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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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WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

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GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

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Manuscripts, reports and communications

should be addressed to the Editor

Dr Thomas Schirmmacher, Friedrichstrasse 38, 53111 Bonn, Germany.

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Email enquiries welcome: chair_tc@worldea.org
<http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/commissions/tc/>

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Editorial: Divine Affectivity and Mission

WE COMMENCE THIS issue with a fascinating article on how the affectivity of God impacts mission. As the author, Karen Shaw (Lebanon) says, 'Emotions matter because God's revelation comes with great emotion and is meant to elicit strong affective responses.' She adds, 'The affective is a vital aspect of human personality and culture, and a necessary agent in the experience of salvation and spiritual maturity.' Aspects covered in this detailed biblical study include revelation, theological anthropology, soteriology, and pneumatology, and it concludes with reflections on how an affective theology might work out in the practice of mission.

In an equally intriguing study, Craig Ott (USA) describes how the logic of games can be applied to the contextualization of scripture. Referring to the way aims and rules in a game do not change but strategies do, depending on the way the game plays out, he shows how biblical passages refer to the objectives of God's mission and how there are flexible strategies for adapting the teaching and models of Scripture in a local context.

Moving on from here to the moral authority of Scripture, Patrick Nullens (Belgium) shows how love precedes true knowing and therefore finds the hermeneutics of love as the way to understanding the ethical imperatives of the Bible, especially in a covenantal context.

For one way in which this might work out, we turn again to the Levant and learn from Robert Hamd how, since the 19th century, Reformed mis-

sionaries focused on vigorous work among the poor, building schools and hospitals, as a part of their ultimate task, the proclamation of the gospel. However, since those days, there has been a divide between these two aspects of mission. Hamd's report on a vital present day ministry documents a deliberate attempt to recover the earlier holistic approach.

For our next two articles we turn to the 'Consultation on Scripture: Its Authority, Meaning and Mission in the Asian Context', sponsored by the Asia Theological Association in June, 2012. Athena Gorospe (Philippines) presented a paper on 'Evangelicals and the Environment' in which she advocates the 'theology of life' as a more biblically satisfactory and contextually helpful approach than the commonly used theme of stewardship, which she argues is 'limited in its usefulness' and restricted in its appeal. Another paper at that conference was contributed by Christof Sauer (South Africa) in which he outlines the comprehensive biblical scope of a statement on persecution and martyrdom from an earlier conference as a welcome example of 'globalizing theology'.

We conclude with an article length review by our General Editor of a voluminous study of the early history of the Evangelical Alliance and especially its remarkable advocacy of religious freedom. Reference to this global body is a fitting conclusion to an issue with remarkable insights from around the world.

Thomas Schirmacher, General Editor
David Parker, Executive Editor

Divine Heartbeats and Human Echoes: A Theology of Affectivity and Implications for Mission

Karen L.H. Shaw

KEYWORDS: *Affectivity, Mission, Emotion, Revelation, Theological Anthropology, Soteriology, Pneumatology*

STAR TREK'S MR. SPOCK was not fully human, and the proof was not just in his pointed ears. His affective deficiency revealed his Vulcan origins. Presumably, missionaries among the Vulcans would not need to take emotions into account, but missionaries on Planet Earth do. This article takes a theological look at missions in light of 'affectivity', the emotional aspect of human personality which plays a major role in influencing feelings, desires, felt needs, prejudices, attitudes, receptivity and dispositions.

I Affectivity and Revelation

God is the great communicator. Like all good communicators, he conveys not only his thoughts, but also his heart. He does this consistently in all his various forms of self-expression.

1. Affectivity in the Bible

The Bible is a book of passion. It presents us with a passionate God who responds to and incites intense human emotions and discerns the noblest and basest of motivations. It confronts entrenched attitudes and nurtures a heart-felt disposition toward God.

The Pentateuch's *narratives* are intensely affective, depicting God and the human race as feeling and acting upon the basis of a wide range of strong emotions. *The Legal Codes* contain injunctions regarding motivations, prejudices, and even emotions. Deuteronomy makes clear that the key to keeping the law lies in the affective state of God's people (Dt. 6:4-6, 30:1-20).¹ Obedience to the Law brings God pleasure and love. Disobedience is insensitivity to God's feelings (Lev. 1:9 and many parallels, Dt. 7:7-13; Lev. 18:22-29; Dt. 12:31; 16:22-17:1).

The Historical Writings both record and inspire a wide range of affective

¹ All biblical quotations are taken from the New International Version.

motivations and responses. The stories carry great emotional power—from the heart-pounding suspense of two spies in a heap of flax relying for their lives on the word of a pagan prostitute, to the grim satisfaction of seeing Haman hang. The manner of God's interaction with humanity conveys his attitudes, will, and feelings. Sacred history prods the reader to examine his or her attitudes and allegiances, and builds in the reader an emotional solidarity with heroes of the faith.

The Wisdom and Poetry of the Bible are saturated with emotion. Job's speeches swim in grief, anger, self-pity, confusion, and a desperate need to find meaning in it all. The intense poetry of the Psalms speaks to the heart, still, after three millennia. In addition to expressing human attitudes, felt needs, and feelings, the Psalms dwell on Divine affectivity: God's contempt for his enemies, his compassion and mercy, love and dignity. The Proverbs promote wisdom with affective causes and effects.² The Song of Songs resounds with passion and pleasure, in marked contrast to the futility, false hopes, and resigned contentment of Ecclesiastes.

The word of the Lord through the prophets proclaims God's attitudes with intense emotion.³ Their oracles portray, promote and predict a wide range of affective human responses.⁴

2 The causes include the fear of the Lord and the love of what is good, and results include honour, patience, compassion, cheerfulness, refreshment and contentment. The Proverbs seek to correct excessive or inappropriate affections.

3 Such as wrath, compassion, vengeance, disappointment, disgust, love and delight.

4 These dispositional and emotional re-

The prophetic books also describe and invite empathy with the moods of the prophets for whom they are named. The feelings and attitudes of the prophets, whether they are commended or rebuked by God, are an integral part of the process of inspiration, a process in which human beings, sometimes despite themselves, were 'carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:21).

The narratives of the Gospels and Acts convey the emotions, moods, and attitudes of the characters: Joseph's sense of duty and honour (Mt. 1:19-25; 2:13-23), the self-righteousness of Simon the Pharisee and the gratitude of the sinful woman he despised (Lk. 7:36-50), the confusion of the disciples (Mt. 28:17; Mk. 8:31-33, 10:5-6; Lk. 24:12-43; Jn. 6:60; 12:16; 13:36-37), the compassion of Jesus (Mt. 9:35-38; Mt. 11:28-30), the defiant courage of the apostles (Acts 4:8-13; 23:1), the awe surrounding the church in Jerusalem (Acts 3:10; 5:9-13), and the mindless fury of the Ephesians (19:28-34). By identifying with the disciples, the reader finds himself or herself emotionally involved in their experiences. Something is fundamentally wrong with a reading of these texts which does not stir the heart.

The Epistles contribute to the affective character of the Scriptures in at least five ways. First, they are built upon the affective relationship between writer and recipient churches and individuals. Second, the epistles are full of exhortations to such affect-based qualities as faith, hope, joy, patience,

sponses include woe, elation, terror, security, despair, certain hope, rebellion, disrespect, trusting submission, humility, pride, shame, honour, and dullness of heart.

perseverance, love, and humility.

Third, the authors are sensitive to the affective state of the recipients, and that affective state is sometimes the occasion of the letter. Fourth, the authors of the epistles frequently remind their readers of the affections of God in greetings, farewells, and benedictions, and in the didactic and hortatory passages. Fifth, the authors make self-disclosures of their own attitudes, passions, and motivations (Rom. 7:14-25; 9:1-3, 10; 2 Cor. 1:8; 2:13; 12:7-11; 12:19-21; Gal. 5:12; Phil. 1:6; 1:22-25; 3:10, 18; 4:10-14; Phlm. 8; 1 Tim. 6:6-11; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:9-18).

Revelation is the Bible's affective grand finale. Its seven letters rebuke or affirm attitudes and emotions, as well as holding out emotionally evocative promises. Its apocalyptic visions are designed to inspire in the listener an emotional appreciation of eschatological mystery, calling forth awe, dread, hope, triumph, and longing. From start to finish, then, the Bible is full of emotion. In its writing styles and contents it communicates, draws out, and seeks to influence the affective.

2. Affectivity in Extra-Biblical Revelations

The Bible is not unique in being an affectivity-rich revelation from God. *Natural revelation* is intended to elicit responses of wonder and awe, fear, gratitude, humility and delight (Some examples are Ps. 8; Ps. 92:4; Ps. 107:24-32, and Acts 14:17). Specific natural phenomenon may function to express God's attitudes—grace, magnanimity, or anger (as in Gen. 3:13-19; Ex. 7:14-10:20; Ps. 18:7-15; Hab. 3:3-15; Mt. 5:44-45; Acts 14:17; Rev. 6:12-

17). *Theophanies and angelic visitations* inevitably draw reactions of fear, awe, sorrow, encouragement or repentance (Ex. 3:1-6; Num. 22:31; Dan. 5:5-6; Zech. 12:10-11; Mt. 17:5-7; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 1:11-13, 28-30; 2:9-10; Jn. 20:10-15; Acts 12:1-11; 26:13-14).

They express God's feelings (Num. 22:33-34; Mt. 17:5; Lk. 1:30; Acts 27:24), provide a response to human attitudes and emotion (Ex. 3:7; Dan. 5:22-23; Jn. 20:10-15; Acts 26:14, 18; 27:23-27); predict specific human affectivity (Zech. 12:10; Lk. 1:14, 17, 30; 2:10), or address the very emotions they elicit (Mt. 17:6-7; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 1:13; 2:10). Likewise, *dreams and visions* often involve intensely powerful images that evoke strong emotional reactions (Is. 6:1-5; Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 8:17; 2 Cor. 12:1-7; Rev. 1:9-17).

3. Affectivity and God's Revelation in Christ

Jesus, God's ultimate self-disclosure, demonstrates the vibrantly responsive heart of God. The gospels ascribe to him a variety of affective states. Among them a sense of humour (Mt. 7:3; 23:24; Lk. 13:8); astonishment, both positive (Mt. 8:10) and negative (Mk. 6:6); compassion (Mt. 9:36; 14:14; Mk. 1:41; 6:34); gentleness and humility (Mt. 11:29); longing (Mt. 23:37); overwhelming sorrow (Mt. 26:38); anger (Mk. 3:5); joy (Lk. 10:21; Jn. 15:11); weeping (Lk. 19:41; Jn. 11:35); grace (Jn. 1:14); zeal (Jn. 2:16-17); distrust of human nature (Jn. 2:24-25); gladness (Jn. 11:15); being deeply moved or disturbed, (Jn. 11:33,38; 12:17; 13:21); love (Jn. 13:1; 14:21; 15:9), and peace (Jn. 14:27).

These affective states are not sim-

ply expressions of the humanity of Jesus, but also revelations of the divine heart, as for instance Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41). Even in his most obviously human emotions, like his distress and exhaustion in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:43-45), Jesus is revealing the love of the Father by bearing our grief and carrying our sorrows (Is. 53:4); sharing our full humanity with all of our inner as well as our physical hurts. This is not surprising, as sending Jesus is the Father's ultimate expression of love for humanity (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 8:31-32).

By becoming incarnate, God the Son allows himself to be subject to the chemical processes of the brain, the social conditioning, and all of the other factors which influence human affectivity. The result of such an incarnation from Jesus' perspective is sympathy for human frailty; from the Father's perspective, a means of expressing freely his mercy and grace; and from the believer's perspective, confidence (Heb. 4:15).

That Jesus became truly human at an affective level provides grounds for the writers of the epistles to hold up as exemplary for us Jesus' attitudes and emotional self-management (Rom. 15:5-9; Phil. 2:1-8; Heb. 12:2-3; 1 Pet. 4:1-2). It was Jesus' own practice to draw attention to his attitudes, motivations and emotional dispositions for didactic and hortatory purposes (Mt. 11:25-30; 26: 39-46; Mk. 8:1-21; Lk. 10:17-24; Lk. 19:41-44; Jn. 14:27; 15:9-14; 17:13). In so doing, he underlines the affective aspect of his incarnation and intentionally utilizes it as an indispensable component in his approach to mission and disciple-making.

Jesus seeks to bridge the emotional

gap between God and humanity. From the divine side, he reveals to humanity God's affectivity in all that he teaches, does, and feels. On the human side, Jesus demonstrates an acute sensitivity to the affective states of those with whom he interacts, a sensitivity which frees him from being either the victim or the perpetrator of emotional manipulation (for instance Lk. 4:14-28; Jn. 5:44-45; 8:2-11).

He examines motivations and attitudes, attacks prejudices, and fosters or rebukes emotions and moods. When questioned, he tends to confront the attitude of the questioner, rather than giving a direct, informative answer (Mt. 9:14-17; 18:1-3; 19:3-12; Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 10:25-37; Jn. 8:3-7). He is not content to deliver a message, but clearly longs to facilitate intensely affective two-way communication between the Father and sinful humanity.

4. Implications for Mission

If God chose to reveal himself through an emotion-laden message via affective media and messengers in sensitivity to the affective state of the recipients, seeking from them an affective response, then it follows that our communication of his word is inadequate unless it is affective from start to finish.

Missionary *motivation* should reflect the affective purposes of God in revelation: zeal for his glory, anger and distress at idolatry and sin, love, and a longing to save. There is a need for accountability involving the missionary, the sending church and agency, and local believers in assessing to what extent these holy motivations are operative, growing, and determinative of the

worker's approach to ministry.

It is difficult to imagine how the gospel *message* could be presented, stripped of its affective character, rooted as it is in its central tenets of the love of God, the disgrace of sin, the passion of the cross, the surprising triumph of the resurrection, and the glorious hope. Unfortunately, some inter-religious dialogues replace vibrant witness with distant, coldly-academic comparison of creeds, sacred histories, and ethical systems.

Polemicists transmogrify the cross into a club, and the good news into a dagger for wounding the enemy in verbal combat. Whether by stripping the message of Jesus of its affective nature or by distorting that nature into a tool of diabolical power struggle, the message sustains fatal damage and the church fails to be faithful to the revelation with which it has been entrusted by God. It would be well for evangelists regularly to consider the question, 'What is the affective message we are *in fact* conveying to this people?'

The *media* used in mission should, like God's revelation, have appropriate affective power. Creativity is required in driving home the intensity of the message through affectivity-laden media. This is not simply a matter of pragmatics or a desire for success in mission. It is a matter of faithfulness in communicating to the world the revelation with which God has entrusted his people.

God's best human *messengers* allow him to use their whole selves as instruments of his revelation. The force of their communication is not only in the words they speak, but in their humility or confidence, their self-giving love or their zeal for truth, their com-

passion, sorrow, or joy. Although the qualities that accompany emotional intelligence are hard to measure, they should be taken into account in selecting, training, developing, evaluating, and debriefing workers. The missionary's prayer life is vital, for without it he or she will fail to be sensitive to the Lord's attitudes in any given situation, and risk misrepresenting the Almighty.

The process of communicating God's Word is greatly enhanced when the communicators are characterized by affective *sensitivity*. Like Jesus, sensitive communicators are instinctively aware that questions and challenges may reveal or cloak foundational affective spiritual issues. Missionary responses to questions should, in keeping with the practice of the Master, address the affective at least as much as the cognitive.

While this sensitivity comes naturally (or supernaturally) to some, nearly everyone can learn a greater level of affective sensitivity. The professional development of workers should include mentoring relationships in which such sensitivity can be nurtured.

Finally, the missionary who is true to the content and spirit of divine revelation will look for affective *responses*, not as the result of human manipulation, but as evidence that the Word of God has been inscribed on the heart by the Spirit of God. The type and intensity of emotional and dispositional reactions will vary, but some affective response will be present if God has indeed opened the eyes of a person's heart. Such responses are not limited to the moment of conversion, but continue with spiritual growth.

II Affectivity and Biblical Anthropology

1. The Unity and Affectivity of the Human Person

Affectivity is both essential and intimately interwoven into the fabric of the human person. Many central theological terms in the Bible contain a strong affective core which interacts with the whole life of the person. *Faith* is ultimately affective—a resting in God—and yet it is mutilated to the point of extinction if it is divorced from its intellectual element of right belief or its physical/volitional/social component of working through love. *Love* is foundationally affective in nature, yet the Scriptures make abundantly clear that to thrive love needs thought, action and appropriate objects. Consider also these terms: *heart, soul, the fear of the Lord, forgiveness, repentance, grace, peace,*⁵ *hope, and praise.* Many other terms, although not primarily affective, contain an essential affective element: *conversion, submission, glory, holiness, sin, gospel, signs and wonders, revelation, power, spirit,* and so on.

The spiritual life of a social group is influenced by collective attitudes, moods, and motives. Nations, families, and churches are described by the Scriptures as being wilful, faithful, rebellious, dismayed, proud, contemptuous, and loving (Ex. 32:9; 2 Chr. 7:14; Is. 54:1-15; Obad. 3; Mt. 23:30-32; Rom. 10:2, 11:11; Rev. 2:4,

19-20). Individuals who run counter to the prevailing mood of their people are singled out by the Scriptures for praise or censure, depending on whether the group's disposition meets God's approval. With communities, as with individuals, the affectivity of the group is intimately linked with its customs, beliefs, and social structure.

2. The Source of Human Affectivity

Theologians have variously contended that the divine image in humanity is evident in our rationality, spirituality, potential for moral goodness, or some combination of these. However, any assessment of human likeness to God which ignores affectivity is wanting. Augustine⁶ asserted that desires and feelings are good because God made us so. I would add that he made us so to share in his likeness.

The Scriptures are prolific in their references to God's affectivity, and draw direct connections between his affectivity and ours. As we cannot separate God from his affective attributes, so we cannot properly understand a person apart from his or her affections. Even a society cannot be understood merely through its prevailing beliefs and practices, apart from its affective core: its collective longings and motivations, its moods, loves, and hatreds. Human affectivity at its very best should be a highly polished mirror reflecting the heart of God.

⁵ See Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 9-10, for a discussion of the role of the affective in the biblical term *shalom*.

⁶ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, translated by Anna S. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (Indianapolis/ New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 49.

3. The Corruption of Human Affectivity

However, human affectivity since the Fall is diseased. The first sin consisted not so much in eating the forbidden fruit as in pride, the distorted affection which precipitated that fateful bite. The result of sin was affective in character and corresponded precisely to the offence: our first parents were filled with shame (Gen. 3:7; contrast Gen. 2:25). They experienced for the first time fear and alienation (Gen. 3:8-24). Dysfunctional thinking, behaviour and relationships resulted.

The Fall is a prototype of the corruption of the affective by sin.⁷ Sin results from evil desires, robs us of joy, peace and dignity, brings sorrow and distress to the sinner and those around, and grieves and angers the heart of God. Sin has a negative spiralling effect, dragging down one aspect after another of the person or community infected by it. The Reformers teach that the whole person is corrupted by sin, apart from divine grace.⁸ Affections, motivations, and attitudes are normally at the root of the problem.

The Bible leaves no doubt that human beings are morally culpable not only for evil acts, but for unholy affectivity. As Augustine⁹ puts it, 'When we ask whether someone is a good man,

we are not asking what he believes, or hopes, but what he loves.' Nicholls¹⁰ notes that not only are guilt and shame part of the human condition, but that we experience both objective and subjective guilt and shame. Because of sin, we cannot always tell when the subjective sense contradicts our objective state.

Correct doctrine is therefore only part of the solution. Having tried and failed to control his own passions, Augustine concluded that the mind is more the slave of passion than its master. Maddox¹¹ describes Augustine's understanding of original sin as consisting of bent affections which are impotent to produce good actions. Calvin¹² notes with dismay that Greek philosophers 'always imagine reason in a man as that faculty whereby he may govern himself aright', and thinks they might have noticed that in fact people naturally choose what seems most pleasing to them.

Human affectivity has become fatally disfigured; yet the Bible teaches that something remains of the image of God. John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards argued on the basis of Scripture

⁷ Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 2.

⁸ Richard B. Steele, 'Gracious Affection' and 'True Virtue' According to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, vol. 5 of *Pietist and Wesleyan Studies*, edited by Richard B. Steele (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1994), 8-9.

⁹ Quoted by John P. Langan, 'Augustine on the Unity and the Interconnection of the Virtue', *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979), 93.

¹⁰ Bruce Nicholls, 'The Role of Shame and Guilt in a Theology of Cross-Cultural Mission', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25, no. 3 (July 2001), 235.

¹¹ Randy L. Maddox, 'A Change of Affections: The Development, Dynamics, and Dethronement of John Wesley's Heart Religion', in 'Heart Religion' in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements, *Pietist and Wesleyan Studies*, No. 12, edited by Richard B. Steele (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2001), 10-11.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill, and translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I: 194.

for a non-rational divine sense, 'an innate, pre-reflective awareness of God' which comes in part through the conscience.¹³ The result is an internal dissonance, a divided heart.¹⁴

It is obvious both from the Scriptures and from experience that, while some people suffer from the pain of internal contradiction between God's image and sin, others seem content, self-satisfied and unaware of any such tension because they have found false resolutions. False resolutions always involve a degree of self-deception.¹⁵ Religious beliefs and practices often serve to preserve sin under the guise of righteousness, thereby providing a particularly treacherous resolution. Many examples could be given from the Scriptures: in all of them, the affective has a crucial role. Edwards¹⁶ says that people are immensely creative in devising arguments that will stop their consciences and make them feel jus-

tified in their sin. Because of the deception of these false resolutions, the gospel is often heard first as disturbing news before it can be received as good news (Heb. 5:12-13).

