions are an approach to ministry where neither evangelism nor social action takes pride of place, but are organically dependent on each other (read more in the Micah Declaration; accessible at www.micahnetwork.org). While some readers may still prefer to speak of the primacy of evangelism (see for example *Evangelism and Social Responsibility*; also available at www.lausanne.org), Wright argues his case well as he moves seamlessly between the way the church lives in the world and the message the church has for the world. The two need and sustain each other; neither can exist without the other. Though Wright constantly weaves together the themes of declaring the gospel and doing the gospel, *God's People* is methodologically arranged to address various aspects of the church's calling one by one. If mission means reason for existence, then the church is created by God to be a people who know the movements of redemptive-history, care for creation, bless the nations, walk in God's way, live redemptively, represent God to the world, attract others to God, know the one living God and saviour, bear witness to the living God, proclaim the gospel of Christ, send and are sent, live and work in the public square, and pray and praise God. Chapters are given to each of these in which Wright begins with several Old Testament passages, ties them together, and then proceeds into the New Testament—all of which provides a robust biblical theology for each locus. An

introduction queuing the questions and a conclusion with trenchant application round out the book.

God's People is valuable for several reasons. First, Wright ventures outside of the typical 'evangelical canon' into texts that address the church's mission in less frequently rehearsed ways. Second, Wright constantly reminds readers that the church is always and everywhere on mission. The mission field is not 'there', nor the concern of 'them'. Rather, as long as the church is in the world (and not of the world, a point Wright consistently makes), it will have a mission to the world. Finally, Wright challenges hackneyed stereotypes on nearly every page and provides convincing biblical reasons for reconsidering what we mean by 'mission'.

For all these strengths, this reviewer does wonder if Wright deemphasizes one particular aspect of the church's mission: to elucidate *how* the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is 'God's answer to every dimension of sin and evil in the cosmos and all their destructive effects' (43). The church is called not only to proclaim the gospel, but with it also to declare *why* the gospel is good news, *how* it works. While not entirely absent, Wright makes only passing references to God's wrath against sin, and how specifically Jesus' death and resurrection assuage that wrath. A statement like, 'The cross and resurrection [is] the central point of the whole line of redemption in history' (43) is true enough; therefore the reader may desire further explication on this 'central point'. On page 193 Wright does speak of being justified, saved, reconciled and forgiven as doctrines 'familiar to us'. But are they familiar enough to receive such little comparative attention in a book on the church's mission? It seems that part of the church's mission is to make its

message clear, these doctrines being indispensable to the task. More attention to the contributions of Noah's flood and the Israelite sacrificial system to the Bible's whole narrative would perhaps aid to this end.

This critique notwithstanding, *The Mission of God's People* will, for all its contributions and strengths, prove helpful for a global audience of pastors and preachers, as well as students and teachers of biblical and practical theology. Dr. Wright has served the church well in writing it.

ERT (2011) 35:4, 379-380

'Communion with Christ and his people': The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon

Peter J. Morden

Centre for Baptist History and
Heritage Studies, Volume 5
Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2010
ISBN 9781907600043
Pb, 318pp

*Reviewed by Derek Tidball, Former
Principal of London School of Theology*

Given his prominence, it is surprising how poorly Spurgeon has been served by recent scholarly publications but Peter Morden's newly published work on Spurgeon's spirituality makes up for the deficiency. Peter Morden is Lecturer in Church History at Spurgeon's College and has already published an illustrated biography of Spurgeon. Although this work originated as a PhD thesis, which has the benefit of ensuring it has been meticulously researched, it is an absorbing read. Morden challenges superficial interpretations of Spurgeon which present him respectively as a straightforward Calvinist, irredeemable Victorian, or an

anti-Romantic champion of the Enlightenment and shows him to be much more complex. Romanticism was more influential than usually acknowledged as seen especially in his Communion Sermons and exposition of the Song of Songs, although this has been explored previously to a more limited extent by Mark Hopkins in *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*. Reviewing his writings and sermons on conversion, sacraments, the Bible, prayer, activism, holiness and suffering, Morden shows how Spurgeon navigated his passage safely through his Puritan heritage as it encountered the cultural influences of his age to arrive at his own distinctive positions.

On holiness, for example, Spurgeon remained largely true to his Puritan roots whilst modifying them through his commitment to Premillennialism and his admiration for the muscular Christianity

of Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley. At the same time, Spurgeon always succeeded in teaching a holiness that related to the everyday world of his congregation.

The various stages and facets of Spurgeon's complex ministry led to some unresolved tensions in his teaching. Yet, far from being incoherent, Morden persuasively argues that Spurgeon's spirituality had an integrating motif in 'communion with Christ and his people'.

This book advances our understanding of the genius of Spurgeon significantly. Apart from its historical value and any contemporary lessons which can be gleaned from it (and they are many), it is a rich devotional study in its own right and good to read for one's own soul. But, be warned. This reviewer was driven back to buy yet more volumes of Spurgeon's works. So the book may cost the reader more than its cover price alone!