4. Implications for Mission

If there is a conflict between the divine image in humanity and human sinfulness, we should expect to encounter distressed people seeking solutions to the disharmony in the self and the world. Missionaries who expect to find this sort of disarray will have an ear tuned to the way each person or community perceives the problem and how Jesus might be presented as a credible solution. They will also be less inclined to complain or become disillusioned: the reason for our calling is precisely the chaos, dishonesty, and conflict that pervade humanity.

If there are always some people who are oblivious to their own or their culture's sin, and who become adept at whitewashing the problem, the missionary should be alert to the extensive and creative systems, including religion, which people devise as false resolutions. The whole missionary church needs to be taught to recognize these schemes. Courage and tact are needed in bringing them to light, particularly where people are genuinely convinced that their schemes make them acceptable to God, society, or self. The most important prerequisite for this task is unflinching self-examination.

III Affectivity and Soteriology

Salvation begins with the affections of God. His love motivated the sacrifice of Jesus through which salvation

13 Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 50-52, drawing upon Calvin's *Institutes*, I.3.1, and Jonathan Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies'*, edited by Thomas A. Schafer, volume 13 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, general Editor, John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 268. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, and edited by Joseph Fessio and John Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 1: 365-425 traces in detail the idea of spiritual senses in Christian theology.

14 Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 62.

15 Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 106-108.

16 Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise on Religious Affections* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1746/1982), 102.

comes. It is God's desire that all people be saved. His wrath, sense of justice, and desire for glory were ironically and definitively vindicated in the cross and resurrection. It was the Lord's pleasure to bring about our redemption through the passion of Christ (Is. 53:10; Eph. 1:5, 9; Col. 1:19-20; Acts 1:3). Divine grace is the means of salvation; divine patience waits in order to save.

Human affections are necessary for the appropriation of salvation. According to John Wesley,¹⁷ since sin is so woven into human affectivity, the remedy for sin must strike at the affective level of human experience, a statement in keeping with Wesley's own and well-known experience of a 'heart strangely warmed'.¹⁸ We are saved by faith (Rom. 10:9). Faith is essentially trust, a reckless, dogged, and sometimes exuberant confidence. The repentance which accompanies faith is a change of habit brought about by a change of mind and heart. The essence of sanctification is love: 'Righteousness is a thing of the heart.'¹⁹ The absence of these affections in a person results in destruction, their presence in salvation.

The Scriptures place great emphasis on the affective as a means of the knowledge of God: one knows him in an intuitive way through faith, love, and experience.²⁰ Salvation is personal

knowledge, the restoration of a broken relationship, and the affective is at the centre of both the relationship and its restoration.²¹ Conversion in the Bible is primarily relational and affective, a turning to the knowledge of God. This is particularly true in the Old Testament.²²

Yet this affective saving knowledge is intimately bound with intellectual understanding. Jonathan Edwards recognizes both a 'notional' knowledge and a 'sense of the heart'. The former makes judgments as to what is true, the latter takes delight and pleasure in the idea and involves the disposition. The 'sense of the heart' is always accompanied for Edwards by an idea, but the idea doesn't transform the person until he or she tastes it with the 'sense of the heart', and finds it sweet.²³

There is a paradox which has never been fully understood regarding the role of the Divine and the human in saving affectivity. On the one hand,

and Related Movements, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, No. 12. (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2001), 234. See for example Eph. 3:16-19; 1 Jn. 3:1.

²¹ Perry W.H. Shaw, 'Education as Hospitality: A Christian Approach to Teaching and Learning', *Theological Review* 23, no. 2 (2002), 95-124.

²² James I. Packer, 'Conversion', in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Leicester: IVP, 1980), 1: 312.

²³ John E. Smith, 'Testing the Spirits: Jonathan Edwards and the Religious Affections', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* XXVII, nos. 1-2 (1981-1982), 32. Smith refers to Edwards' *A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine* (from the Sermon on Mt. 16:17). For more on 'sensible knowledge', see David W. Waanders, 'The Pastoral Sense of Jonathan Edwards', *Reformed Review* 29 (Winter 1976), 125.

¹⁷ John Wesley, 'A Caution Against Bigotry', Sermon 38 in *The Works of John Wesley*, edited by Albert C. Outler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984-1987), 2: 66.

¹⁸ Maddox, 'A Change of Affections', 17.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1: 774-775.

²⁰ So John Wesley, according to Maddox, 'A Change of Affections', 12, and Les L. Steele, 'Educating the Heart', in Richard B. Steele, ed., *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition*

the Scriptures make clear that God is the only source of saving affections. Faith is not a human work, but comes from God (Eph. 2:8-9). Love, joy, and peace are fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). God confirms the new covenant with his people by giving them a new heart (Rom. 2:29; Heb. 8:10). God works in the believers to both motivate and cause them to act according to his desires (Phil. 2:13).

God is even held responsible for the hardened attitudes of those whom he rejects (Rom. 9:17-18). People cannot come to Jesus unless the Father draws them (Jn. 6:44). Yet, human beings are morally responsible for their affective states. God frequently commands people to be characterized by certain emotions, attitudes, and motivations, thereby assuming some degree of human agency in the fulfilling of those commands.

Through God's grace in creating humanity in his image, through the common grace with which he shows his kindness to all, and through special intervention, people who are not saved are enabled to demonstrate positive affectivity such as love, concern, mercy and the fear of the Lord, respect for God's sovereignty, generosity, and humility (Mt. 5:46; Dan. 6:18-20; Jon. 1:11-16; Acts 5:38-39; Ex. 11:2-3; Neh. 1:11-2:8; Mt. 7:11; Dan. 2:46; 4:37). Appropriate affectivity is not necessarily a guarantee of salvation.

Appropriate affectivity in some biblical characters is a sign of readiness to receive salvation: Zacchaeus eagerly climbing a tree to see Jesus (Lk. 19: 3-4); Cornelius's devotion, fear of the Lord, and generosity (Acts 10:2), and the humble, grateful love of the sinful woman at Simon's dinner (Lk.

7:36-50). Others, however, are saved through the special intervention of God from markedly negative affective patterns, as were James the brother of Jesus (Jn. 7:1-5) and Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1 and 9:1).

Regeneration is the first moment of a lifelong transformation by the Holy Spirit of the believer's affectivity. This transformation ideally involves the whole person in an integrated manner. The type and intensity of emotion at the moment of regeneration varies, and may be expressed in a variety of behaviours. John Wesley noted that 'heart religion' does not mean salvation from mood swings and sudden bursts of emotion, but a change of disposition from anxious pre-occupation with the self to abiding 'trust, love, joy and gratitude'.²⁴

There is no consistency in the degree or type of emotion expressed in the biblical invitations to salvation, but emotional manipulation is unethical and, in the long run, unhelpful. It is dangerous to a person or group's spiritual welfare to provide them with false comfort or to inflict them with false guilt. However, Jesus, Paul, and the apostles did not consider it manipulative to combine evangelism with the alleviation of physical and social distress. Throughout the biblical narratives, God reveals himself to people

²⁴ Richard B. Steele, 'The Passion and the Passions', in *'Heart Religion' in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies*, edited by Richard B. Steele, (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2001), xxi. Steele cites Wesley's *Journal* entries for May 26, 27 and 28, 1738, which record Wesley's varying moods in the days following his Aldersgate experience on May 24, 1738.

in circumstances of emotional vulnerability.

The Bible appears at times to say that the affective states which pertain to salvation are qualitatively different from corresponding affectivity in the unregenerate (for example, Jn. 14:27, Gal. 5:22). We are not told how they are different, aside from their Source, and it is clear that judging the genuineness of the affections of others is an uncertain business at best. While appropriate affectivity is not a guarantee of salvation, habitually inappropriate affectivity provides good grounds for persons or groups to question the genuineness of their salvation (1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 10:35-39; 1 Jn. 4:7-8; Rev. 2:4-5).

New Testament religion does not stress law codes suited to external measurement and enforcement, because the saints' love of God and divine righteousness ensures that duty will be fulfilled without the need for rigid guidelines.²⁵ The affective fruit of salvation is portrayed in Scripture as both the fruit of the Spirit and as a moral obligation. All theologians allow some role for human co-operation in the encouragement of these virtuous affections among believers, recognizing worship, teaching, behavioural guidance and sanctified socialization as means of fostering godly affectivity. The idea of habituation in holiness appealed to both Edwards and Wesley,²⁶ but it carries with it the danger of relying on the human will and socialization processes to produce what only

the Holy Spirit can produce. Edwards²⁷ contends that there are some means inappropriate to the stirring up of truly gracious affections.

The religious affections that precipitate and accompany salvation must take an object or point of reference, and that is Jesus Christ, a timely, visible expression of the eternal, invisible God (Jn. 1:14-18; Col. 1:15). Faith is a good thing only if its object is reliable. There is no virtue in gullibly trusting a scoundrel or placing one's hope in that which promises but cannot deliver. I have heard it said at inter-religious dialogues that 'we are all people of faith', as though that should make us all feel cosily united in a religious fraternity with various branches.

This is a naïve approach which fails to recognize, not only the fundamental differences in doctrine, but also the connectedness of emotions and attitudes to their objects. Failure to recognize the definitive importance of the objects of religious affectivity is failure to recognize the relational nature of religion in general and of salvation in particular.²⁸

Implications for Mission

If God alone is able to transform human affectivity in such a way that salvation can take place and the fruit of salvation can flourish, then the foun-

²⁵ William C. Spohn, 'Sovereign Beauty: Jonathan Edwards and the Nature of True Beauty', *Theological Studies* 42 (1981), 400.

²⁶ Maddox, 'A Change of Affections', 19-20.

²⁷ Edwards, *A Treatise on Religious Affections*, 45.

²⁸ Henry H. Knight III, 'The Role of Faith, and the Means of Grace in the Heart Religion of John Wesley', in *'Heart Religion' in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies*, No. 12, edited by Richard B. Steele (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2001), 277.

dational tasks of mission are fervent intercessory prayer, discernment of the workings of God, and unreserved cooperation with him. A human-centred approach looks for success where it cannot be found—in human strategies—and risks becoming emotionally manipulative. Gospel invitations should demonstrate sensitivity to people's spiritual and affective states, the affective patterns of local culture and affective signals of readiness for salvation.

There is a place in mission for prophetic confrontation of ungodly attitudes, moods, emotional reactions and prejudices, since humans are accountable for the management of their affective states. Two caveats are necessary, however. First, it must not be assumed that people who are so challenged are capable of making the foundational changes of heart needed to correct the problem. They should therefore be urged to meet Jesus, not just to reform themselves. Second, the messenger delivering such a challenge must be humble, for the sake of his or her own spiritual safety, to be true to the message spoken, and to level the path before a difficult communication.

On-going affective renewal requires holistic spiritual direction or other affect-sensitive discipleship throughout the believer's lifespan. Affective discipling is more likely to take place if the mentors (1) model giving and receiving it, (2) prayerfully and strategically consider how best to accomplish it, and (3) train leaders in a manner that integrates the development of affective, cognitive, practical, and relational skills. The redemptive passion of Jesus should be a central metaphor in the for-

mation of Christ-like affectivity.²⁹

The missionary should not expect new believers to fit uniform affective patterns. In fact, conformity to a preferred pattern may be a warning either of imitation faith or of genuine but inarticulate faith. Care must be taken in assessing the motivations, values, desires, moods and emotions of others. There is no fool proof affective measuring stick for determining whether someone is saved. (Neither is there a fool proof rational or behavioural measuring stick, although churches are more inclined to devise and act upon these.) Any sort of evaluation should distinguish between a lone event and the overall course of the person's life.³⁰

If God often reveals himself to people at their point of felt need, the missionary should be highly alert to felt needs, ready to communicate God's love and truth to hurting people in speech and life. Love must be sincere (Rom. 12:9), not simply a ploy to gain converts. Emotional appeals and affective self-disclosure are effective and honouring to God only when they are genuine and result in lasting change. Since false guilt or comfort is dangerous, anyone with an apostolic ministry needs to be certain that the affective message they bring is timely and from God.

It would be wise for the evangelist and discipler to notice the presence or absence of unusual godly affectivity as a factor in assessing a person's spiritual growth and standing. For example, if a spiteful person claims to submit to

²⁹ Steele, 'The Passion and the Passions', 257.

³⁰ Smith, 'Testing the Spirits', 34.

Christ's Lordship and becomes forgiving and patient, there is evidence that a change of heart has really taken place. Notice, however that this is *evidence*, but not *proof*. A great deal of humility and restraint is needed in assessing others.

The missionary should model and encourage humble and sober self-assessment, especially with regard to the congruity or lack of it between professed affectivity and actual practice. Missionaries should be familiar from observation and personal experience with the virtues that accompany salvation, and should have a working notion of those most likely and least likely to be counterfeited.³¹ It is helpful to be on the alert for the sorts of transformation which Satan cannot or will not do, in order to have confidence in the source of the change or experience.³²

IV Affectivity and Pneumatology

Just as the Scriptures describe the Father and the Son using the language of human emotion, so they describe the Spirit. The Holy Spirit intercedes with unspeakable groans (Rom. 8:26), grieves (Eph. 5:30), and is intensely jealous (Jas. 4:5). The Holy Spirit is presented as the impetus of mission, and it is therefore not surprising that the Spirit catalyses affective changes both in the agents and recipients of mission.

The agents of mission resound with the groans and jealousy of the Spirit in their ministries (Gal. 4:19; Acts 17:16). The Spirit confirms to them the love of the Father and his commission to service, so that they at times feel compelled to ministry (Mt. 12:18; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 14:15-21; 2 Cor. 3:1-3; Acts 20:22; Rom. 5:5 with 2 Cor. 5:11-14). The power by which the Holy Spirit enables believers for mission is effectual word and action rather than an intuitive sense of power in the worker (Mich. 3:8; Acts 1:8; 1 Thess. 1:5-6; 1 Tim. 1:7).³³ In fact, the Spirit's power is most keenly displayed in the context of the missionaries' subjective experience of weakness (1 Cor. 1:26-2:5; 2 Cor. 3:17-4:18; 11:16-12:12).

Yet the Spirit's power does have the effect on the workers of producing boldness, confidence, joy, peace even in difficulty, love and self-control (Acts 4:31; 8:29-30; 2 Cor. 3:4-6; 1 Thess. 1:5-6; Lk. 10:21; Jn. 16:22-24; Acts 13:52; Rom. 15:30; 2 Tim. 1:7; Jn. 14:25-27). The Spirit's confirmation that God has accepted believers of other ethnic and religious backgrounds helps the church to accept others and treat them with compassion (Acts 15:8-11).

When those outside the people of God observe the Holy Spirit in the miracles, words, and character of his servants, they often display strong affective reactions which run the emotional gamut: hope, fear, jealousy, confidence in the message, confusion, attraction, fury, awe, amazement, dismay and joy. The Bible teaches that faith is both the

³¹ On the value of Jonathan Edwards' 'signs' for missionary practice, see Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 374-384.

³² Smith, 'Testing the Spirits', 33.

³³ See Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 35, 823-826, 849.

occasion and the result of receiving the Holy Spirit,³⁴ but never states plainly *how* the Spirit and human affectivity interrelate in the lives of people outside of the community of faith. It is clear in the Scriptures, however, that the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people is unpredictable (Jn. 3:6-8; Acts 10:44-48; 15:8-12), and that communities of believers need mutual encouragement in the Spirit (Heb. 3:7-14).

The Holy Spirit establishes believers experientially, linking the rational (a new self-understanding as children of God) and the affective (confirmation in our spirits, teaching us to cry 'Abba Father!').³⁵ The presence or absence of the fruit of the Spirit may be helpful in assessing the genuineness of a conversion or the degree of maturity in a new follower of Jesus, and this fruit consists of inner dispositions evident in relationships, rather than external conformity to religious strictures (Mt. 7:16-20; Gal. 5:22-23).

Implications for Mission

Jesus did not want the church to start its mission without the empowering of the Spirit. The missional church shares the Spirit's affective states of joy, jealousy, and pain on behalf of others, and its love and humility impress outsiders. Its apostles go out Spirit-impelled, exercising faith and boldness in the face of opposition.

The Holy Spirit also draws an emotional reaction from the hearers, and their responses range from visceral hatred to exuberant welcome. When the Holy Spirit works, one should not expect universal popularity. Those who do believe will be taught by the Spirit, and missionaries should help new believers to learn to hear the Spirit's confirmation and admonitions.

This is a far healthier way of fostering sanctification than embarking on a missionary-designed program of indoctrination and social control. Heeding the Spirit will mean celebrating a variety in patterns of spiritual growth and resisting attempts to 'institutionalize the Spirit'³⁶ in church development. Ethical teaching should emphasize character flowing from a relationship with God rather than external behaviours.

V Conclusion

God is passionate: lavish in mercy, consuming in anger, relentless in jealousy for his own honour, unparalleled in majesty, extravagant in love. He created the human race to live in his presence in a relationship characterized by awe, trust, humility and love. When we betrayed his goodness, he sent—not a Vulcan—but Jesus, the ultimate expression of his great justice and love. The most faithful and effective witnesses to Jesus will be, like him, skilled in matters of the heart.

³⁴ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 853, contrasting Gal. 3:2-5 with 1 Cor. 12:8.

³⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, I: 230-231, based on Rom. 8:14-17; also Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 856.

³⁶ John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission* (Bristol: SCM, 1972), 119, 209.

Contextualization, the Bible, and Games: What I Learned about Theology from The Settlers of Catan

Craig Ott

KEYWORDS: *Narrative, mission, contextualization, hermeneutics, mission strategy, biblical authority, rules, strategy*

I Introduction

Having spent much of my adult life in Germany, my family became well acquainted with the popular board game *The Settlers of Catan* (original German *Die Siedler von Catan*). First released in 1995, the game quickly became a raging success and has since been translated into some 30 languages, and by 2009 had sold 15 million copies worldwide.¹

One of the secrets to *Settlers'* success is that the game board is not a

fixed board, as with chess or Monopoly, but is composed of numerous hexagonal pieces that are arranged randomly each time the game is played. This means that each time one plays, the board configuration must be carefully studied so as to determine a new winning strategy. The goal, rules and general principles for winning remain the same, but the specific strategy must be adapted to the given layout of the playing field in order to win.

The parallel struck me that the task of biblical contextualization might be compared to playing *The Settlers of Catan*. Though the goal and basic means of Christian mission remain the same everywhere, Christian mission is 'played out' on different cultural playing fields which demand fresh contextual strategies to attain the goal while abiding by the rules. Furthermore, the analogy can be applied to the hermeneutical task of interpreting the contextual 'playing strategies' revealed in biblical texts and learning from them

1 Andrew Curry, 'Monopoly Killer: Perfect German Board Game Redefines Genre', *Wired Magazine* 17.04 http://www.wired.com/gaming/gamingreviews/magazine/17-04/mf_settlers accessed on September 11, 2012.

Craig Ott (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), is professor of mission and intercultural studies and department chair at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, USA. He formerly served for over twenty years in church planting and theological education in Germany. He is the co-author of *Encountering Theology of Mission*, and *Global Church Planting*, and co-editor of *Globalizing Theology*.

to discern strategies for contemporary contexts.

The great challenge of the Christian life in general, and of contextualization in particular, is discerning just how we can apply biblical teachings in contemporary settings that are so different from the world of the Bible. To use the game metaphor: how do we discern the universal 'rules' as taught in scripture, and what strategies most appropriately apply those rules in the quest to reach the goal to which Christ calls us? Popular approaches to biblical hermeneutics among western evangelicals often attempt to extract from the specifics of the biblical context universal, culturally neutral, abstract principles, which are then applied in a new context.²

This approach, however, faces numerous difficulties. The impression can easily be given that really important truths are the naked timeless abstractions (principles), to which the cultural or situational elements of the biblical narrative or discourse are merely incidental. Furthermore, in the words of Krikor Halebian, "To separate the content of the gospel from its cultural forms is similar to peeling an onion in order to find its core. What is urgently needed is a method that can sidestep kernel-versus-husk type questions."³

2 For example Grant R. Osborne seeks to determine the 'supracultural' (*The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 2nd edition, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006, 422) and William J. Webb speaks of 'cultural components' versus 'transcultural components' of biblical texts (*Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

3 Krikor Halebian, 'The Problem of Contextualization', *Missiology* 11 no 1 (Jan 1983):95-111, 102. See also D. A. Carson, 'A Sketch of the Factors Determining Current Hermeneuti-

cal Debate in Cross-Cultural Contexts' in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, edited by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 19-20.

4 Paul G. Hiebert, 'Form and Meaning' in *The Word Among Us*, 101-120, edited by Dean S. Gilliland, (Dallas: Word, 1989).

5 Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 242.

6 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 25.