From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity': A History of Australian Baptists

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Ken R. Manley

From their beginnings in Australia in 1831 with the first baptisms in Woolloomooloo Bay in 1832, this pioneering study describes the quest of Baptists in the different colonies (states) to discover their identity as Australians and Baptists. Although institutional developments are analyzed and the roles of significant individuals traced, the major focus is on the social and theological dimensions of the Baptist movement.

Ken R. Manley is Distinguished Professor of Church History, Whitley College, The University of Melbourne, Australia.

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Articles

AKRONG, ABRAHAM	
The 'Born again' Concept in the Charismatic Movement in Ghana	31
BARKER, NORMAN T.	
Ronald G. Goetz, <i>Clear And Definite Words</i> and William J. Abraham, <i>Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief</i> (Review Article)	372
CAMPBELL, SUSAN	
Scratching the Itch: Paul's Athenian Speech Shaping Mission Today . .	177
DANAHER, JAMES P.	
Out of Context—the Gospel According to Jesus.	265
Theology in the 21st Century	111
DE CHIRICO, LEONARDO	
<i>Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week from the entrance into Jerusalem to the resurrection</i> (Review Article).	369
DODDS, ADAM	
The Mission of the Spirit and the Mission the Church: Towards a Trinitarian Missiology.	209
DOWSETT, ROSE	
The Tale of a Centenary: Edinburgh 1910 to Edinburgh 2010	196
EWELL, C. ROSALEE VELLOSO AND BAXTER-BROWN, JOHN	
Changing the World, One Story at a Time: Rediscovering Evangelism after Cape Town 2010.	100
FERNANDO, AJITH	
Roger Steer, <i>Inside Story: The Life of John Stott</i> (Review Article)	365
HARRIES, JIM	
Magic, Science and Theology in African Development	17
HITCHEN, JOHN M.	
Confirming the Christian Scholar and Theological Educator's Identity through New Testament Metaphor	276
HUIZING, RUSSELL L.	
Leaders from Disciples: The Church's Contribution to Leadership Development	333
IGBOIN, BENSON OHIHON	
Afro-Christian Expression of Sex and Sex Organs	345
JAYAKUMAR, SAMUEL	
The Work of God as Holistic Mission: An Asian Perspective	227

JOHNSON, THOMAS K. Christ and Culture	4
KOPPELIN, FRANK AND SCHIRRMACHER, THOMAS The Gospels and Cultural Adaptation in Mission	326
LEWIS, JOHN Salvation, Pseudo-modernism, Suffering and Hope: A Study of I Kings 17	360
MA, WONSUK David Yonggi Cho's Theology Of Blessing: Basis, Legitimacy, and Limitations	140
MORDEN, PETER J. C.H. Spurgeon and Suffering	306
NOLIVOS, ELOY H. Hermeneutics and Missions in the Land of the Equinox	41
PARSONS, MICHAEL Luther, the Royal Psalms and the Suffering Church	242
RICHARD, H. L. New Faces of the Church: An Indian Case Study: A Response	78
SCHIRRMACHER, THOMAS Christianity and Democracy	51
TALBOT, BRIAN The King James Bible: A Reflection on 400 Years of its History	292
WILDSMITH, ANDREW Contextualizing the Structure of Systematic Theology in Africa	122
WRIGHT, CHRISTOPHER J. H. The Righteous Rich in the Old Testament	255
YONG, AMOS Disability and the Love of Wisdom: De-forming, Re-forming, and Per-forming Philosophy of Religion	160
YUNG, HWA Energising Community: Theological Education's Relational Mandate	61

Books Reviewed

Bebbington, David W., <i>Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People</i>	95
Charles, J. Daryl, <i>Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things</i>	188

- Dyrness, William A. and Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti (editors), *Global Dictionary of Theology* 191
- Groitzl, Gerlinde, *Evangelical Internationalism: The American Christian Right and Global Human Rights* 192
- Johnson, Todd M. and Ross, Kenneth R., *Atlas of Global Christianity* 87
- Kerr, David A. and Ross, Kenneth R. (editors), *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* 85
- Lehmann, Theo, *Blues Music and Gospel Proclamation: the extraordinary life of a courageous East German pastor* 96
- Leonard, Bill J., *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a scandalous past and an uncertain future* 81
- Long, D. Stephen, *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* 187
- Mangum, R. Todd and Sweetnam, Mark S., *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church* 88
- Marinello, Thomas J. and Williams, H. H. Drake III (editors), *My Brother's Keeper: Essays in honor of Ellis R. Brotzman* 190
- McDermott, Gerald R. (editor), *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* 288
- Morden, Peter J., 'Communion with Christ and his people': *The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon* 379
- Parker, David (editor), *Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People: Papers on the Uniqueness of Jesus and Jewish Evangelism* 376
- Smith, Gordon T. (editor), *The Lord's Supper: Five Views* 92
- Stewart, Robert B. (editor), *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue* 185
- Warrington, Keith, *Discovering Jesus in the New Testament* 82
- Wetzel, Klaus, *Kirchengeschichte Asiens (Asian Church History)* 189
- Witherington, Ben III, *The Living Word of God: Rethinking the Theology of the Bible* 90
- Wright, Christopher J. H., *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* 378
- Yandell, Keith and Netland, Harold A., *UK version: Spirituality without God: Buddhist Enlightenment and Christian Salvation, US version: Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal* 83

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