7 See for example Larry W Caldwell, 'Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context', *Journal of Asian Mission* vol. 1, no. 1 (1999), 21-43.

As Paul Hiebert has pointed out, the relationship between form and meaning is a complex one, where form is often integrally bound with meaning.⁴

Attempting to extract a theological kernel from the narrative which is then discarded as so much chaff is unjustified according to Michael Goldberg on two counts,

First, it wrongly regards narrative as a kind of intellectual crutch needed by the less perceptive. Second and perhaps more serious, it tends to view all narratives as fables, i.e. as stories with detachable meanings. But there *are* narratives whose meaning cannot be stated apart from the story, whose meaning *is* the story.⁵

The challenge is in understanding the implications of those meanings without, in the words of John Howard Yoder, leaving the story behind.⁶

Many interpreters, especially in the majority world, are uncomfortable with extractionist hermeneutics.⁷ The proposal here explores an alternative model of biblical interpretation and

contextualization using the conceptual framework of games.⁸ The game metaphor can potentially provide an aid to understanding how biblical texts, especially narratives, can afford insight into strategies for living and contextualization.

Game hermeneutics on the one hand allows for more intuitive access to biblical meanings, and on the other hand provides reasonable guidelines to protect against unrestrained subjectivity. Because games are a universal phenomenon in human cultures,⁹ they have the potential of providing a model of contextualization that is accessible and plausible in many different contexts.

A few preliminary clarifications are in order to avoid potential misunderstanding. First, by comparing Christian life and mission to a game, I am in no way trivializing what is at stake or suggesting something that is merely playful, simulated, or disconnected from reality. Games in fact often perform many important social functions.¹⁰

Second, many people associate games with both individualism and competition. However, team sports are by nature a collective activity and many games and sports are non-competitive. For example, I may play golf to improve my own handicap, not to defeat an opponent. Or I may play table tennis with a child not competitively to defeat her, but cooperatively to see how many times we can get the ball back and forth over the net.¹¹

Third, game logic as used here is not to be confused with mathematical 'game theory', used in analysis of decision making and human rationality applied to economics, marketing strategy, conflict resolution, and political theory.¹² Steven Brams has proposed a 'game-theoretic exegesis' based upon mathematical game theory.¹³

I am not using games in this manner whatsoever. Rather, I seek to use the inner logic of games and how they are played as a conceptual model for Christian life and contextualization. To avoid confusion, in this essay I will speak of game logic, not game theory.

Finally, using game logic as an interpretative model needs not undermine biblical authority or universal truth claims of the Bible. Though there is a sense in which the biblical game is a self-contained system with inter-

8 Wm. McClendon Jr. in *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986, 162-66) and Bryan Stone in *Evangelism after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007, 32) briefly draw upon Bernard Suits' *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Robert H. Stein uses the concept of games differently in *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

9 On the universality of games in all cultures see J.M. Roberts, M. J. Arth, and R. R. Bush, 'Games in Culture', *American Anthropologist* 61:4 (Aug 1959), 597-605, and Noel Dyck, ed. *Games, Sports and Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2000).

10 See Dyck, *Games, Sports and Cultures*, and Allen Gutmann *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University, 1978), and Roberts, Arth, and Bush,

'Games in Culture', 598.

11 Bernard Suits call this an 'open game' (*The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Toronto: University of Toronto, 1978, 130-138).

12 See Ken Binmore, *Game Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; Oxford University, 2007).

13 Steven J. Brams, *Biblical Games: Game Theory and the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003).

nal coherence, this does not mean that that system is on equal footing with competing systems, worldviews, or truth claims. The Bible provides an authoritative guide to playing the game of life in general and participation in God's mission in particular.

By understanding biblical events and teachings in terms of how a game is being played in various settings and circumstances, we are given, as it were, a divinely inspired playbook with many instructive examples of how the game is played well or poorly. By examining the game strategy depicted in a biblical text, we need not attempt the dubious task of stripping the text of its 'cultural clothing' in order to grasp its authoritative meaning and implications for contemporary contexts.

II The Nature of Games

As noted above, games are universally familiar and a feature of every human society. They have very ancient origins,¹⁴ and may come in the shape of sports, board games, card and dice games, role playing, and more recently, computer games.¹⁵ Except for games based upon pure chance (e.g. roulette) or solely upon physical skill (e.g. dart-

throwing), most games require a playing strategy to be played well. Games of strategy, such as Mankala in Sub-Saharan Africa, are familiar even in traditional societies with little sociopolitical complexity and among most classifications of societies.¹⁶

When speaking of games in this article, games involving strategy are in view. Such games are most like life itself. To live well we must have a 'strategy' for wise living and attaining one's goals under constraints over which we have little control.

I will draw upon Bernard Suits' understanding of the four essential elements of games: (1) an end or goal, (2) the means, (3) rules, and (4) right attitude,¹⁷ adding a fifth element (5) strategy. I will briefly describe each of these elements before explaining how they can be helpful for contextualization.

1. Essential Elements of a Game

The Goal or objective of a game. A game must have a goal or end in view which one attempts to achieve. In golf the goal is hitting a ball with a stick into a hole in the ground with as few hits as possible. Without a clearly defined goal or end, the activity may be entertaining, instructive, playful, or good for one's health, but it is not a game. The game objective often *only* makes sense within the parameters of the game itself. There are of course many better

¹⁴ For example, a 5,000 year old board game was found in ancient Egypt. See H.J.R. Murray, *A History of Board Games other than Chess* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2002 [1952]); Peter A. Piccione, 'In Search of the Meaning of Senate' *Archaeology* 33:4 (Jul/Aug 1980):55-58, and Kendall Blanchard *The Anthropology of Sport* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1995), 95-127.

¹⁵ Games can be considered to be a subset of play, games being more structured and defined and having other purposes than play in general. See Blanchard, *Anthropology of Sport*, 50-51.

¹⁶ Philip Townshend, 'Games of Strategy: A New Look at Correlates and Cross-Cultural Methods' in *Play and Culture*, 217-225, edited by Helen B. Schwartzman (West Point, NY: Leisure, 1980).

¹⁷ See Suits, *The Grasshopper*.

ways to get a ball in a hole than by hitting it with a club. Indeed what utility would there be in even getting a ball in a hole apart from the game?

The means of playing a game. In golf one needs a ball, at least one club (though a variety of clubs is better), and a playing field; the golf course. Though the basic materials of a game usually remain the same (a ball, a deck of cards, etc.) the specific playing conditions may change, affecting play. One golf course is laid out differently from another; the board configuration of *Settlers of Catan* is different each time played.

The rules of a game. A game must also have rules which determine allowable ways by which the means will be used to attain the goal. For golf the rules stipulate that the means of getting the ball into the hole is hitting it with a club. One may not throw or carry the ball. Rules do not predetermine the outcome of the game, but only set parameters, allowing a level of freedom as to how one plays the game.

Rules not only give structure to how the game is played but more importantly, they are essential to the very nature of a game. They are *constitutive* of the game. For example, it would be more efficient and quicker to simply carry the golf ball to the hole and drop it in the cup, but no one would call that 'playing golf'. Suits points out, that unlike other situations in real life, where one might justifiably break a rule to attain a goal (for example, breaking a 'no trespassing' law in order to save a life), 'in a game the end and the rules do not admit such disjunction. It is impossible to win a game and at the same time to

break one of its rules.'¹⁸

The proper playing disposition. The disposition of the player is also essential to truly playing a game, which Suits calls a 'lusory' attitude.¹⁹ In other words it is possible to go through the motions of playing a game, but not really *play* it, if one does not play with the right attitude.

Suits names *triflers*, *cheaters*, and *spoilsports* as examples of not being real players.²⁰ We would not say that one truly played golf if he went to the golf course and trifled by hitting the ball in *any* direction, not even trying to get the ball into the hole.²¹ Cheaters, if caught, are normally disqualified from playing or punished in some manner. Spoilsports disrupt games by quitting or making it impossible for others to play or enjoy the game.

2. The Importance of Strategy to Game Outcomes

Most games require some kind of strategy to be played well. The rules set parameters, but usually allow some level of freedom so that the players must make choices about how they play the game. The logic of how those decisions are made is the playing strategy. The strategy provides an algorithm for playing the game and attaining the objective, guiding decisions for each individual move or playing choice. One

¹⁸ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 25.

¹⁹ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 5, 38.

²⁰ Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 44-48.

²¹ In the 2012 Olympic Games four Badminton teams were disqualified, not for cheating, but for deliberately losing matches in hopes of attaining advantageous placement in later playoff rounds.

can of course play a game without a strategy, but will seldom attain the goal without a strategy. No one would win a card game by playing the cards randomly.

There are two types of strategy for most games: *general strategies* and *situational strategies*. A *general strategy* is not a formal rule of play, but what might be called a rule of thumb that applies to attaining the goal nearly every time one plays, irrespective of the players or the circumstances. General strategies apply universally because they are inherently linked to the logic of the game. Failing to adopt them normally leads to consistent failure to attain the goal. A general strategy for playing 'hearts' would be to void one's hand of a suit.

Situational strategies are strategies that are helpful in attaining the objective in light of the specific conditions each time the game is played, taking into consideration the changing variables. These variables will have direct implications for the situational playing strategy. For example, a specific playing strategy must be considered for each hand of cards one is dealt in 'hearts'.

The playing board layout in *Settlers of Catan* changes with each game, requiring a new playing strategy for *that* board. Furthermore, situational strategies may be adapted and changed over the course of the game, based upon on-going developments in the playing of the game. In this regard playing strategies are not static, but dynamic, while at the same time always crafted towards attaining the same end goal.

3. Games Involving Teams

Many games involve teams whereby

typically two or more groups of people compete against each other in some way, as, for example, in sports such as basketball, and in card games such as contract bridge. Team games have the added dimension that to play well the players must somehow coordinate their efforts to attain the goal. Cooperation or coordination among the diverse teammates is essential to an effective strategy. One cannot play the game well in an individualistic manner that disregards the importance and contributions of other teammates. The playing strategy must be a *team* strategy.

Furthermore, to play team games effectively an additional playing disposition is necessary that is not required of non-team games. We might call it team spirit or selflessness. Individual team members must often be prepared to surrender individual performance or 'glory', so as to enhance the overall team performance. Individual personal goals must be subordinated to the overall team strategy and goals.

4. Game as Simulation and Alternative World

It is not difficult to see parallels between playing games and living life in general. People normally have life goals they seek to achieve; certain means are necessary to attain those goals (resources, relationships, security, education, skills, etc.), and not everyone is born with equal access to or endowment with them. Both formal law and informal social norms are the rules that guide how life goals can be rightly attained.

We also know that attitude or disposition is a key to living well, namely

having a positive disposition and a spirit of love and kindness. Wisdom might be defined as strategy for living the game of life well within socially defined boundaries.

Yet there is a sense in which a game creates an alternative world; a closed system making sense only within itself. In the words of Johan Huizinga, play creates order, play *is* order.²² Games are based upon rules and objectives that are usually defined and operate independently of the normal contingencies of real life.

The player enters a space where this alternative set of goals and rules applies. The rules of play may be contrary to common sense or efficiency (e.g. hitting a ball with a club instead of carrying or throwing it to attain the objective of getting it in a hole), and sometimes deliberately impose otherwise unnecessary challenges or hindrances (e.g. sand traps).

Playing a game involves a willingness to accept the playing parameters as a condition of play that make perfect sense within the game, but little sense outside of the game. Nevertheless, once one enters play, the goal of the game takes over and is the only objective in the world of the game.

III Games and the Bible

How then does this understanding of games relate to interpreting biblical texts and contextualization? In the Bible we see the game of life being played

out and described from the divine perspective. We can identify divinely appointed objectives, rules, means, attitudes, and strategies as the biblical characters play the game of life and as biblical authors report, instruct, and/or interpret the play.

In reading the Bible we also begin to identify a worldview and value system rooted in the person and purposes of God that stand in contrast to human systems; an alternative world so to speak, that often makes little sense apart from faith. Let us now re-examine each element of game logic and see how it can offer a useful framework for biblical interpretation and contextualization.

1. The Goal

Various themes have been proposed in the attempt to capture the overall thrust of the biblical story and God's purposes for his people. For the sake of our discussion I will use the theme of the *missio Dei*. (One may choose a different unifying theme, but the general principle will be the same.) God is a missionary God who throughout the biblical story has called his people to participate in his mission,²³ thus I will rather uncreatively call this game 'The Mission' which we as the people of God are called to play.

The broad goal of The Mission as spelled out in Scripture is the faithful participation in God's redemptive purposes and the advancement of his kingdom. Throughout salvation history

²² Johan Huizinga argues that play is prior to culture (animals play), and that culture is derived from play (*Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Boston; Beacon, 1955), 10.

²³ See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006) as an example of a missional hermeneutic.

we observe in scripture God's people living in pursuit of this goal. At times they succeed, and at times they fail. They live in different epochs and under different covenants, but the broad purposes remain the same as history progresses towards the ultimate victory of God and the consummation of his purposes with the fullness of the coming of the kingdom.

It can be said that this goal makes sense only within the parameters of the game. Just as the goal of getting a ball in a hole using only a club is a worthy goal only if one has chosen to play golf, so too participation in God's mission makes sense as a worthy goal only to those who have chosen to enter God's kingdom.

Of course the fundamental difference is that the game of God's mission *is* the ultimate reality, rooted in the reality of God himself as creator and sustainer of all things. All other human objectives, rules, and alternate games are at best a shadow of that reality, at worst a perversion of it.

2. The Rules

Scripture also spells out certain rules for the game. 2 Timothy 2:5 makes the analogy explicit: 'if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.' These are the covenantal standards by which this game is to be played. The rules of many games may seem arbitrary or impractical apart from the game.

Much like the goal, the rules of God's mission often appear foolish to those outside the kingdom, but rules in The Mission are not arbitrary. As we shall see below, they reflect the very

character and purposes of God and are thus perfectly logical from within the game.

We saw that in games the rules are constitutive of the very nature of the game. One plays by the rules, or one is not really playing the game. Those who consistently violate the rules are disqualified from playing. Of course no person or church plays perfectly by the rules, but Paul exhorts, 'Run in such a way as to get the prize' (1 Cor. 9:24). How we run is as important as the goal to which we run.

So too God's commands and ethical standards define The Mission and how the goal is to be achieved. To violate God's rules in pursuit of God's mission is to forfeit the mission altogether. In this sense the rules of the mission are inseparable from the goal of the mission, though the two are not identical. Indeed, in The Mission the means reflect the very nature of the end: the restoration of God's rule, the law of love, justice, reconciliation, the freeing power of truth.

There are two related dimensions to the rules of The Mission. One is the moral or ethical, the other is relational or covenantal. The Ten Commandments might be considered an example of ethical playing rules. Micah 6:8 summarizes:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Jesus claimed that all the law and the prophets can be summarized in the two commands to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself (Mt. 22:36-40).

The relational dimension of the rules defines the larger context of how the game is played within the covenantal relationship between God and his people. Idolatry and other loyalties are 'out of bounds'. To violate the covenant is to incur judgment. More positively, it is in relationship with the Triune God that one is enabled and empowered to play. To switch metaphors, Jesus said, 'If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing' (Jn. 15:5b).

These rules are universal and they apply wherever and whenever the game is played. One of the hermeneutical difficulties is discerning which biblical injunctions are 'rules' with universal validity, and which are situational strategies that are not universally binding but examples of how the game is played under certain circumstances—a question we will return to later.

3. The Means

The most important means of the game The Mission are the Word of God, the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, and various gifts—spiritual or natural—endowed to us collectively as the players. Various gifts are given to the church to assist in attaining the goal: individual talents, institutions, educational resources, finances, technology, etc.

The *charismata* are given to members of the church to build the body of Christ and strengthen it for its mission. They must be employed consistently within the rules, in character with the gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and with intentionality towards the

end.²⁴ The 'playing field' is the social and cultural context where the missional church finds itself.

4. Playing Disposition and Attitude

The proper playing disposition for this game is also clearly spelled out for us in scripture. At the most fundamental level, the Christian must want to become an agent of the *missio Dei*, and be willing to act and not merely theorize. We do not trifle with being Christians.

Furthermore, Christians are to be people who act in love, for without this disposition we are but a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal; we are nothing and gain nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3). We are to 'do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit'. Rather, we are to value others above ourselves, having the mind of Christ, becoming humble servants (Phil. 2:1-9).

A faith relationship with God is fundamental for 'without faith it is impossible to please God' (Heb. 11:6). Overarching all else we are exhorted: 'whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1 Cor. 10:31). As with games, the right spiritual disposition is essential for carrying out The Mission. An inappropriate disposition, compromises the mission itself as much as a spoilsport, cheater or trifler compromises the playing of a game.

5. Strategy

The value of game logic for contextu-

²⁴ For example the church in Corinth violated the 'playing rule' of love, exercising spiritual gifts for self-glorification instead of for the edification of others (1 Cor. 12:7; 14).

alization becomes most intriguing and fruitful when we consider the matter of game strategy. Each biblical text reveals in some manner the way in which The Mission is being played in the given biblical context. Not only the goal, rules, means and dispositions are evident, but playing strategies are revealed. For example, the apostle Paul preached differently to different audiences as reported in the Book of Acts.

The rules and goal did not change, but the strategy did. Dean Flemming has demonstrated that not merely isolated texts, but the entire New Testament is a collection of contextual documents illustrating how the gospel engages culture, addressing various audiences and cultural challenges in the emerging mission churches.²⁵

This approach may help us to resolve seemingly conflicting exhortations or reports in scripture. For example, why women are prohibited from speaking or teaching in the church in some passages, but we see women prophesying in the church in others. Different playing conditions call for different strategies while reaching the same goal and following the same rules.

In some cases more than one strategy may be acceptable. For example, the prohibition of adultery can be easily identified as a rule, but Paul's recommendation of celibacy can be considered a strategy, not binding for all and not excluding other possible strategies such as marriage (1 Cor. 7:8-9).

Many games have different phases, such as Pinochle (bidding and trick-taking phases), and *Settlers of Catan*

(an initial piece placement phase followed by the dice rolling phase). Each phase is governed by a subset of rules, necessitating different strategies, yet each stage contributes to the overall game objective.

The Mission also as played out in scripture has developed in phases over the course of salvation history. The overarching goal has not changed and the ground rules have not changed, but the specific tactics and strategies have changed, based upon the conditions and progress of the game. We must thus discern in each scriptural episode how the game is being played in light of that text's salvation-historical location.

6. Team Play

In a real sense, The Mission is a team game. Various talents and gifts are to be coordinated in mutual interdependence towards fulfilling the objective of the game. Each player is important (1 Cor. 12). God has consistently chosen a *people* as agents of his purposes (e.g. Ex. 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). Team dynamics are also important to biblical interpretation. Theologians, especially missiologists, speak of the necessity of a hermeneutical community.²⁶

The hermeneutical community is not merely a matter of an individual interpreter engaging various herme-

²⁵ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005).

²⁶ See for example Paul G. Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999), 94-95; 'Critical Contextualization' (in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, 75-92. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), and John Howard Yoder, 'The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood' in *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 22-34.

neutical traditions found throughout church history, but should include the voices of the contemporary global church.²⁷ The Spirit is present and at work in the collective mind of believers as they reflect together on the meaning of scripture and its implications for their given context.

7. The Self-contained System of the Game

As described above, games are a self-contained system or alternative world based upon objectives and rules that players voluntarily accept, though these rules may have little to do with 'real life' or common sense. The game *The Mission* is based upon the alternative goals, value system, and rules of the kingdom of God.

Those values and rules are at many points contrary to the norms and values of any given culture of 'this world'. This is particularly illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount. Indeed many of these rules would seem to be hindrances to attaining one's goals in life, highlighting that this game (participation in God's redemptive purposes) makes little sense to those outside the game and are desirable only within the logic of the game.

Playing *The Mission* entails, as with the playing of any game, a voluntary submission to the logic of the game, suspending other logics, embracing the alternative reality of the game. In *The Mission* this new reality is described as a 'new creation' in Christ (2 Cor.

5:17), setting our minds on the things above, not earthly things (Col. 3:2), and not being conformed to the pattern of this world, but transformed by the renewing of our mind, 'able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will' (Rom. 12:3).

Furthermore, one must actually enter into the playing of the game to begin to truly understand both the game as a whole, as well as specific biblical texts describing the game. John Driver speaks of an 'epistemology of obedience' as integral to the interpretive process.²⁸ 'If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own' (Jn. 7:17).

IV Learning to Play a Game and Contextualization

If I have never played a certain card game I could learn how to play in several ways.

Explanation: Someone explains to me the objective, the rules, and perhaps some basic strategies for winning. Alternatively, I might just read the instructions that come with the game or a rulebook.

Observation: I may observe other players while they repeatedly play the game and I begin to get a feel for the rules and game logic. As I note what players do who frequently win, I may gradually discern the strategies behind their winning ways. I may also identify recurrent mistakes made by poor players. Observation will be one of the best

²⁷ See for example, Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds. *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

²⁸ John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1986), 36.

ways to learn effective game strategies.

Participation: I simply play the game numerous times and attempt to learn by trial and error. By experience I can gradually discover good playing strategies. It is the most painful way to learn, as I will make many mistakes along the way.

Formal instruction: I may take lessons or engage an expert player to coach me. I would not only receive verbal explanation, but I would also receive supervised practice and direct feedback on how to improve my play.

The Bible provides us with the first two aids in learning The Mission. Didactic biblical texts provide the reader with *explanation* and explain the rules. However, even didactic texts and imperatives are given in a specific context, and may reflect situational strategies and not necessarily universal playing rules.

Through narrative biblical texts we learn by *observation*. The reader observes in the narrative how biblical characters have played the game. By repeated observation of what makes for effective and ineffective play, we begin to discern the underlying playing strategies and logic of The Mission. The Psalms especially give insight into the disposition of players, including attitudes, prayers, songs, motivation, and inspiration. The reader observes the inner life of the players, and is invited to reflect upon and identify with such dispositions.

But this is not all. The Holy Spirit acts as a coach who instructs, guides, and imparts skills for the game. Jesus promised the Spirit to his disciples to guide them into all truth (Jn. 14:26, 16:13). The Spirit reveals the deep

things of God (1 Cor. 2:9-13). The Spirit enables the keeping of the rules and playing with the right disposition (Ezek. 36:27; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:5-17; Gal. 5:22-25). The Spirit creates, equips, and guides the missional community (e.g. 1 Cor. 12; Acts 16:6-10). In this way the Spirit aids the church in understanding scripture and developing playing strategies for various contexts. Indeed, it is the Spirit who brings the game of God's mission to its victorious end.

V Playing Strategy and Contextualization

Game logic offers an aid to biblical contextualization by unpacking the relationship of goal, rules, and strategy in a given context of the biblical narrative or injunction. Recall that in playing games, while goals and rules do not change, playing strategies do. In a card game my playing strategy must be adapted to the specific hand of cards that I am dealt. In *Settlers of Catan* the playing board changes from game to game, demanding careful study of the game board and crafting a fresh strategy in order to win on *that* playing board.

So too as the gospel moves from one cultural context to the next, from one 'playing field' to the next, new strategies must be forged to achieve the same goal. As we seek to understand the implications of a specific biblical passage for a contemporary context, we are in essence changing playing fields. Though the goal and rules do not change, the playing field does, and this means that the specific strategy effective in the original biblical context may not be an effective strategy in the

contemporary context.

Studying the Bible we discern the interrelationship of the ways in which the biblical strategies related to the specifics of the various biblical contexts in attaining the goal (or why a particular strategy was ineffective). We begin to acquire a feel for the game logic. In the same way in which repeated observation of experienced players playing a game helps the novice to understand game strategies, so too the numerous biblical narratives provide the reader with numerous opportunities to observe The Mission being played.

Understanding the logic of the strategies described in scripture is more important than imitating the specific actions. Mimicking the individual moves of the winning card player observed playing one hand will not win another round of play unless the exact same hand is dealt and play proceeds identically in both games, which is never the case. So too, merely mimicking features of biblical events will not lead to playing well because the contemporary circumstances are never identical to the biblical situation.

How then does one discern what a playing rule is (universally binding), and what is merely a playing strategy (thus variable in application) in any given biblical text? This will not always be obvious. I might observe actions or exhortations in scripture that seem to be universal rules, but are in fact only situational strategies.

The key to identifying the rules lies not in sorting out which commands are universal and which are not, but rather in understanding how rules are constitutive of a game, whereas strategies are not. In The Mission rules are constitutive of accomplishing the ob-

jective, namely God's redemptive purposes.²⁹ The rules are not arbitrary, but can be identified as follows:

- *Rules reflect the character of God.* Humans are created in God's image and redemption restores that image marred by the fall.³⁰ Because the redemptive plan of God is to bring humanity back into relationship with himself under his gracious and righteous rule, rules are by necessity congruent with his character.
- *Rules are essential to our covenantal relationship with God.* Faithfulness, submission, devotion and obedience to God are essential to the covenant. To serve other gods, to compromise God's truth, or to dishonour him is to violate the covenant, thus violating that which is constitutive to the game. Our mission is dependent upon and grows out of that covenantal relationship.
- *Rules are a necessary condition to fulfilling the mission.* To be agents of God's redemptive purposes, we must both communicate the message of redemption and in some measure exemplify what it means to live as a redeemed people; a people characterized by forgiveness, healing, restoration, justice, and above all love, for this is the fruit of God's redemptive work.
- *Rules are foundational to God's cre-*

²⁹ William J. Webb helpfully suggests discerning the 'redemptive-movement' of a given passage as a key to contemporary application (*Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, 30-66).

³⁰ Gen. 1:26-27; Col. 3:10; 1 Jn. 3:2.

ation order. God is a God of order, and his creation is to be ordered in a way to promote human well-being. God ordained marriage and family. He ordained human government to curb evil, to care for the disadvantaged, to provide just and fair treatment of all, and to structure social life. Creation care both honours God's creation and preserves conditions for life. Apart from such order human life becomes chaos and God's own beauty, justice and harmony are violated.

Such rules can be traced, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, throughout scripture. They are the underlying foundation of every command, guideline or action of scripture. They frame the general and specific playing strategies described in the Bible and should frame contemporary contextual strategies. Jesus points to such an underlying rule when he taught that all the Law and Prophets depend upon the dual commands to love God and to love neighbour (Mt. 22:37-40); an understanding echoed in the epistles of Paul (e.g. Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:14).

VI Playing the Game

God's people are called to be *players* of The Mission, not merely observers or commentators. Games exist to be played, and they do not play themselves. A football and field do not constitute the game of football. A game really comes into being only when it is played. The divine game has been played throughout biblical history by specially called servants and God's elect people. It is the calling of the church today to continue to play and

continue the mission under the parameters of the game as defined by its creator, God.

As already noted, games are created as their own world, with their own goals, means, and rules (which are often counterintuitive). Game players are the actors who enter the world of the game and bring the game to life, adopting that new reality in order to play. Once the player enters the game, he must take the terms of the game seriously, voluntarily submitting to the conditions of the game. In Gadamer's words, the play has primacy over the consciousness of the player.³¹ Rudolf Bernet describes it in this way:

The player thus only participates in a process whose unfolding and logic are imposed on him. He allows himself to be born away by the game, and even when he actively participates in a football game or a ceremony, he enters into the game's service in order to ensure its success.³²

Is this not an appropriate analogy for Christians individually and for the church collectively entering into the service of God? We serve (or play) as instruments of God's mission (the game objective), in that process abiding by the game rules in a spirit of faith, integrity, humility, and loving, worshipful submission (playing disposition).

Just as the logic of a game only makes sense in its own context, so

³¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. (Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall) (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 104.

³² Rudolf Bernet, 'Gadamer on the Subject's Participation in the Game of Truth', *Review of Metaphysics*, 58 (June 2005), 785-814, 790.

too the logic of the kingdom of God is rightly comprehended only by playing the game, submitting to it, becoming like a child (Mt. 18:3), taking on a new citizenship (Phil. 3:20), and walking by faith not sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

It is this experience or participation in the game that opens the logic of the biblical world to the interpreter. There is a subjective identification with those meanings by voluntarily entering that frame of reference. However, this does not allow the interpreter to define the game or import his own meanings.

The message and meaning of scripture remain authoritative. Furthermore, particularly in sports, the players submit to the coach who directs the strategy. The church functions as a collective, interdependent body under the headship of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer has developed the idea of *thedrama* that has numerous parallels with game hermeneutics. In *thedrama* the interpreter is called upon not merely to interpret, but also to *perform* scripture as an actor would perform in a play.³³ Similarly, in game hermeneutics the interpreter's goal is not to merely observe the game being played in scripture and remain a game analyst or commentator. Our calling is to play that game, living and serving in faithfulness, losing ourselves in the process, determined to play well, gladly embracing the goal and parameters.

The servant of God adopts the purposes of God, joyfully selling all to purchase that field (Mt. 13:44), in love obeying his commands (Jn. 14:15), tak-

ing up the cross for the privilege of following (Lk. 14:27), dying to self and all other rivals to life in God (Rom. 6), having been transferred into the new reality of the kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:13). The player is immersed in the new reality of the game. Other realities have no influence or authority in the world of the game.

And yet each generation and each new context presents unique challenges and circumstances (new playing fields) that demand fresh contextualized approaches and creative solutions (new situational playing strategies) as we seek to give faithful expression to the gospel. And so we must ask ourselves: Are we continuing to serve (play) not with identical actions (playing moves) that we read of in the New Testament, but in the trajectory of that service as we see it in the New Testament, ever moving towards that same goal?

This brings us to a final point, worthy of much more reflection than can be given here: *God is creator, player and judge of the game.* The revelation of God's purposes and actions in scripture locate him as the creator who stands above the game. It is he who has determined the rules and objective of the game. Of Christ we are told, 'For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (Col. 1:16-17). The *missio Dei* is indeed *God's* mission. It is he who elects, guides, and empowers his people to be agents of that mission.

Yet God is also a player in this game, actively engaged in bringing play to its

³³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

determined end, bringing his mission to fulfilment. History is God's history and God is not a passive observer. 'The first premise of evangelical theology is that God can enter and has entered into relationship with the world.'³⁴

Ultimately God enters the game in the most tangible way imaginable. With the incarnation, God the Son steps onto the playing field. The same Christ, who is creator, sustainer, and end of all things, submits himself to the parameters of play, surrendering his divine position, taking on the form of a servant even unto death (Phil. 2:6-8).

The life, death and resurrection of the incarnate Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, is the source and foundation of all redemptive action. He accomplishes the ultimate victory over sin, Satan and evil. He is the ultimate player and victor. All play must now be oriented on the person of Christ. The sending of the church is based upon the sending of the Son: the work of the Son creates the church, the message of the Son is proclaimed by the church, the life of the Son is embodied in the church, and the obedience and submission of the Son to the Father is imitated by the church.

The disciples are sent into the world as the Son was sent (Jn. 17:18; 20:21), 'who, in complete dependence and perfect obedience to his sender, fulfils the purpose for which the Father sent him'.³⁵ With the sending of the Holy Spirit, God continues to actively transform, empower and guide the church to

fulfil the purpose for which it has been sent.

Finally, God is also the judge or 'referee' of the game. At the consummation God himself is the righteous, omniscient, and impartial judge before whom all players will stand and give account. His judgments are perfect. There will be no need for video replay. There will be no contested calls. There will be no unseen fouls, infractions or cheating. He will not only bring history to its foreordained end, but he will punish the wicked, and reward the just with the victor's crown of righteousness, glory, and life itself (2 Tim. 4:8; Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10). The outcome of the game is determined and sure.

VII Conclusion

The approach described here seeks to offer a fresh perspective, a new framing of the hermeneutical process and contextualization that will hopefully help interpreters to greater appreciation of biblical teaching and greater faithfulness in living it out. Game hermeneutics provides an alternative logic for the challenge of contextualization.

The goal of biblical interpretation cannot be to disembodiment truth from the accidents of the biblical record to arrive at an abstract 'timeless meaning'. Those accidents are the field upon which the divine purposes are played out. Truth is revealed in the concrete actions of God and exemplified in the lived responses of God's people in specific historical and cultural contexts. God's mission is carried out on specific playing fields, ever moving in the trajectory of his eschatological and teleological purposes through salvation

³⁴ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 40.

³⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 203.

history.

Game hermeneutics frames that process in terms of the logic of games. As the interpreter grasps the logic of that game, he more willingly submits to the game parameters and is better situated to become a faithful player on the playing field upon which God has placed him. He seeks to understand the biblical dynamic and then re-enact it, live it out, and incarnate it in new settings.

Several advantages to game hermeneutics can be envisioned. First, it might provide a more plausible basis for discerning the universal rules that guide the specific commands and narratives in scripture. We seek to understand their logic as situational strategies appropriate to the given context and salvation-historical location. Game hermeneutics thus resists an overly literalistic application of biblical passages, while at the same time retaining their pedagogical and revelatory authority.

Second, game hermeneutics provides a more intuitive way to understand and apply narrative texts. Narrative texts present a special challenge to the extractionist approach to hermeneutics. As one observes and interprets the game being played in the narrative, one can identify how the details and actions relate to the larger goal and rules. Narratives become lessons in game strategy and how contextual factors impinge upon the playing of the game. The key to understanding the passage and its application is in grasping the interface of biblical commands and contextual factors in pursuit of God's mission.

Third, game hermeneutics can help to discern questions of contextualiza-

tion. As the gospel enters new contexts or as cultures change, the playing field changes and new playing strategies become necessary. Game hermeneutics helps us understand the nature of how God's purposes are manifested and lived out in various settings as we find them in scripture.

As we encounter new settings and new challenges, that often have very little in common with biblical situations, we are encouraged to transfer the logic of those strategies and develop similar or new situational strategies to face the challenges of the new context. We seek to live in the trajectory of the biblical story towards the telos of redemptive history.

Finally, game hermeneutics calls the interpreter to be not merely an analyst or spectator, but to become a proficient and faithful player. In a real sense, we are *all* game players and the only question is which game, or better, *whose* game we choose to play: a game of human invention or of divine calling? As we read scripture we increasingly come to understand God's game from God's own perspective.

We must make a choice. To choose to become children of the kingdom, is to choose to live in the world of God's reality, which, like the alternative world of games, operates according to its own values and objectives quite unlike those of other worlds with which we are familiar.

To be good players, we must willingly embrace the parameters of that new reality and play with the right disposition. Yet unlike games, this new reality is God's ultimate reality, and every other competing 'reality' is but a distortion, distraction or mirage.

The Moral Authority of Scripture and the Hermeneutics of Love

Patrick Nullens

KEYWORDS: *Postmodernity, scripture, ethics, hermeneutics, biblical authority, love, covenant, obedience, virtue, Holy Spirit,*

I Introduction

The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck states about faith in Holy Scriptures: 'There is no dogma about which there is more unity than that of the Holy Scriptures.'¹ He emphasises that the authority of Scripture is based not on a 'scientific pronouncement', but on the claims of Scripture itself. Much like the dogma of Trinity, the inspiration of the Bible is a dogma 'which Christians accept, not because they understand the truth of it, but because God so attests it'.²

Most commonly, 2 Timothy 3:16 has been used to stress the fact that

the Scriptures are God-breathed (*theopneustos*) and as the Word of God they are therefore credible in themselves (*autopistis*). Bavinck's observation that this dogma brings unity among Christians is particularly true for Evangelicals; the consensus on the authority of Scripture is generally considered to be one of the unifying factors in this, in many other ways diverse and dispersed group.

The evangelical view on Scripture stands in the reformation tradition and holds fast to the reformation principles of Scripture being the *regula fidei* (rule of faith) and *regula morum* (rule for morals) that was needed. The first generation of reformers tried to safeguard these principles, which were later codified in the confessions of faith. In this spirit the French Confession of 1559, for example, states in the fifth article

We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, *and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men*. It is the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God

1 H Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics I, Prolegomena* (Translated from the Dutch) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 402.

2 Bavinck et al., *Reformed Dogmatics*, 436.

Dr **Patrick Nullens** is Rector of the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven, Belgium and professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics. He is director of the Institute of Leadership and Ethics. His most recent publication, co-authored with Ron Michener is *The Matrix of Christian Ethics. Integrating Philosophy and Moral Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Paternoster / IVP, 2010). This article is a shortened version of a paper presented at the FEET conference held in Berlin on August 27, 2012. All Bible references are taken from the NIV.

and for our salvation'.³

In the same way, albeit more succinctly, the Evangelical Alliance testifies to belief in: 'The divine inspiration, authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures'.⁴

The question then logically follows regarding the nature of the authority of Scripture, which is the inquiry of this paper. More specifically, we investigate the moral authority of Scripture. A traditional evangelical understanding of the nature of Scripture's authority can be found in the work of Carl F. Henry, *Revelation and Authority* (1976-1983). Henry stresses the way in which the Bible provides us with an objective standard, revealed in propositional truths. The task of theology is to systematize the information which is conveyed through biblical propositions.

The task of Christian Ethics is similar, but is more specifically directed towards making moral decisions. Unsurprisingly, Henry's *Christian Personal Ethics* (1957) stresses the revelational dimension of Christian morality. The 'good' is the will of God, which he revealed to us in Scripture. Our response to this revelation should be obedience, which is the key concept in his moral theology.⁵ He sees the Bible as 'authoritative literature' since it reveals 'universally valid norms of goodness and truth'.⁶

It is interesting to see how he recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit as a dynamic principle, which has the power to transform people,⁷ yet warns us that the dynamic work of the Spirit does not 'rid the moral life of an *objective* ethic which is mediated through prophets and apostles, supremely illuminated by Jesus, and *inscripturated* in the Bible'.⁸

So the moral authority of the Holy Spirit is always in line with the written Word. 'The rule of the Spirit does not remove man from the will of God *objectively revealed* in the Bible.'⁹ More recently, this typically evangelical understanding of the Bible as a sourcebook of objective facts, has often been considered to be too modernistic.¹⁰ Kevin Vanhoozer (an evangelical himself) remarks in this regard:

Evangelicals have been quick to decry the influence of modernism on liberal theology but not see the beam of modern epistemology in their own eyes.¹¹

The challenges of postmodernism increase the realisation that applying sound exegesis to arrive at clear cut solutions to our ethical dilemmas, is not feasible. Modernistic methodologies are crashing against the walls of contemporary moral issues, and we need

3 'Confessio Fedei Gallicana,' <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iv.vii.html> (accessed 15 Nov 2012).

4 *Symbolica Evangelica* (Evangelical alliance, 1846, art. 1).

5 Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 209-218.

6 Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 149.

7 Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 437-458.

8 Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 359. Italics mine.

9 Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 360. Italics are mine.

10 See especially the discussion about the 'Chicago Declaration of Biblical Inerrancy'.

11 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 26.

to realize that the challenge is not just to understand and order the biblical data as if we are collecting facts and consequently apply them to the complex contemporary issues we are faced with. In general terms, Postmodernity has altered the way we perceive truth and authority.

This general shift in perception of authority consequently has an immense impact on how we see the moral authority of 'Holy Scriptures'.¹² One might say that there is a change of emphasis from the normative to the formative role of Scripture. The perception has changed from a book of law to a book of the gospel, from a moral blue-print to a compass which shows us the direction to go.

In this article, I first want to map out some of the recent developments in the use of Scripture in Ethics, which are inspired by this postmodern critique. I would then like to offer an alternative approach to Scripture for Ethics, inspired by Paul Ramsey's hermeneutic of love. I will argue that a hermeneutic of love will answer the challenges offered by Postmodernity. As a brief conclusion, I will look at 2 Timothy 3:16 from this perspective.

II Six overlapping developments in short

1. Appreciation of canonical diversity¹³

Historical criticism and biblical theology have increased the awareness of the unique historical setting of the different books in the Bible. In a postmodern setting, there is much more appreciation of diversity and people are more reluctant to unify the plurality of voices into one chorus. The diversity of the canonical books has its effect on the way Scripture is used in ethics. Moreover, the canon itself is considered to be a discourse in which we are invited to participate.

Indeed, diversity should be appreciated, but it has to be set in the larger framework of the one God, Creator and Saviour. The plurality of the four written gospels does not result in four different gospel messages. The particularities and concreteness of the biblical texts are to be seen and explained against the wider horizon of God's salvation history.

One way to appreciate the diversity in genres is to relate them to the different formats of ethical argumentation. This 'Matrix' model integrates the four classical types of moral reasoning with the diversity of biblical texts.¹⁴ We distinguish four types: value ethics, com-

¹² See Bonnie Howe, 'Authority and Power' in Joel B. Green et al., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

¹³ See Bruce C. Birch, 'Scripture in ethics, methodological issues' in Joel B. Green et al., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

¹⁴ Patrick Nullens, *The Matrix of Christian Ethics: Integrating Philosophy and Moral Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Colorado Springs Colo.: Paternoster, 2010).

mandment theory, character ethics and consequentialism.

We often limit ourselves to one of those models. For instance, the search for 'principles' behind the text betrays a limitation to deontological ethics, or divine command theory. The law is of course an important source for ethical reflection. But behind the laws lies a world of values.¹⁵ Wisdom literature then has a strong consequential bend.

Furthermore, the narratives are not only crucial to demonstrate value priorities, they are crucial for character formation. Nonetheless, the four models are but a manifestation of the one will of the one God as the only source of our morality.

2. Appreciation of pneumatology

Carl Henry has already pointed to the work of the Holy Spirit as a dynamic principle at work in our moral conscience. This has become even more prominent in the past century, which has been seen as 'the century of the Holy Spirit'. This is in large part due to the growth of the charismatic and Pentecostal movements, but also to the ethical statements of non-charismatic theologians, for example Jürgen Moltmann, where, the Spirit plays a central role. The Spirit originates and preserves life, and is God at work here among us.¹⁶ Another example of the re-

newed attention on the Holy Spirit can be found in Stanley Grenz's decision to deal with the authority of Scripture under the subheading of pneumatology.¹⁷

This emphasis on Word and Spirit resulted in a more dynamic view of Scripture. The Word of God 'happens'; it is the divine encounter that makes it God's word spoken to us, not a material text of written words. This of course is also more in line with a Barthian and Bonhoefferian view of Scripture.¹⁸

Revelation is not so much the provision of hidden truths, as it is the self-presentation of God, a form of divine presence, a self-presentation in divine mercy, a form of saving fellowship.¹⁹ Webster refers to Barth and summarizes:

Revelation is thus not simply bridging a noetic divide (though it includes that), but it is reconciliation, salvation and therefore fellowship. The idiom of revelation is as much moral and relational as it is cognitive.²⁰

3. Appreciation of Scripture by the interpretive community

This is possibly one of the most striking trends. The church is the primal locus of moral formation. The moral authority of Scripture is mainly manifested by the reading of the Bible with-

¹⁵ Patrick Nullens, 'Value Personalism as a Lens to Read the Ten Commandments', *Das Heilige Herz Der Tora Festschrift Für Hendrik Koorevaar Zu Seinem 65. Geburtstag* (Aachen: Shaker, 2011).

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: a Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

¹⁸ It is a given that both theologians have grown in status among evangelical scholars.

¹⁹ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: a Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

²⁰ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 16.

in the community of believers. It is the church that lives out the biblical story, in the same way that Paul describes the church in Rome: 'you are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another' (Rom. 15:14).²¹

One may refer to the cultural linguistic turn in Systematic Theology. Theology is in fact explicating the practice of the church and the Bible has to be understood as the identity narrative²² of the interpretative community. Stanley Hauerwas, the main proponent of this school, insists that the Bible is first of all the church's book.²³ The particularities of the moral life are not grounded in some kind of understanding of all reality combined with practical reasoning. In fact the church has its own grammar.

One may conclude that the indi-

vidualistic tendency of evangelical use of Scripture, as we see it for instance formulated in art.2 of its *Symbola Evangelica* (1846), is under serious attack.²⁴

4. Appreciation of Character Ethics

Since Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1984) the literature on virtue ethics has been growing vastly. The focus changes from the moral object to the moral subject. Ethics is not so much about principles we need and decisions we make in difficult cases. The major question in ethics has become what kind of people we want to be.

Again, Stanley Hauerwas was a driving force in the recovery of the virtue tradition in Christian ethics.²⁵ He advocates a more particular and concrete ethics of discipleship, rather than one of universal principles and decisions.

This shift is closely related to the previously discussed turn towards community: It is in the community that traditions are embodied and the communities are the first place where character formation happens. We can develop virtuous dispositions only through communal practices and stories. Reading Scripture is therefore only one of the many practices of the church and it should go along with the celebration of the Eucharist, prayer, feeding the hungry etc.

²¹ Especially interesting in connection with Paul's former words about Scripture in Romans 15:4,5. See also Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).

²² Hans Frei specifically emphasises the theme of 'identity' in his book, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: Hans W. Frei, The Identity of Jesus Christ: the Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

²³ The church is the narrative-formed community, faithful, remembering God's care for his creation, the calling of Israel and the life of Jesus. Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Moral Authority of Scripture: the Politics and Ethics of Remembering', *Interpretation* 34, no. 4 (O 1980): 356-370. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), and Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

²⁴ Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*.

²⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: a Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975). Also Meilaender (Lutheran), Jean Porter (Roman Catholic).

5. Appreciation of tradition

In general we can witness a growing appreciation of tradition of the early church. Oftentimes this goes along with the new emphasis on catholicity. The paleo-orthodoxy school (e.g. Thomas Oden) contributes a lot to biblical interpretation by use of the church fathers.²⁶ The Wesleyan Quadrilateral, using Scripture, tradition, reason and experience as four sources for theology, is welcomed more and more in evangelical theology.²⁷

This newfound appreciation in itself is already quite a broadening of the view, compared to a more strict use of the Bible only. We might say, however, that the appreciation of tradition is more prominent in the area of theology, biblical interpretation, and spirituality than in the more tangible and contemporary area of Christian Ethics.

6. Appreciation of theological interpretation

We make the transition from descriptive data in the Bible to prescripts

for use today through theological reflection in the context of the church community.²⁸ The Bible provides the general 'wisdom map' that guides us in our efforts of moral reflection. The broad school of Theological Interpretation can be helpful for creating a bridge between the Scriptures and current morality.²⁹

Barth's commentary on Romans is a classical example. Lesser known is his posthumously published book, *Das christliche Leben* (1959-1961), wherein Barth elaborates on the struggle for human justice, giving Christian social ethics the necessary theoretical content. He discusses our responsibility in light of the Lord's Prayer. In doing so he unites prayer with ethical behaviour. The prayers, 'hallowed be your name', and, 'your kingdom come', stand in sharp contrast to the reality in which we live. In praying for the Kingdom of God we fight the battle for human justice. The Christian's zeal for God takes its shape in fighting for human rights, freedom and peace on earth.³⁰

²⁶ See for instance *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, edited by Thomas Oden, published by InterVarsity. See also Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (IVP Academic, 1998) and Richard J Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

²⁷ Donald A. D Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 1990). C. van der Kooi, Eveline van Staaldune-Sulman, and A.W Zwiep, *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Essays Under the Auspices of the Center of Evangelical and Reformation Theology (CERT)* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2012).

²⁸ As Richard Hays submits, we must be actively engaged in 'metaphor making'—putting the life of our community 'imaginatively within the world articulated by the texts'. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1996), 6. Hays speaks of key images rather than concepts or doctrines (Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 193–214).

²⁹ Theological interpretation does not buy into the traditional modernistic biblical criticism that has created an ugly chasm between biblical interpretation and theology. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 19–25.

³⁰ Karl Barth, *Das Christliche Leben: Die Kirchliche Dogmatik IV 4, Fragmente Aus Dem*

Similarly and expressed even more strongly we see this process of moral reading of Scripture in the oeuvre of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.³¹ Although he was trained in Berlin by Reinhold Seeberg and Adolf von Harnack he felt that historical criticism had failed to understand the meaning of the text. His interpretation was pneumatological and christocentric. It is a continuous and dynamic search for the 'true way'.³² Only through prayer can one have access to the meaning of Scripture. The fundamental question we should ask ourselves, he writes in his *Discipleship*: 'What did Jesus want to say to us today?'

III Loving is knowing

Essentially the six trends above show us a way of understanding and moral knowledge. It is not a new way, but all six can be incorporated in a theological interpretation that starts from the unifying theme or 'key conceptual model' of love.³³ Theological interpretation

Nachlass, Vorlesungen 1959-1961 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1976), 356. In a note Barth refers to the fact that Calvin never advocated any form of religious war in France.

31 Jeffrey B. Kelley and F. Burton Nelson, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theological Interpretation of Scripture for the Church', *Ex Auditu* 17 (2001): 1-30.

32 On the importance of Psalm 119 for Bonhoeffer's Ethics see Brian Brock, 'Bonhoeffer and the Bible in Christian Ethics: Psalm 119, the Mandates, and Ethics as a "Way"', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 3 (December 2005): 7-29.

33 For a discussion of the role of a 'key conceptual model' in Systematics, see Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge University

reads the biblical text from the perspective of the nature of God. As Vanhoozer summarizes: 'A properly theological criticism will therefore seek to do justice to the priority of God'.³⁴ Theocentric ethics must start from the acting and loving God. As St John writes passionately:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; every-one who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ... God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (1 Jn. 4:7-9, 16).

In this passage theological knowledge and morality merge into one another. Only the one who loves can know God. In a *theologia caritatis*³⁵ ethics precedes understanding. Morality is not only a result of obedience to the Word of God, it is also a condition for understanding the Word. The righteous hear the word of God, the evil oppose and are deaf (Is. 6:10). In this sense an ethic of love has an epistemological

Press, 1993).

34 See the introduction of Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*.

35 Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, 'This Is Not About Sex? A Discussion of the Understanding of Love and Grace in Bernard of Clairvaux's and Martin Luther's Theologies', *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 15-25.

status.³⁶

It is however not merely the very nature of God that leads us to the priority of love. Jesus himself provided us with the key hermeneutical principle in the discussion about the greatest commandment (Mt. 22:33-40), which stresses love of God and neighbour; on 'these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets' (v.40).

This double love commandment demonstrates the unity and focus of Scripture and therefore it should function as our main paradigm for understanding its moral authority. All Scripture should be interpreted in light of this double love commandment.³⁷ All of Scripture (i.e. the Old Testament) 'hangs' on the twofold commandment (Mt. 22:40) and this double commandment can be considered as the 'hermeneutic program' for the understanding and application of the Scriptures.³⁸

Using love as a hermeneutical tool was emphasized by Augustine in his *Christian Doctrine*. In the first book he identifies the love of God and neighbour as the purpose of Scripture:³⁹

Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbour, does not yet understand them as he ought. If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from them that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception.⁴⁰

In book three of *Christian Doctrine*, the love commandments comes back to the fore, now as a hermeneutical tool. When a literal interpretation goes against good morals, it should be read figuratively. Good morals are defined using the double commandment. Our interpretation should fit the 'reign of love'.⁴¹ It is only through love that we can come to the truth: *caritas quaerens intellectum* (love seeking understanding).⁴²

This Augustinian line fits well the evangelical view of biblical author-

³⁶ Stephen Pardue, 'Athens and Jerusalem Once More: What the Turn to Virtue Means for Theological Exegesis', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 294-308.

³⁷ For literature on a hermeneutical interpretation of this expression, see Charles H Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 158.

³⁸ B. Gerhardsson, 'The Hermeneutic Program in Matthew 22:37-40'. In *Jews, Greeks and Christians*. W. D. Davies, ed. R. Hamerton-Kelly and R. Scroggs. Leiden: Brill, 1976. 129-50, quoted in (2002) D.A. Hagner, *Vol. 33B: Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28*, 643.

³⁹ Par. Xxxv, xxxvi, see also Ernest L. For-

tin, 'Augustine and the Hermeneutics of Love: Some Preliminary Considerations', in *Augustine Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 35-59; Jeff B. Pool, 'No Entrance into Truth Except Through Love: Contributions from Augustine of Hippo to a Contemporary Christian Hermeneutic of Love', *Review & Expositor* 101, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 629-666. Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*.

⁴⁰ Book I. par. 36

⁴¹ Book 3, par. Xv, see also Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*.

⁴² Pool contrasts this with the classic scholastic *fides quaerens intellectum*. Pool, 'No Entrance into Truth Except Through Love', 633.

ity. It has been more developed in the pietistic and puritan traditions. John Wesley's theology, for example, can be summarized as one of 'Holy Love'.⁴³ The Wesleyan view on sanctification and perfection (similar to Bernard of Clairvaux) is one about growth in love.⁴⁴

According to Jonathan Edwards, for instance, it is only by change of the affections that one is able to understand Scripture. True regeneration is a 'real circumcision of the heart'. God has endowed the soul with two capacities: 'understanding, which merely perceives and speculates', and inclination, which is a capacity that 'does not merely perceive and view things, but is in some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers'. One that 'has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion' and has therefore no 'true virtue'. On the other hand, to have the right inclination is also to have the right knowledge. There is a cognitive dimension to affections, because 'what makes the will choose, is something approved by the Understanding'. As there can be no light (knowledge) without a fire (affections), neither can there be fire without light.

Loving is a way of seeing, a way of understanding and in it is a condition for true moral knowledge. The German

philosopher Max Scheler developed this Augustinian line of thought. Only through the eyes of love can one discover true values. In an ethics of love the subjective and objective merge together. The moral agent is a loving person who discovers the true values of life. The human person is not a thinking being (Kant), nor a willing being (Nietzsche) but a loving being. As a loving being man is created in the image of God. Love as a value cognition determines how we perceive the world. Scheler quotes Goethe:

One can know nothing except what one loves; and the deeper and more complete one desires the knowledge to be, the more powerful and dynamic must the love, indeed the passion be.⁴⁵

Because we are primarily loving beings, our emotional relationships precede both the intellect and the will.

Scheler uses colours as a metaphor for values: The intellect is as blind to values as the ear is blind to colours. He concurs with Pascal on this point, who refers to the logic of the heart ('Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point'). Love is the highest human capacity, and forms the basis for the sympathy required to develop a moral relationship with another person.

Ultimately, love leads us to God and renders us willing to accept what he desires from us. Love thus plays an important role in enabling us both to recognize values and create them. Scheler describes love as a movement that

⁴³ Kenneth J Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007); David L. Cubie, 'Wesley's Theology of Love', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spr 1985): 122–154.

⁴⁴ Bernard, *Saint Bernard on the Love of God* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1972).

⁴⁵ Alfons Deeken, *Process and Permanence in Ethics: Max Scheler's Moral Philosophy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 32.

focuses on ever-higher values. Love is literally an 'e-motion'—a movement away from ourselves which transcends our ego.⁴⁶

Value personalism combines the anthropological understanding of a human as a person with value theory in ethics. Somehow there is a match between the human person and the world of values as we experience them in our daily realities.

IV Covenantal love

One might be suspicious about the vagueness of using love as the prominent concept of understanding biblical authority. Here we are faced with a circle: It is only by studying Scripture in its entirety as a testimony to God's saving acts that we understand more about the meaning of love. Love is initiated by God and therefore our love is always responsive. It is a covenantal love that is revealed to the full in the Cross of the New Covenant. This covenantal love of the new covenant forms the basis of our understanding of the moral authority of Scripture.

It is a covenant of the Spirit writing the law in our hearts. Jeremiah and Ezekiel described the covenant as a radical change of the heart (Jer. 31-34; Ezek. 36:24-29). Unresponsive hearts of stone turned into hearts of flesh. It is the covenant that changes our identity; it has changed the identity of the moral subjects, the new covenantal

community, the readers of the text.⁴⁷

The human heart has changed, the affections have changed, the direction of love has changed. Love changes the heart, it is formative. At the same time, it is normative. Jesus himself has set the standard. He has demonstrated love to us (Jn. 13:34). Paul speaks about a radical transformation which will enable us to discern the will of God, that which is good and perfect (Rom. 12:1,2). Love is a broad concept that incorporates our whole being as creatures of God.⁴⁸

The ethicist Paul Ramsey asserted that agape love is the predominant concept of all Christian ethics by which it can critically integrate with different types of moral philosophical models. According to Ramsey, Christian ethics is about 'love transforming natural law' or 'love transforming justice'.⁴⁹ He criticizes 'medieval scholasticism when a theory of natural law and the ethics of Aristotle were assigned the fundamental, Christian faith and love only the second-story, position'.⁵⁰ Only love can have this primacy.

⁴⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 413–417.

⁴⁸ I am critical of Nygren's *Eros and Agape*; agape love cannot be disconnected from an erotic creational dimension. There is always a biological and social element. See also Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); Wiberg Pedersen, 'This Is Not About Sex?'

⁴⁹ Christ transforming the natural law is the unifying theme of Paul Ramsey, *Nine Modern Moralists*, 3.

⁵⁰ Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1950), 184.

⁴⁶ This ties in with Scheler's anthropology, where the capacity for self-transcendence is characteristic of humans as dynamic beings who are able to reach beyond themselves with the capacity to love.

Ramsey's understanding of Christian love is very Christocentric. The reference is always Jesus himself, He is the prototype: 'My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.' (Jn. 15:12, 13). Christian love is self-emptying (kenotic) and grounded in the divine 'condescension' or self-sacrifice toward men.⁵¹ The main reference for all Christian ethics is the controlling love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14). Quoting Luther, Ramsey defines love as 'being Christ to our neighbours'.⁵² So he reminds us of the fact that love should be defined by Christ himself.

For Ramsey the biblical concept of 'obedient love' is central to a distinctive Christian ethic, but needs to be explained within the larger frame of the covenant.⁵³ God acted first and established a covenantal relationship. Therefore our righteousness cannot be limited to respect or obedience to divine authority. It goes a great deal beyond submission to divine commandments. The biblical religion is one of 'grateful obedience' or 'obedient gratitude'.⁵⁴ God has first delivered us and therefore our attitude has totally changed. Within the wider perspective of the covenant, justice is not correc-

tive or distributive, but redemptive.⁵⁵

Not only theologically, also from the perspective of moral philosophy, love is an interesting option for the grounding of our ethics. Kierkegaard's reflections on the *Works of Love* (1847), for example, even though they are more theological than philosophical in nature, clearly make an anthropological claim.

Kierkegaard understands the need to give and receive love in human relationships to be deeply rooted in human nature, having been created that way by God. Our nature has its source, and thus the God who is love has left his mark, and is necessarily a presence, in all human loves.⁵⁶ His love ethics grounds the equality of all human beings. For Kierkegaard love is also an epistemological category: 'Only he who abides in love can recognize love, and in the same way his love is to be known.'⁵⁷

The hermeneutical priority of covenantal love embraces the six tendencies I have mentioned before.

First, it gives the universal message, but at the same time love, by its very nature, is manifested differently in the different biblical narratives, stylistic forms and discourses. Then love ethics is pneumatological. It is the love of the Holy Spirit that is poured into our hearts. It is through this loving Spirit we can understand the text he inspired. Furthermore, love is manifested in the Eucharistic community of the new covenant. The main distinctive of the church is that they love as Jesus

51 Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, 20.

52 Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, 21.

53 The centrality of the covenant for understanding love and even the human person is currently confirmed by the work of the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. The self is, as one of his books is entitled, the 'covenantal self'. Walter Brueggemann, *The Covenanting Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

54 Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, 13.

55 This can be illustrated by the parable in Matthew 18:27.

56 Søren Kierkegaard et al., *Works of Love* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2009), 27.

57 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 33.

does. Only in this context do biblical words make any sense.

Then we can see that the priority of love has a long tradition (even though it is mainly Augustinian). Finally, covenantal love can be used as a key concept for theological interpretation of Old and New Testament. In this sense Scripture should be understood as the book of the covenant. As Vanhoozer stressed, it is only by participation and performance in the 'drama of redemption' that we come to a full understanding of the text.

'The church is constituted –gathered and governed—by a divine covenantal initiative that is both the source of its identity and its authoritative principle. . . . Scripture is a divine covenant document before it is an ecclesial constitution'⁵⁸ a covenant document which provides 'dramatic direction' for performing Christian wisdom.⁵⁹

V Equipped for works of love

Let us shortly turn to the text most commonly used to underline this authority, 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

It is imperative we take the context of this passage into account. The authority and inspiration of Scripture is set into the context of imitation of Paul: 'Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me,

in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1:13,14)' Vanhoozer points out that this, following in Paul's footsteps, is not a mechanical movement, but requires personal and creative input to give direction to the theo-drama.⁶⁰

It is essential that the Spirit has the freedom to lead:

The direction doctrine provides is less a matter of moral rules than of ethical aims that pertain to the shape our freedom must take in order to realize the good. . . . Doctrine thus fosters a certain ethos, or sense of the overall shape that one's life must take in order to realize, the good, and the beautiful.⁶¹

Paul's aim is not to create a copy of himself, but sincere love gives freedom within the framework of a relationship. As Jean Paul Sartre would say: 'If the beloved is transformed into an automaton, the lover finds himself alone.'⁶²

In contrast with the false teachers, Timothy's response to Paul is one of obedient love. Timothy follows Paul in everything (. . . now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness. . . —2 Tim. 3:10).

To better understand the contrast, it might be useful to take a look at the false teachers of the last days. These can be considered as people teaching Scripture falsely. The false teachers

⁶⁰ ὑποτύπωσις means a 'sketch, model, or pattern' of something.

⁶¹ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 105.

⁶² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 357; quoted and discussed by Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 160.

⁵⁸ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 133.

⁵⁹ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 104.

are described as people with wrong loves (3:2-4) or wrong desires. As Max Scheler would stress, all evil is caused by the intoxicated soul of erroneous loves and the disposition of 'resentment'.

Paul gives a long list of eighteen vices (3:2-4) and, as George Knight rightly observes, it starts and ends with 'words expressing a misdirection of love'.⁶³ It Opens with 'lovers of self' and 'lovers of money' and ends with 'lovers of pleasure instead of lovers of God'. These false teachers of the last day value the wrong things. Therefore they have only the appearance of true religion (*eusebeia*), which in fact is misleading. They are not led by the desire to serve but only to fulfil their own appetites.

Paul gives another example and urges Timothy to keep in mind 'from whom you learned it' (3:14).⁶⁴ The circle of knowledge is as important as the knowledge itself. It is from his childhood on that he 'had known the Sacred Writings' (3:15).⁶⁵ Scripture in itself is not enough. It is only 'through Jesus Christ' that it becomes a source of wisdom and salvation. This is also well illustrated by the opening passage of this letter, where Paul expresses the very personal and even emotional dimension of loving relationships and even tradition (2 Tim. 3:3-5).

It is in this context of relationship, tradition and community of faith that Paul makes a more general statement

about the Scriptures. All Scripture is God-breathed.⁶⁶ The four *pros*-clauses (for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training) come together in the one *hina* clause 'so (in order) that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (v.17). Paul gives the ultimate purpose of Scripture's inspiration. Scripture has a divinely intended purpose for salvation.⁶⁷

The four propositional clauses may be said to form two groups, the first two dealing with doctrine (orthodoxy) and the second with behaviour (orthopraxy).⁶⁸ Timothy and all Christians can find in Scripture everything necessary to do good works.⁶⁹ The concluding participial phrase emphasises that the man of God will be well equipped for every kind of good work.

The general scope of this *locus classicus* on biblical authority is less about doctrine as such,⁷⁰ and more about morality, the man of God equipped for charity. There is a dynamic movement of the Spirit. Through the word of God the Spirit equips the man of God to do good works and in doing so participate

63 George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 430.

64 The 'all' includes grandmother, mother and Paul.

65 Referring to the Old Testament.

66 Passive meaning; see Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of Bible*, 2nd ed. (P & R Publishing, 1948), 294.

67 I. Howard Marshall and Philip Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 794.

68 William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2000), 570.

69 Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 571.

70 But we should not separate doctrine from morality. Indeed scripture is useful for sound doctrine (*didaskalia*). But in 1 Timothy 1:10: 'the sexually immoral, men who practise homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine'. In short, immorality is heterodoxy.

in the *Missio Deo*. Because of the Word of God we can be salt and light: 'Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven' (Mat. 5:16).

VI Conclusion

It has been my claim in this paper that postmodernity discourages us from treating the Bible as a compilation of objective facts, and leads us to see the ethicist's task as finding the will of God within this collection of information and consequently directing the Christian towards obedience. Postmodern man no longer believes in objective, universal truths, and postmodern theologians can no longer treat the Bible as if it were an objective, universal sourcebook of truths.

We need a theology and an ethic that takes this longing for authenticity and character, this appreciation of community and tradition, the recognition of canonical diversity and pneumatology and the need for theological interpretation into account. This can be done through a hermeneutic of love.

Speaking about a *hermeneutic* of love stresses the epistemological character of love (1 Jn. 4). Love is the lens through which we understand the world (Augustine). As loving beings, love comes first, before intellect and

will (value personalism). In biblical perspective, we speak of covenantal love. The relationship between God and man is initiated by God, but requires a human response: obedient love (Ramsey). Within this covenant of obedient love we find the answer to our inquiry into the nature of the moral authority of Scripture.

This broader theological framework helps us to understand the meaning of 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The Bible is not so much a sourcebook of facts and principle, that we have to apply in our contemporary context. It is first of all a testimony of covenantal love that we read and understand in a community of love. It is only from a desire to serve our neighbour in love by good works that we have access to the depth and richness of Scripture.

Kierkegaard rightly asserted that love is a divine and incomprehensible mystery. However, the works of love can be perceived, they form the observable fruit. Kierkegaard quotes 1 John 3:18, 'Let us not love in word and speech, but in deed and truth.'⁷¹ Words are only the leaves of the tree, they already give some idea of its nature, but the final test is in the acts, the fruits. It is only within the wider context of our loving acts that Scripture makes sense in a moral discourse.

⁷¹ Kierkegaard et al., *Works of Love*, 29.

Working with the Poor as a Means for Demonstrating the Good News in a Middle East Context

Robert Hamd

KEYWORDS: *Missiology, contextualization, Middle East, Lebanon, marginalized, evangelism, Reformed, Evangelical.*

Pity the Nation...

'Pity the nation that is full of beliefs
and empty of religion...
Pity the nation that acclaims the bully
as hero,
and that deems the glittering
conqueror bountiful...
Pity the nation that welcomes its new
ruler with trumpeting,
and farewells him with hooting,
only to welcome another with
trumpeting again...
Pity the nation divided into fragments,
each fragment deeming itself a
nation.'¹
In every epoch and country there are

poets who capture the imagination of their people with the power of their words. The Lebanese American poet, Khahil Gibran Khahil, seized the heart of the people of Lebanon with his prophetic words about his beloved homeland. Excellent poetry is truth in words. A poet describes, with the greatest economy of words, some unvoiced reality that he and his readers face.

Gibran compressed the broader complexities and paradoxes of the Middle East into a mere 23 lines in his poem 'Pity the Nation'; and in particular, he captured the spirit of Lebanon. The country that is unwilling to honestly assess its behaviour and practices, or that does not have the courage to change, following the dictates of its consciousness of its situation, is, Gibran tells us, pitiable.

'Pity the nation whose sages are
dumb with years
and whose strong men are yet in
the cradle.'

¹ Khalil Gibran wrote this poem early in the 1900s (published in 1933 in *The Garden of the Prophet*).

Robert Hamd (M.Div., Near East School of Theology; D.Min., Fuller), a Lebanese–American who has served as a church planter and pastor in Jordan, France, the U.S.A., and Lebanon, is pastor of a 'Global South' congregation in Beirut, Lebanon and the executive director of the Philemon Project. His research, which focuses on human rights abuses against Migrant Domestic Workers, is framed within the larger context of analyzing the Lebanese Church's prophetic role as it carries out the *missio Dei* (mission of God). This article is based on a lecture given in Istanbul, Turkey, November 2011.

With these verses ringing in our ears, we need to evaluate our past and appropriate the lessons learned for the coming generations.

It is at this juncture in our moral history that Christian theologians and missiologists enter the conversation to remind us of what was done in the past and how we can learn to apply the lessons learned for the present in the context of the fullest sense of history – history as the unfolding of God’s creation. I believe that a fruitful starting point would be to evaluate one’s history through the lens of God’s salvific plan. This means that we do not flee the realities we face, but assess them with reference to the word of God and the entrance of God as man into the world as our rule for faith and practice.

I contend that every one of us is called in some way to merge the good and ill of our past into our present through an incarnational holistic change in our sphere of influence for the glory of God. In other words, Christians, on the model of Christ himself, must engage with the world and challenge our deeply held assumptions, confronting the status quo for the glory of God. The Gospel saying: ‘the first shall be last and the last shall be first’ is an excellent methodological rule for understanding history, and our place in it, not from the perspective of secular power, but from the perspective of the grassroots, the humble people themselves.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, I will give a brief account of the history of the Protestants in Lebanon; second, I will focus on the role and practice of caring for the poor as a means of enacting the good news in a Middle East context.

As is evident from these themes, this paper takes its missiological cues from the past but reinterprets them from the horizon of the church’s situation today, mainly in its efforts to extend diaconal care to marginalized people in Lebanon in order to transform the marginalized (to liberate their potential for love). This, I contend, is a major aspect of the church’s self-understanding of the *missio Dei*.

I The Lebanon Context

Within the Arab World, spanning Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, among others, there are no less than two million Protestants for whom Arabic is their language of worship and cultural expression. The word ‘evangelical’ (*enjili* in Arabic) is typically used by Arabs to describe the myriad Christian denominations within the region, including the Lutheran, Reformed, Episcopal, Baptist, and other churches, which in the west are normally known as ‘Protestant’.² In Lebanon in particular, the terms ‘Protestant’ and ‘Evangelical’ are interchangeable to describe a small minority of Christians within a larger, albeit still minority Christian population, made up of Maronite and Orthodox.

To help simplify the denominational language I am using, when I use the phrase ‘Protestant church’, I am referring to two major denominational traditions: Reformed and Anabaptist. They determined the Protestant church

² Habib Badr, ‘The Protestant evangelical community in the Middle East: impact on cultural and societal developments’, *International Review of Mission*, 2000 no. 89 (352), 60.

landscape which we are grappling with to this day.

1. Historical Background

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was the first mission agency to send agents to the Middle East. These new missionaries, although immersed in Reformation principles, typically merged, in the manner of the 19th century, the Enlightenment's optimistic view of humanity with a postmillennialism view that motivated and informed their mission.³ Their desire was to establish a base in Jerusalem, but Ottoman authorities barred the way.

The Ottomans were suspicious of the intentions of the Protestant missionaries nor did they fully understand where they fell amongst the already established Christians (which was truly disturbing to the conservative Ottoman state bureaucracy).⁴ With Jerusalem off limits, the early Protestant missionaries shifted their base to Beirut, purchasing property outside the city gates.⁵

3 David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 328.

4 Habib Badr, 'Mission to "Nominal Christians": the policy and practice of American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and its missionaries concerning eastern churches which led to the organization of a protestant church in Beirut (1819-1848)', PhD, 1992, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ., 82.

5 The National Evangelical Church of Beirut in the heart of the capital stands on the original property purchased by the early missionaries. They have had a worshipping community since the 1860's.

When the first missionaries disembarked, Beirut was a small town of roughly 6000 inhabitants on the Mediterranean coast. Later, European missions united with the American missionaries in Lebanon and Syria and consolidated their mission work to form a larger base. In 1830, the AMFCM moved from Istanbul to Beirut, consolidating their operations to jump-start indigenous churches, using a version of what we would now call 'contextual mission'.

By the middle of the 20th century, Reformed missions existed all across the Middle East from Turkey to Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Sudan. During this period, the Lebanese Protestant church was slowly succeeding in becoming more indigenous as the church learned how to be independent of its founding denominations.

2. Protestant Presence in the Middle East/Lebanon:

Scholarship on missions in the Middle East tends to take a critical view of the expansion of Protestant missions in the region, with some justification. To help to understand the criticism, I will give a brief outline of Protestantism in the Middle East.

Academic scholarship characteristically divides Protestantism in the Middle East into two categories: 'the colonial phenomenon' and 'the foreign (Western) transplant'. The two themes are related, as David Bosch in his book, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, writes: '[c]olonialism and mission, as a matter of course, were interdependent; the right to have colonies carried with it

the duty to Christianize the colonized.¹⁶ Thus, when a missionary arrived in Lebanon to spread the gospel among the Arabs, he or she was justly seen as irretrievably tied to their institutions of Europe or America. These institutions were perceived as granting the missionaries the source of their authority and connection to the West.

For this reason, many scholars emphasize the fact that 19th century missionary activity and western colonialism were inextricably bound. Indeed, one could argue the missionaries of this period were thoroughly imbrued with the dominant imperialist attitude, with both positive and negative elements emerging in their work. By the end of the 19th century, the dominant ideology within the Reformed mission essentially blended the Christian religion with western cultural values, producing an institution-wide cultural blind spot. Missiologist Wilbert Shenk points to the assumptions grouped under the slogan of 'Christianity and Civilization' with the third 'C' standing for commerce. When western nations penetrated an area to expand trade, it usually meant that missions were soon to follow.⁷

Granting, however, the imperialist connection, it can easily be taken too far in a Middle Eastern context, especially when it is claimed to provide a unilateral explanation for the rise of Arab Protestant communities. This crude—but popular reductionism tends to view western missionaries and their activities solely in an instrumental

light, as though the Christian mission's sole purpose was to maintain the European and American influence in Middle Eastern populations. This interpretation transforms piety and humanitarian efforts into mere fronts, behind which we will always find the western desire for power.⁸

Historically speaking, this interpretation exaggerates a relationship that undoubtedly existed. Most serious scholars, Christian historians, and missiologists do not go this far. Sadly, some Muslim scholars and the more extreme fundamentalists believe and propagate this perspective, using it as political propaganda to cast a poor light on the motive of early missionary efforts and, by inference, on the present day church in the Middle East.

A more moderate view of the 'colonial phenomenon' theme concedes that it would be naïve not to see the close link between western imperialism and the missionary movement of the last century. Some scholars identify a 'complicity' between western missions and a western political agenda which linked the activities of the missionaries explicitly with the political consulates of their time. Surely missionaries of that era benefited from their close relationship with the ruling powers.

One example from the first records of a Protestant service in Beirut held on November 23, 1823, at the home of the British Consul, Mr. Peter Abbott, indicates how close missionaries were to their consulates. The initial entry in the historical record book reads:

6 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 227.

7 Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 51-52.

8 George Sabra, 'Protestantism in the Middle East: Colonial Phenomenon? Western Transplant? or Something Else?', *Reformed World*, 1993, no. 43 (1-2):39-51.

'[w]e administered the Lord's Supper from time to time, generally on the monthly Concert...',⁹ showing the close relation between early missionaries and their countrymen. This kind of thing has been picked up by those who would debunk the sincerity of the missionary movement in the Middle East. These critics like to cite Ussama Makdisi's work, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, which argues that the missionary movement of the 19th century was fraught with mistakes, resulting in a struggle between European and Ottoman powers for decisive influence on the basis of religious allegiance.¹⁰

A second line of criticism contends that Middle East Protestantism is a thoroughly foreign transplant, and regardless of its origins, Protestants are not Eastern in their origins, and therefore do not belong in the Middle Eastern world. Here, converts to evangelical Christianity are represented as though they were inhabitants of an artificial garden, transplanted on eastern soil, a sort of invasive species which never should have been brought there.¹¹ This view maintains that though Protestantism has been taken up by Arabs on Arab soil, it nevertheless must be considered a foreign intrusion in the landscape of the Middle East.

⁹ Robert M. Copeland, *A Sesquicentennial History of The Community Church of Beirut 1823-1973* (The National Evangelical Church Historical Records, 1974), 2.

¹⁰ Ussama Samir Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 1-14.

¹¹ Sabra, 'Protestantism in the Middle East', 41.

Scholarly discussions among Arab Protestants on this topic are on one hand critical of the missiological mistakes made by the ABCFM missionaries, but on the other hand, call for a more appreciative assessment of the changes wrought by the missionaries, and value the Reformed tradition that they have adopted as their own.¹²

These Arab scholars rightly call for a contextual revision of Protestant Reformed theology to reshape existing structures and institutions to become more relevant to the Arab community. They make the case that Reformed teaching is not defined by its origin and ties to the western world, but carries within its theological constructs universal biblical claims that are appropriate in any culture.

II Creating Missiological Capacity

There were many missiological contributions to the social good brought into the Middle East by the early Reformed missionaries. Reformed missionaries founded evangelical elementary and high schools (many are still operational today) in order to empower, through education and literacy, the very people who were influenced by the missionaries' teachings to learn and live by the word of God. An important achievement of the Reformed missionaries consisted of educating girls. This was a risky enterprise at a time when female education was not supported by

¹² Badr, 'The Protestant evangelical community in the Middle East'; George Sabra, 'The Struggle for a New Society in the Middle East'. *Reformed World*, 1991 no. 41 (5):169-174.

societal norms.¹³

In addition to the focus on education, the Reformed missionaries sponsored print publication such as Bibles and other books written in Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, and other oriental languages. They were instrumental to this explosion of translations which certainly helped overthrow the cultural stagnation imposed by the Ottoman overlords.

The lessons one can draw from the early missiological works in Lebanon are social in nature. Care for the poor, which is one of the great lessons of the New Testament, became part of the missionary program from its beginnings in the Middle East, and was primarily manifested in the establishment of schools, hospitals, and orphanages. Care for the poor included care for *all* poor, both Muslims and Christians, which functioned as a way of enacting Reformed teachings to all within the Lebanese context. That enactment, naturally, attracted interest in the Protestant message.

The missionaries' inclusive approach touched on the importance of human rights, founded on the biblical teaching of *imago Dei* (image of God), or, in other words, the teaching that all human beings are created in God's image and have rights and value. Their work in establishing schools, hospitals, and orphanages involved confronting the ruling powers and demanding the ending of oppression and injustice, in the name of a commitment to new life in Christ.

The author of the Epistle of James says that 'religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world' (James 1:27 NIV). The early missionaries' method was in line missiologically, crossing boundaries to love all, regardless of background, belief, or societal status.

The pragmatics of caring for the poor, and making the poor the privileged target of their teaching, was not elevated into a theory by these early missionaries. The late missiologist Orlando Costas believes that Protestant churches, by and large, have an underdeveloped theology of the Incarnation, which informs their missiological practice towards a whole gospel that includes justice and proclamation because theological training has not paid sufficient attention to prepare future leaders to handle new challenges. He writes, '...if it is true that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed and therefore that God's people must also be on the side of the little ones...'¹⁴

Costas's insight provides us with an imperative for missions today, urging them to work with older churches to revive cultures and contexts with the Word, without requiring God's elect to embrace the missionaries' culture. Rather, missiologists should be satisfied with simply focusing on following Jesus wholeheartedly in generating culturally-appropriate expressions of worship and community life.

In the incarnation, Jesus' mission was holistic and engaged the world.

¹³ Christine Beth Lindner, *Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860* (Ph.D., 2009, University of Edinburgh), 196.

¹⁴ Orlando E. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 169.

When Christ announced the kingdom of God, he linked together Word and Deed, healing the sick, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, and instructing the people to tell what they had seen, for 'the poor have good news brought to them' (Matthew 11:4-5 NRSV). Therefore, it is the assumption of this paper that caring for the poor and marginalized is part of the announcement of the Kingdom of God, which is at the heart of our missional practice. In other words, in a Middle East context, how we treat the poor, migrants, refugees, and marginalized is primary evidence of our love and devotion for Christ.

What we need in the Middle East is a Reformed theology that is both incarnational, in the above sense, and contextual—that is to say, sensitive and respectful to local culture. We must be willing to cross boundaries to become servant-orientated in our methodology. The result would hopefully be thoroughly Reformed, thoroughly Arab, and thoroughly grounded in *praxis* for the poor.

When I say thoroughly Reformed, I am taking my missiological impulse from the teachings of John Calvin. Calvin taught that the believer should take his or her responsibility in the world seriously. I have found Bonnie Pattison's book, *Poverty in the Theology of John Calvin*, to be a helpful guide to Calvin's social teachings. Her thesis is that 'in Calvin's theology, poverty, and affliction—not splendor and glory—mark and manifest the kingdom of God on earth'.¹⁵ Her framing is helpful

to illuminate the privileged place that poverty and our treatment of it holds in manifesting the self-revelation of Christ as king, serving as an essential mark of the kingdom of God.

She notes historical and economic changes in the mentality of people throughout Europe in Calvin's time. Calvin's Geneva was a city inundated with migrants and refugees, to which Calvin's response was both pastoral and practical. Though Pattison's work is valuable, she develops Calvin's theological framing of poverty more than his practice in confronting poverty. Still, we can draw important parallels that our response needs to be pastoral and practical.

Today, many Lebanese Christians and Muslims regard the poor with similar attitudes to those in Calvin's day—that is, the poor are in their condition as a divine judgment, or as recipients of donations from the wealthy for their spiritual benefit.¹⁶ I contend that these Lebanese wear cultural blinders that prevent them from sympathizing with the plight of the poor, as a result of which they tend to tolerate the poverty in their midst.

In other words, a certain fatalism pervades the Lebanese attitude to the poor. The Lebanese maintain a rigid system of social stratification, and even if the poor are pitied, there is little belief that one can challenge the social order to systematically improve the plight of the poor.

The question I have for the Protestant Church in Lebanon is: how can it

¹⁵ Bonnie Lynn Goding Pattison, *Poverty in the Theology of John Calvin*. Vol. 69, *Princeton Theological Monograph Series* (Eugene: Pick-

wick Publ., 2006), 4.

¹⁶ Pattison, *Poverty in the Theology of John Calvin*, 147.

reconcile the prophetic dimension that prompts believers to get involved in society with this state of things? Or is it right for the church to remain on the side lines, discussing systematic theology, in lieu of putting into practice the command to love one's neighbour as oneself?

III A Call to Action

Why is the church in Lebanon slow to respond to the contextual needs right outside its doors? As Lebanese theologian, George Sabra asked, is the Protestant Reformation essentially and fundamentally a Northern European phenomenon *or* is it universal, and therefore universalizable in other contexts? In other words, does the message of the Reformation address and touch *only* the men and women of Wittenberg, Zurich, and Geneva, or does it address and touch, just as much, the men and women of Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, and Cairo?

The lessons we should draw from the early Reformed missionaries serving in Lebanon is to integrate robustly, if imperfectly, the message of the gospel with the practice of holistic care. This approach, as we pointed out above, had its origins in an incarnational understanding of *imago Dei* (image of God), in that all people, being created in the image of God, deserved care and basic human rights.

The message here is similar to that of Thomas Cahill in his book, *Mysteries of the Middle Ages*: 'Christianity's claim that all were equal before God and all equally precious to him' challenged Greco-Roman society and introduced scores of people to the message of the gospel through its holistic

approach.¹⁷ Christianity, according to Cahill, was a 'harbor to women, who had always been kept in the shadows', and to slaves, who had never before been granted 'social dignity or political importance'.¹⁸ Even aristocrats joined the Jesus movement, and they were sincere and bold 'seekers after truth who had gone quite out of their way to find it'.¹⁹

In the 4th century, Christianity had become so popular within the Greco-Roman region that the emperor Constantine adopted it as the state religion (Edict of Milan 313 AD), and it quickly became the prevailing religion of the Roman Empire. According to Cahill, it was the holistic efforts of the leaders of the church that led people to lift their eyes to Jesus, instead of to the Greek and Roman gods, thereby transforming the western world.

IV Philemon Project

In 2002, my local church in Lebanon, in line with this tradition, was called into action and began a ministry to poor migrants and refugees which we called the Philemon Project, after the Christian whose ownership of a Christian slave prompted one of Paul's letters. The National Evangelical Church of Beirut chose to serve the poor holistically by crossing over the lines of class in our culture to demonstrate that the gospel breaks down barriers.

Our call to action was motivated in part by recognizing that all people are created in the *imago Dei* (image of

¹⁷ Thomas Cahill, *Mysteries of the Middle Ages* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 44.

¹⁸ Cahill, *Mysteries of the Middle Ages*, 44.

¹⁹ Cahill, *Mysteries of the Middle Ages*, 44.

God), which means we are called as a church to put ourselves among those who are placed at the margins of society in a pastoral and diaconal expression. The Philemon Project aims to be a project of humble service, just as St. Paul humbly allowed the slave Onesimus into his home (see the Epistle to Philemon) and served him, which we believe is an appropriate missiological approach in a Middle Eastern context.

Our worship services are at the heart of the Philemon Project, providing a forum where people can return to God through Christ, and remember God's call to serve one another through the power of the Holy Spirit. One of the most important aspects of the services is the witness to our diversity: people from many nationalities, social backgrounds, educational levels, and former religious affiliations are gathered to worship the one true God. We emphasize, therefore, that we come together as the family of God, a family in which everybody is included and received without prejudice in the name of Christ.

The vision of the Philemon Project is to clearly combine church life with service to the poorest among the poor as a contextual missiological way of practising our mission. We believe the church can be a healing presence among the marginalized, and a place of refuge. Our intention is to create a church made up of people from all continents and all walks of life, so that together we may discover 'the breadth and length and height and depth' of the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 3: 18). In that moment the discriminating social categories are abolished, and the first and last come together as one. That is why the congregation and the diaconal

work are two sides of the same coin.

Specifically the Philemon Project demonstrates our missiological thrust in a number of areas, including but not limited to:

Counselling: When people come to the church seeking assistance, they are welcomed into our community. We believe that the first thing we ought to do for people is to listen to them. Their stories are offered as valuable and unique, and they want them to be heard. Listening proves to be so helpful that people leave our community relieved that someone has heard their cry. In counselling, we point people to God's love and care, and we pray with people and share God's love through Christ respectfully.

Financial aid: Illegal refugees tend to fall outside most categories that make them eligible for aid, which is where the Project can come in. We sometimes provide people with small grants that can help them pay for surgery, medication, the rent of a room, education fees, papers required for legal residence, etc. Financial aid is concentrated on the most vulnerable group in Lebanon: single women with children. Particularly when caring for young children, single women are unable to work and fully provide for themselves and their families.

Financial aid is always coupled with extensive listening, considering, and counselling. We seek to avoid making people dependent on the church, but rather our work should give them a sense of dignity and care, knowing there is someone who stands with them.

Food parcels: The church regularly distributes food parcels to those in great need. The advantage of handing

out food parcels over direct financial aid is that food parcels offer practical help and avoid the problems entailed by the abuse of funds. Food from the Project helps its recipients make it through the month with better nutrition. Food parcels for women with children also often include milk and diapers.

The diaconal work of the Philemon Project is thoroughly *missional*. Many of those who benefit are nominal Christians or Muslims, and through the Project's assistance, we seek to convey the inviting love of Christ. Our intention is to enact that love, rather than to use assistance as a lure. As a result, some of the refugees and migrant workers show clear interest in the message of the gospel and the fellowship of the church. We recognize that 'rice Christianity' is a great pitfall, and a humiliation to both the donor and the recipient.

However, we are bound to proclaim that it is the love of Christ that drives our missional care for others, and that we are at all times called to testify to God's love for us in our context. Furthermore, those who have received are called upon to give to the less fortunate when their own circumstances change, transmitting God's love through the community.

Among the 100 family units that were assisted during the year 2011, 65 were families in which one or more persons are Muslim. (Often female Christian refugees are married to Muslim men, and they turn to the church when the need of the family is great.) The nationalities of assisted people included Sudanese, Ethiopian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nigerian, Eritrean, Iraqi, Egyptian, Congolese, Somalian, and

(very rarely, for this is not the scope of the project) some Lebanese.

V What about Evangelism?

Of course, one criticism among some Protestant Evangelicals is how all this fits into evangelism. Our critics are quick to point out that by emphasizing diaconal work we may be watering down the preaching of the gospel and neglecting our mandate to evangelize. We don't see it that way. Remember, we are talking about a dominant Muslim context, although Lebanon has a Christian population. Nevertheless, evangelism must be carried out wisely and be culturally-appropriate, and the community that can most appropriately carry this out is the local church.

I contend that our dominant Muslim context requires the church to engage with our wider context wisely. Thus, evangelism must remain culturally wise but ever active in the knowledge that we are merely following Jesus' mission, which was holistic and engaged with the world. It is our experience that when the church engages in justice issues within our Arab context, we have the opportunity to preach the gospel in acts, not words. The acts invite people to encounter the ultimate author of the acts—Jesus—and from that point to encounter others both in word and in deed.

It is important to note, when we confront social issues in our context we believe there is a softening of the ground for the proclamation of the gospel. We found David Bosch's *Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today* (1987), to be very helpful in the conversation. David Bosch asserts eight principles that help to

ground our justice ministry with a thorough proclamation of the gospel:

a) Evangelism the heart of mission

It is essential for the church to announce salvation in Christ alone to nonbelievers; this mission is not diverted by caring for the poor and marginalized. We retain the message of the forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Christ. But we enact, as well, the love of God, proclaiming the gospel practically among Muslims.

Here, the concept of honour becomes important. Muslims identify acts of service as honourable; thus when we care for the poor we are earning the honourable right to share the gospel. Additionally, our research has found that Muslims perceive the church as an extension of its founder—Jesus—and our care for the poor whether they be Muslim or Christian is perceived as bold obedience to continuing the work of Jesus.

b) Evangelism brings people into community

Many non-Arab workers who engage in missiological activity in the Middle East among Muslims tend to distance themselves from the local visible church for a variety of reasons. Countering this trend, we encourage workers to develop a robust working relationship with the visible church. As Reformed missionary practitioners, we believe in having a healthy connective ecclesiology that encourages foreign workers to value the indigenous church, which is rooted in society. When workers begin interacting with

the indigenous church, both the church and the missionary will benefit from the cross-pollination of theological, cultural, and missiological perspectives.

Therefore, we think it is imperative to introduce those to the visible church who by God's grace have come to have faith in Christ. This practice should be part and parcel of our evangelistic norm as laid out in the New Testament. It ultimately is a cultural more than a theological issue. When workers exclude themselves from the local community and those their ministry touched, they are practising a form of Evangelical missiological imperialism as though they who are not from the community context can best determine one's community association.

c) Evangelism witnesses to God in action

When we engage in caring for the poor, we draw people's attention to the character of God as a God of missions and justice. Caring for the poor is a vital and important part of *missio Dei* by demonstrating that God cares for the poor and marginalized. Our evangelism, therefore, becomes a witness. Our work is not meant to draw attention to our virtues, but rather points curious onlookers to the source of our mission, service of the Triune God under whose commands we labour.

Thus, caring for the poor enables us to confront injustices in tangible ways that give glory to God. Additionally, caring for the poor counteracts an often-misunderstood notion among some Arab Middle Easterners that Evangelicals are politically aligned with a particular group of people whose beliefs

are based on pre-millennia theology.

d) Evangelism is an invitation, and (e) irradiates with its lifestyle

One problem among some missionaries is that they believe that caring for the poor is a distraction from the more important task of bringing about conversion. These practitioners tend to separate proclamation from the social component. From this point of view, serving the poor is subordinate to proclamation.

Yet this notion is, in practical living, completely disproved. In the Philemon Project, we have first hand experience that our work produces fruit by God's grace. For example, during 2010, a Muslim family was invited to come to the church community mainly to request help with enrolling their daughter into a school. The family essentially lacked the means to pay for regular tuition. Over time the Muslim family was drawn to our community.

We later learned from the family that they had been pleasantly surprised by what they had witnessed in the church community. They discovered first hand the rich diversity of our community, where white and black, rich and poor, educated and non-educated, all equal in God's sight, encouraged one another, praying, worshipping, and receiving the Word and sacrament. The family was witness to the fact that it was not by words alone that we witnessed to Jesus, but by all the innumerable visible acts of worship and love.

Indeed, the Philemon Project did assist the family to place their daughter into one of our Evangelical schools. But that is not the whole story or the reason why this family remains in the

church. It was the invitation of a marginalized poor woman sharing with the family that the church was a place to find help—and discover who Jesus is. That introduction opened them to the power of the gospel. Over time, the family professed faith in Christ. They continued in fellowship, regularly growing in their faith. We learned later that the church's demonstration of a grace-based community of acceptance, love, and care was precisely what drew them back to attend the church faithfully.

f) Evangelism is risk taking

Suffice to say when we engage in caring for the poor we are taking a risk. There are no assurances that our help or care for the physical person will do anything spiritually for the person. This, however, was a risk that Christ himself took time and time again in the Gospels. We recognize that we cannot simply dismiss the suffering of the marginalized and remain Christian. We are compelled to extend Christ-like care to the least in our society.

When we proclaim the gospel in word and deed, we do not possess any control over the gospel, nor know where the message will go. What we do affirm is that we are proclaiming the twofold gospel, in word and in deed. Our message announces that the good news consists in restoring our relationships with God and humanity.

David Bosch succinctly puts it another way. He writes that the gospel is 'Announcing that God, Creator and Lord of the universe, has personally intervened in human history and has done so supremely through the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth

who is Lord of history, Saviour and Liberator'.²⁰

We realize that our witness to the gospel coupled with confronting social injustices means our work will attract friends and foes. Nevertheless, we are called to take risks in securing justice for the poor since another word for justice is liberation and in the words of missiologist J. Andrew Kirk liberation is 'the removal of barriers which prevent human beings from participating fully in the benefits and responsibilities of the community'.²¹

It is always risky to work in such a way that one's ministry challenges the status quo of the dominant few over against the majority poor in a prophetic manner. Our work is a reminder to the cynical and indifferent that suffering and exclusion are not the final words.

g) Fruits of evangelism

In our work we are cautious not to make false promises, which encourage a dependent relationship. We want to avoid the trap of using our help making a convert into a rice-Christian, outwardly affirming Christ in order to reap some material benefit. This is a degrading relationship both for the giver and the receiver.

Our mandate is to proclaim a gospel that calls people to faith in Christ while working to transform our local community. Thus, we would never promise people in our ministry on-going assistance as a quid pro quo for the confession of faith. Assistance is given irre-

spective of the person's background or belief. But we make no secret of the fact that our work for the poor and the oppressed is all part of the covenantal promises of salvation in Christ alone; that Jesus will never leave them nor forsake them.

This does not ensure a life free of trouble – far from it. It is a life of taking up the cross, and this must be recognized. But what it does is announce that the kingdom has arrived and informs the conversation that the work we do not only confronts injustices but also restores people, marred by the effects of sin, through Christ alone.

h) Evangelism calls people to be followers of Jesus

Indeed, our experience demonstrates that, in the Muslim context, it is suitable and culturally appropriate to integrate the proclamation of the gospel with a holistic approach to social problems as a model for what it means to follow Christ. It is teaching by doing, in a sense. Caring for the poor gives us access to our work by countering indifference to our message by demonstrating its worth. We acknowledge that when we confront injustices it gives us respect and honour among a broad base of Lebanese communities.

We believe the work we are advocating is best executed within a church-based ministry. Because many Evangelicals in Lebanon are not well off, the Protestant church, does not stand in a place of superiority, nor stand over against the poor in society, but rather stands in solidarity with those on the margins. It is our argument that the church has a vital role to play within our context, even if the church does not

²⁰ Bosch Transforming Mission, 412.

²¹ J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission?: Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 106.

by itself possess the power to change harmful structural practices.

We nevertheless must present the whole gospel to the whole world using the whole church. We are called to prophetically challenge the status quo. That is why the church is called to model Christ's ministry in dependence on the Holy Spirit, which is a means to ultimately transform our context.

I would suggest that the church's mission is a medium for God's mission in the world. The church is called to challenge the counter-kingdom principles in the world.²² This comes from proclaiming the gospel in word and deed—announcing the saving message of Jesus Christ and denouncing systems of idols or powers that are opposed to God in the name of Christ.

This is best demonstrated within a church community, which is, after all, founded on love of Christ. The community lives by extending the love and grace it has received through Christ to others through ministering in the fullest sense of the word. Furthermore, the mission of the church is to cross all frontiers and social barriers, confronting injustices and evil as a sign that the kingdom of God has arrived.²³ Therefore, God wills the church to participate in his active mission as a sign to the world that the kingdom of God comes in weakness and not in power.

VI Conclusion

This paper is based on a lecture given

in November 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey. It was intended to give a very brief historical sketch of the birth of the Protestant church in Lebanon, pointing out that the early Reformed missionaries were thoroughly engaged in a variety of justice ministries which cared for the poor and marginalized as a means of proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. This paper also argued that the present missiological model is applicable to and culturally-appropriate for a Middle East context.

For further study on the work of the early missionaries' church planting activity I recommend the work of Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, *Mission to 'Nominal Christians'* and Dr. Christine Lindner's *Negotiating the Field*. I hope this article will spark future interest among scholars, missiologists, and church practitioners to examine the connection between social justice work in the Reformed tradition and the planting of the church in the Middle East. This paper attempts to show the link between actively confronting injustices and proclaiming the gospel in the Middle East.

I used as an exemplary contemporary instance of the synthesis of social justice and evangelism the ongoing work of the Philemon Project, with which I am involved. This is a church-sponsored ministry of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, which finds its justification in continuing the work handed down to us from our Reformed forbears. Furthermore, it is our belief that our missiological practice strengthens local congregations where they are found, and seeks to organize local churches where none exist.

Lastly, we believe our missiological practices are grounded in a holistic sense of what proclaiming the whole

²² David J. Bosch, 'Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 1987, no. 11 (3), 100.

²³ Bosch, 'Evangelism', 101, 102.

gospel means. That sense understands the message of hope and salvation in Christ as part of the whole work of Christ in the world, seeking to affect

transformational social change. May we all have the courage to trust God and be inspired to action.

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Evangelicals and the Environment Going Beyond Stewardship

Athena E. Gorospe

KEYWORDS: *Life, servant, transformation, eschatology, justice*

IN THE RECENT CAPE TOWN Commitment issued after the 2010 Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, evangelicals affirmed their love for the world of God's creation, repenting of waste and destruction to the environment and committing themselves 'to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility'. The Cape Town Commitment also calls evangelical Christians to 'adopt lifestyles that renounce habits of consumption', 'exert governments... on issues of environmental and potential climate change', and recognize that environmental protection and restoration is part of our missional calling.¹

Clearly, evangelicals have gone a long way in making environmental care an integral part of our mission. This is not surprising, considering the

ecological challenges that our world faces today. In Asia, we are witnesses to natural disasters that have often been caused or aggravated by human carelessness and neglect. To be indifferent to the suffering caused by our destructive attitudes to the ecosystems that support and sustain our life on the planet is not only a mark of folly, but it also imperils our Christian witness since it opens us to the accusation that Christianity, with its dominion theology, has caused or contributed greatly to the ecological crisis² and that Christians are insensitive to needs outside our own 'church' concerns.

As evangelicals, with our presupposition of an authoritative Scripture, it is essential that our stance is supported by a solid biblical foundation. However,

¹ Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization, *The Cape Town Commitment*, Part 1, Sec. 7a; Part 2, Sec. 6 . Available Online: <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html#p1-1>.

² Lynn White Jr.'s article, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155 (1967), 1203-07, has often been cited. It traces the roots of the ecological crisis to the Christian teaching of humanity's dominion over living creatures, giving human beings the license to exploit their environment for the sake of economic growth, without any regard for the preservation and sustainability of life on earth.

we need to move from exegesis to articulating a biblical theology for Christian engagement on environmental issues. To do this, we need an organizing principle that would help us select biblical texts that are relevant to the subject matter, organize these diverse texts into a coherent arrangement, weigh the selected text in relation to which provide the deepest insight, and lastly, correlate these texts to form an integrated whole. In addition to this, we need to discern which concept or theme would resonate the most in our Asian context.

I Evangelicals and Stewardship

The predominant organizing principle for evangelical environmental hermeneutics and theology is the concept of stewardship.³ Several evangelical declarations on the environment stress this theme:

Because we have sinned, we have failed in our *stewardship of creation*. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator's work.We make this declaration knowing that until Christ returns to

reconcile all things, we are called to be *faithful stewards* of God's good garden, our earthly home.⁴

In the beginning, God established just relationships amongst all of creation. Women and men—as image-bearers of God—are called to serve and love the rest of creation, accountable to God as *stewards*. Our care for creation is an act of worship and obedience towards the Creator.

We, however, have not always been faithful stewards. Through our ignorance, neglect, arrogance and greed, we have harmed the earth and broken creation's relationships. Our failure to be faithful stewards has caused the current environmental crisis, leading to climate change, and putting the earth's ecosystems at risk. All creation has been subjected to futility and decay because of our disobedience.⁵

All human beings are to be stewards of the rich abundance of God's good creation. We are authorized to exercise godly dominion in using it for the sake of human welfare and needs, for example in farming, fishing, mining, energy generation, engineering, construction, trade, medicine. As we do so, we are also commanded to care for the earth and all its creatures, because the earth

3 See Calvin Dewitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998); Loren Wilkinson, ed. *Earthkeeping in the 90's: Stewardship of Creation* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Fred Van Dyke, David C. Mahan, Joseph K. Sheldon and Raymond H. Brand, *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996); and Douglas Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

4 Evangelical Environmental Network, 'An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation' (1993). Available Online: <http://www.creationcare.org/blank.php?id=39>.

5 Micah Network, 'Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change' (2009), Par. 3. Available Online: http://www.micah-network.org/sites/default/files/doc/resources/mn_declaration_on_creation_stewardship.pdf.

belongs to God, not to us. We do this for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the creator, owner, sustainer, redeemer and heir of all creation.⁶

The main insight of the stewardship concept in relation to the environment is that human beings are not the owners of the world and of creation. The real owner is God and human beings are only caretakers who must 'steward' the earth according to God's purposes. Here, the human is a trustee, entrusted with the care of what God owns.⁷ The image of the steward is drawn from the New Testament text of the 'Parable of the Talents' (Mt. 25:14-30). A steward is a household manager, who is in charge of ensuring that the master's wealth and possessions are used well and even multiplied (Lk. 12:42-48; 16:1-9). Like abilities and financial resources, creation is seen as a natural resource which must be managed well as part of a Christian's accountability to God.

The main text often used to expound the concept of stewardship is Genesis 1-2. Basically, the argument is that the mandate to rule over creation in Genesis 1:26-28 is not a licence to exploit nature, but rather a charge to preserve it and care for it (cf. Gen. 2:15). Dominion does not mean domi-

nation. Here, rulership is exercised not by an abusive dictator-king, but rather by a steward who manages and utilizes resources in order to conserve and enhance, rather than destroy.

II The Limitations of Stewardship

However, some have pointed out the limitations of the stewardship concept as an organizing principle for Christian engagement on environmental concerns. First, the household metaphor of a steward has been expanded to apply to the world of business, and in evangelical circles has been extensively used in relation to the utilization of financial resources, particularly in fund-raising, entrepreneurship, and financial accountability. Thus, as Christopher Wright points out, it emphasizes 'the management of things rather than of caring relationships'.⁸

Moreover, the values of the corporate world are geared towards the efficient and productive utilization and multiplication of resources. Creation, however, is viewed more than as a 'natural resource' in Scripture. This can be seen in the use of active and emotive language for creation in relation to the non-human creation: the land moans (Is. 33:9; Hos. 4:3; Jer. 12:11), the ground cries out (Gen. 4:10), the trees clap their hands (Is. 55:12), the

⁶ *The Cape Town Commitment*, Part 2, Sec. 6. (italics added).

⁷ A good definition of the concept is found in William M. Pinson, Jr., 'A Denominational Perspective on Biblical Stewardship', *The Earth is the Lord's: Christians and the Environment* (ed. Richard D. Land and Louise A. Moore; Nashville: Broadman, 1992): 'the responsible care of all that we are and possess as a trust from God to be used according to His plan and purpose' (135).

⁸ Christopher Wright, 'The Earth is the Lord's: Biblical Foundations for Global Ecological Ethics and Mission', in *Keeping God's Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Perspective* (eds. Noly J. Toly and Daniel I. Block; Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 230; Also in *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 123.

earth trembles (Ps. 97:4; 104:32), the mountains and hills skip like rams and lambs (Ps. 114:4, 6), the whole creation groans (Rom. 8:22).

Even though these are metaphors that personify nature, they point to the reality that non-human creation is not just inert matter, waiting to be worked on by human hands.⁹ It is not just an object for scrutiny and study, but a subject in its own right. It has a life of its own; it is sustained by God and flourishes under God's eye, apart from human control and intervention. This can be clearly seen in Psalm 104 which shows how God gives water (vv. 10-13, 16), provides food (14-15, 21, 27-28) and shelter (vv. 17-18) for all the living creatures of the earth. In the book of Job, God delights in the wildness of animals, such as the Behemoth and Leviathan, which do not necessarily serve any human purpose and are not often seen by the human eye (Job 39:1-12; 40:15-41:34).¹⁰

This relates to another critique of the stewardship concept: it can lead to a utilitarian view of creation because it emphasizes the 'wise use' of resources. This wise use, however, can

be defined in relation to what is good for human beings, whether this refers to the present or future generations. In this formulation, the reason for preserving the environment is that it can continue to do its work of sustaining humanity. Non-human creation then is valuable only in an instrumental sense, in so far as it contributes to the welfare, development, and advancement of human beings. When this view is combined with the emphasis of stewardship on wealth creation and multiplication, this can legitimize exploitative environmental practices for the sake of human profit,¹¹ especially on behalf of the dominant classes and nations.¹²

Scripture shows, however, that creation has value apart from its benefit to human beings. God declared parts of the created order as good even before the entrance of human beings into the world (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). It is God the Creator who has given creation its value.¹³ The notion that creation exists only for human beings is contradicted by Psalm 104, which shows how springs, trees, mountains, plants, the great sea provide nourishment and shelter to God's non-human creatures.¹⁴ But above all, creation ex-

⁹ Metaphors are not just figures of speech with an ornamental function; they capture a reality that is not accessible to direct description. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 221.

¹⁰ Van Dyke et. al., *Redeeming Creation*, 48-49; H. Paul Santmire, 'Partnership with Nature according to the Scriptures: Beyond the Theology of Stewardship', *Christian Scholars Review* (2003). Available Online: <https://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/December-2003/Partnership-with-Nature-According-to-the-Scriptures-Beyond-the-Theology-of-Stewardship.aspx>.

¹¹ H. Paul Santmire, 'From Consumerism to Stewardship: The Troublesome Ambiguities of an Attractive Option', *Dialog* 49/4 (Winter 2010): 336.

¹² Santmire, 'Partnership with Nature', Par. 5 (Online).

¹³ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2006), 398-400; *Old Testament Ethics*, 126-27.

¹⁴ See Walter Harrelson, 'On God's Care for the Earth: Psalm 104', *Currents in Theology and Mission* 2 (1975): 20-21, as cited by C. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 400.

ists, as the Scriptures attest, not only and not primarily for human beings, but for the glory and praise of God (Ps. 19:1-6; 148; 150; Is. 44:23). Thus, we see a role for non-human creation beyond that of a 'natural resource', that is, as a raw product to ensure and maintain the economic well-being of humankind.

The utilitarian or instrumental view is related to another limitation of stewardship—it is anthropocentric, in that it centres too much on the role of the human. As managers, trustees, administrators of God's created order, human beings are set so much above the rest of creation that their dependence on the rest of the created order is not sufficiently emphasized. In fact, the opposite view—that nature is dependent on humans (rather than on God) for its growth and survival—can creep in.¹⁵

Doubtless, human beings do have a special place in creation for they alone, of all the creatures, are made in the image of God and are commanded to rule, as Genesis 1:26-28 affirms. Yet this emphasis can obscure another fundamental truth—both human and non-human creation live in dependence on God and on each other, and God, as a relational God, is in interdependent relationship to both. This is seen in that God, in some sense, is dependent on human beings and on nature to accomplish God's purposes for the world.¹⁶

The role of human beings, based on the Genesis creation account, has been

extensively discussed, but that of the non-human creation has not been given much attention. Fretheim argues that just as human beings have a vocation, non-human creation has a vocation as well. Not only human beings, but animals, are commanded to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:22). Nature is not just a victim of human transgression, as can be seen in how it is affected when human beings violate God's laws (Gen. 3:17-19; 4:10-12; 6:11-13; Hos. 4:1-3), but is also used by God as an instrument of judgment (Jer. 3:2-3; 5:24-25; 14:2-12). In his parables, Jesus used animals and plants as object lessons, giving insightful lessons about life (Matt 6:25-30; 7:15-20; 13:1-8, 18-23; 24:32-33). Contemplating the wonders of creation helped to bring Job to a place of rest, healing, and appreciation of God's care for all creatures, after all his tortured questions of justice in the midst of all his suffering.¹⁷ All these show that just as human beings have a unique place in the world, non-human creation has a unique role as well.

If we are to go beyond the concept of stewardship in thinking about the environment, what other scriptural themes and concepts can we use as organizing principles?

III The Eschatological Framework

The stewardship concept looks at creation from the point of view of the beginning. However, it is possible to look at creation, and its implications for environmental issues, from the vantage point of the end. This is especially im-

¹⁵ Helen Beazley, 'The Stewardship Model and Evangelical Response to Environmental Crisis', *Phronesis* 16/1, 2 (2009).

¹⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Fretheim, *God and World*, 270, 278-84.

portant if the New Testament witness is to play an integral role in our eco-theology, since the NT does not speak as extensively of the natural world as much as the OT.

A widespread belief in some sectors of evangelicalism is that the world will be totally annihilated before the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth. This has resulted in a world-denying form of Christianity in which Christians no longer feel the need to be involved in long-term solutions to societal and environmental problems. Corollary to this view is the thinking that the increasing severity of environmental problems is but an indication that the outpouring of divine wrath on Judgment Day is drawing near.¹⁸ This can inure one to the pains of an ailing world. In a moving story of how this perspective has almost destroyed the faith of his wife, one of my colleagues from Japan explained: 'If we believe that the world around us will disappear someday, it follows that we ought not to labour to preserve the planet.'¹⁹

In an exegetical study that looks at the passages that deal with the liberation of creation in Romans 8:19-22, the language of destruction in 2 Peter 3:10-12, the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 21:1, Douglas Moo concludes that what is envisioned here

is not the destruction of the natural world but its transformation.²⁰ N. T. Wright also examines phrases in the New Testament that have often been construed as referring to an altogether other state of existence that has nothing to do with our present earthly existence,²¹ and shows that, rather than a radical discontinuity, they refer to a fuller, although hidden, dimension of a present reality.²²

They point to God's heaven, God's life, God's dimension, impregnating, permeating, charging...the present world, eventually producing new or renewed heavens and new or renewed earth, integrated with each other.²³

Both authors do not deny the reality of sin and the decay of the human body and the physical world. But just as the resurrection of Jesus shows the transformation of the physical body, so the natural world will be renewed and transformed.²⁴

18 Al Truesdale, 'Last Things First: The Impact of Eschatology on Ecology', *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith* 46 (1994): 116-17.

19 Katsuomi Shimasaki, 'The New Heavens and the New Earth: Our Hope and Motive for Stewardship', in *The Earth is the Lord's: Reflections on Stewardship in the Asian Context* (eds. Timoteo Gener and Adonis Gorospe; Manila: OMF Literature, 2011), 18.

20 Douglas Moo, 'Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49/3 (September 2006): 459-69. An abbreviated version is found in *Keeping God's Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Perspective* (eds. Noly J. Toly and Daniel I. Block; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010).

21 These phrases are 'kingdom of heaven' in Matthew, 'eternal life' in John and Paul, 'salvation kept in heaven for you' (1 Pet 1:4), 'our citizenship is in heaven' (3:19-21). N. T. Wright, *New Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture of Christian Hope* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1999), 3-11.

22 N. T. Wright, *New Heavens*, 14-17.

23 N. T. Wright, *New Heavens*, 11.

24 Moo, 'Nature in the New Creation', 37. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the*

What do all these imply? If the physical world that we live in has continuities with our future hope, then we are motivated to work for the renewal of creation now because the fruit of our labours will not be wasted.

IV The Justice Paradigm

Justice is rooted in the character of God²⁵ and is a major theme in both the OT and NT. It is closely connected with righteousness with which it is often paired in Scripture (Ps. 33:5; Ps 89:14; Prov. 21:3; Jer. 22:3). In the Old Testament, righteousness involves fulfilling the demands of a communal relationship,²⁶ especially in relation to the poor, the weak and the oppressed.²⁷

This involves more than rendering righteous judgments in court or offering legal assistance to the poor, but includes the improvement of their conditions, especially by those in positions of power and advantage. This means not only refraining from acts of oppression and exploitation (Jer. 7:5-6; 22:3-4; Zech. 7:9-10; Ezek. 18:7-8, 12-13, 16-17), but also doing acts of mercy and

kindness to the most vulnerable ones in society (in the case of Israel, these are the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the aliens.²⁸) Thus, justice goes beyond direct help and seeks to introduce and pursue legislation, policies, or programs that would benefit the ones who are most vulnerable in society.

The environmental crisis is a justice issue because the ones most affected by it are the poor. For example, the ones who would be most affected by climate change are regions in which majority of the world's poorest population live, even though they contribute the least to greenhouse emissions that cause global warming. Aside from Africa, which is seen to be the most vulnerable, one billion people in South, Southeast Asia, and East Asia and millions in Latin America would face increased risk.

These effects include increased flooding which results in death, disease and homelessness, drought, reduction of agricultural productivity with the corresponding consequence of lack of food security, decrease in freshwater supply, loss of biodiversity, and loss of communities along with their traditional cultures.²⁹ Moreover, unlike richer nations, poorer regions have limited resources to adapt to climate

Church (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 147-63.

²⁵ Stephen Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 60-61; Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 254.

²⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 1:371-72; Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 256.

²⁷ The cry for justice assumes that something is amiss which needs to be put to right so that righteousness can be achieved. See James Luther Mayes, 'Justice: Perspectives from the Prophetic Tradition', *Interpretation* 37 (1983), 5-17.

²⁸ Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press The Hebrew University; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 35.

²⁹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007, 'Regional Vulnerabilities'*, Sec. 19.3.3. Available Online: http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg2/en/ch19s19-3-3.html

change and mitigate its effects.³⁰

Even on the level of air pollution alone, the ones most susceptible are those who cannot afford the luxuries of air-conditioned cars and homes (which by the way contribute to global warming) and whose jobs require them to be exposed to polluted air the whole day. Statistics in the Philippines show that bus and jeepney drivers, street vendors, school children and infants, and public commuters have a higher incidence of acquiring respiratory diseases due to pollution.³¹ While those with professional jobs may have health insurance and the resources to buy medicines when they acquire respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, this is not the case with the poor, who spend most of their income on food. Injustice happens when some are given access to goods that would enable them to sustain life in a healthy environment while others are denied such access.³²

The links between poverty and jus-

tice have given rise to the concept of eco-justice, or some would prefer the term environmental justice. The central theme in eco-justice is that caring for the earth and caring for humanity, particularly for the poor and the marginalized, are inextricably linked.³³ A lack of healthy environment impacts the poor more; on the other hand, the poor can contribute to environmental problems as they try to survive economically without regard for the long-term impact their actions make on the environment. Thus, in eco-justice, both poverty and environmental degradation need to be addressed in an integral manner.

Due to the shift in thinking of evangelicals in the past twenty years, we are now more involved in helping the poor, whether through mercy projects or community development. However, without seriously seeing the link between environmental issues and poverty, our approach to poverty alleviation would be only piecemeal and would not fully address what biblical justice demands.

One other issue in the area of justice has to do with whether one can speak of justice for the non-human creation. According to Knierim, ecological order is the work of divine justice,³⁴ but more scriptural support is needed to prove this contention.

30 The links between poverty and environmental issues are explored in Ken Gnanakan, 'Environment, Poverty, and Justice', and Sarah La Trobe and Joanne Green, 'Water, Sanitation, and Climate Change', in *Inheriting the Earth: Poor Communities and Environmental Renewal* (Monrovia, Calif.: World Vision, 2004), 41-50, 73-87.

31 Leoncito Silva and Athena E. Gorospe, 'Breathe and Let Breathe: Biblical Imperative for Promoting Clean Air', in *The Earth is the Lord's: Reflections on Stewardship in the Asian Context* (eds. Timoteo Gener and Adonis Gorospe; Manila: OMF Literature, 2011), 89-91.

32 David Gushee, 'Environmental Ethics: Bringing Creation Care Down to Earth', in *Keeping God's Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Perspective* (eds. Noly J. Toly and Daniel I. Block; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 251.

33 Terence Gatfield, 'Eco-justice: Some Exploratory Concepts', *Phronesis* 13.1 (2006).

34 Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 110.

V A Theology of Life and Well-Being

One of the key biblical themes that has not often been expounded in standard biblical theological books is the theme of life. This theme goes to the heart of the gospel—the good news of life in Christ. It is a theme that encompasses both the OT and NT and runs from Creation to the New Creation.

In Genesis, God forms the earth so that life will flourish and gives life not only to humankind but to all the beasts of the earth, the birds of the sky, and all the creatures that move on the ground (Gen. 1:30; 2:17). In the garden, God planted all kinds of trees not only to provide food for humankind and all the living creatures, but because they are ‘pleasant to the sight’ (2:9). God also planted the tree of life, which symbolizes fullness of life in the presence of God.³⁵

Because of disobedience of man and woman, however, the way to the tree of life was barred, but in the new heaven and new earth, we find the image of the tree of life again, yielding fruit, with its leaves for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2, 14; cf. Rev. 2:7; Ezek. 47:12). In addition, there is the image of the water of life flowing from the throne of God (Rev. 22:1, 17). At the centre is the Lamb who offers the water of life.

The Bible repeatedly affirms that life comes from God (Is. 42:5), so that without God’s life-giving spirit people die (Ps. 104:9; Job 34:14-15). It is God’s life-giving breath that links us with all

living creatures: ‘In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being’ (Job 12:10, *NRSV*). This is expressed in the Hebrew term used for human beings and animals—*nephesh haya* (‘living beings’)—which shows our continuity and commonality with other creatures of the earth. We are all dependent on God for life.³⁶

Thus, human beings are not the only ones affected when the environment suffers. All living creatures will and experience loss of life, whether this means physical death or impairment of bodily functions. Moreover, the delicate balance between living and non-living elements in the ecosystem is disturbed, creating disruptions in the cycle of life.

The sanctity of human life is one of the central norms in Christian ethics. Evangelicals in the pro-life movement have taken this in the direction of the fight against abortion and assisted suicide.³⁷ However, the sanctity of life should be applied not only to the unborn and the dying, but should involve all human beings—both the present and future generations—‘with a commitment to the preservation, protection, and flourishing of their lives.’³⁸

Nevertheless, the sanctity of human life is still insufficient for an ecological ethic, for it considers only the value of human life. Thus, one must speak not only of the sanctity of human life but also of the sanctity of creation. This is different from seeing creation as divine.³⁹ ‘The sacredness or sanctity of

³⁵ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology Vol. 1: Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove; IVP, 2003), 119.

³⁶ Portions of this section appear in Silva and Gorospe, ‘Breath and Let Breathe’, 92-96.

³⁷ Gushee, ‘Environmental Ethics’, 258.

³⁸ Gushee, ‘Environmental Ethics’, 259.

³⁹ Wright, *Mission of God*, 400-402.

creation speaks of its essential relatedness to God, not of it being divine in and of itself.⁴⁰

Jesus said, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10). In this verse, Jesus contrasts himself as the good shepherd with a thief whose aim is to steal, kill, and destroy. Often this verse is interpreted in relation to life in heaven, but the image of the good shepherd points to something more than the life-to-come, since the task of the shepherd is to feed and protect the sheep, which pertains to life-in-the-present. Jesus' intention is to give 'life in all its fullness', even if that means laying down his own life. Thus, there is a place for death in the theology of life. Although a commitment to life means countering threats to life and working against what would bring death and would impede the fullness of life, death is sometimes necessary as a pathway to the fullness of life.

God is the source of life and sustains life. To believe in God, according to Gustavo Gutierrez, is to believe in the God of Life.⁴¹ This affirmation leads to actions that sustain life and give life. In this way, we can be 'friends of life', as Gutierrez describes those who make a choice to fight on the side of life.⁴² Gutierrez, however, applies the term only in relation to human beings. To be truly friends of life, we need to expand this commitment to life to non-human creation—being careful to preserve natural habitats and counter threats that would affect the cycle of life.

The affirmation that God is Life, as powerfully embodied in Jesus' resurrection, is our hope that regardless of discouraging situations that bring death to our community, we dare not be paralyzed into inaction. Jesus has destroyed death once and for all and promises 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Rev 21:1).⁴³ With faith and hope we can persevere to make visible here on earth and in the midst of death and deterioration, the God who is Life.

VI Some Concluding Reflections

Although the stewardship concept has provided an impetus for evangelicals to be involved in environmental issues, it is limited in its usefulness as an organizing principle for a biblical theology that could support and sustain Christian involvement on these issues. This is because it is preoccupied with the role of the human and does not sufficiently account for the human as embedded in and interdependent with the rest of creation, and not just someone who is over creation. Moreover, the metaphor of a steward as household manager or financial overseer does not resonate so much in Asian cultures, where the majority live in agricultural or coastal settings.

Of the above themes, the closest to the Asian psyche is a theology of life. A reverence for life is characteristic of many Asian religions. As evangelicals, we often have a polemic reaction

40 Wright *Mission of God*, 402.

41 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The God of Life* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

42 Gutierrez, *God of Life*, 62-64.

43 Martin J. Hodson and Margot R. Hodson make this point in *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008), 205.

to this reverence because it divinizes nature. At the same time, this characterizes nature religions and those with affinities to the New Age Movement. However, the recognition of the value and interdependence of all creation, whether human or non-human, means that there is already a solid starting point for environmental engagement. Rather than completely debunking this reverence for life, it may be wiser to critique the way in which nature has been divinized, but affirm the basic respect for life and for the ecological systems that sustain life.

A theology of life belongs to a biocentric approach to creation care, which affirms the value of all living organisms. In a biocentric approach, 'our duties toward living things do not derive from our duties to other humans. Rather, they are grounded in the value the organisms possess simply by virtue of being alive.'⁴⁴

This approach, however, has been criticized for several reasons,⁴⁵ the foremost of which is that it does not fully take into account the role of the human. Since all life forms are regarded as being equal in value and integrity, then this means that it is best not to interfere with existing ecosystems but just allow things to take their course. This non-interventionist approach,

however, goes against the scriptural teaching of humanity's role, as expressed in the first chapters of Genesis and in Psalm 8.

However, rather than the model of stewardship to explain humanity's role, Christopher Wright suggests the image of a servant king. The OT portrays the king in the role of shepherd (Ezek. 34) and servant (1 Kgs. 12:7). A good shepherd takes care of the flock and does not abuse or exploit it, while the idea of a king as servant emphasizes his responsibility to care for the needs of his subjects.⁴⁶ Moreover, the task of the king in the ancient Near East and in ancient Israel is to administer righteousness and justice.⁴⁷ In addition, the image of a shepherd is complemented in Genesis 2 with that of a gardener, who tends the garden and cares for it.

These images, with their emphasis on providing justice and righteousness, caring for and serving one's subjects, maintaining order so that each part of the created order fulfils its function, are more consistent with a theology of life. Yet these still need to be complemented by images that emphasize the horizontal dimension. Sustained by the God of Life and interdependent with the rest of creation that have life and sustain life, human beings respond by being 'friends of life' and 'bearers of life' to a world threatened daily by death.

⁴⁴ Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁴⁵ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty of the Earth*, 130; Gushee, 'Environmental Ethics', 254-57.

⁴⁶ C. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 122.

⁴⁷ Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 45-46.

Theology of Persecution and Martyrdom; an Example in Globalizing Theology

Christof Sauer

KEYWORDS: *Hermeneutics, typology, Messiah, discipleship, conflict, salvation, responsibility, church, mission, Kingdom of God, honour*

I Introduction

1. The challenge for theology

Much of popular missiology in recent decades has been dominated by lopsided emphases, sometimes called a managerial missiology,¹ asking, 'what must we organize?' or a pragmatic missiology, claiming, 'if it works, it must be good'. Often these approaches have in common a tendency towards a 'theology of glory and success', sidelining a 'theology of the cross'. The reality of suffering, persecution or martyrdom is bypassed.

However, according to latest sociological research, two thirds of the

world's population live in countries with serious restrictions of religious freedom. Christians in these countries number at least 200 million. I refer to the websites of the IIRF, the US Department of State, advocacy agencies, and reference works for current experiences of persecution.²

The focus of this presentation is the theological reflection of persecution and martyrdom, not the reality itself.

2. Globalization of perspectives

Rarely have western theologies engaged in much detail with the reality of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for Christ and its significance for mis-

² For the most comprehensive descriptions of persecution of Christians, see Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that endures: the essential guide to the persecuted church* (Lancaster: Sovereign World, 2006); for restrictions of religious freedom, see Paul A. Marshall (ed.), *Religious freedom in the world* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); on the various approaches for researching persecution, see Christof Sauer, 'Researching persecution and martyrdom'. *IJRF* 1 (2008), 26-48.

¹ For a criticism of the reduction of world missions to a managerial enterprise, see James F. Engel and William A Dyrness, *Changing the mind of world missions: where have we gone wrong?* (Downers Grove, 2000), 67-74.

sion. Christian thinking seems to be that persecution is something of the past. A few might know it is happening elsewhere, but the general assumption seems to be, 'it will never happen here'.³ So the topic seems irrelevant and is largely ignored by western theology.

But who says that the western perspective is all sufficient, normative, or the decisive one? Should not a contemporary theology seriously explore a topic that is of very obvious, immediate, painful relevance to large parts of global Christianity? After all, it is a topic which permeates Scripture! Could it be that on closer study the topic might be of more relevance for us than we are accustomed to think, and that an exercise in globalization of theology might uncover some of our blind spots and correct our theology?

3. The example of the Bad Urach Consultation

In September 2009, possibly for the first time, an international group of theologians and missiologists gathered in Germany, in a place called Bad Urach, to develop an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission.⁴ A

major rationale for this consultation was that the church seems ill-equipped for the suffering that comes with its mission in the world.⁵ The participants issued the extensive *Bad Urach Statement* of eighty pages length with the subtitle, 'Towards an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission'.⁶ I would like to introduce some of the outcomes here, and invite the reader to examine it as an exercise in global theology.

II Theology of Persecution and Martyrdom

This can merely be a sketch of the theological core of the consultation statement which is much more detailed and also deals with a number of further perspectives. It tries to overcome current misperceptions and distorted terminology concerning suffering, persecution, and martyrdom. It also extensively deals with responding to suffering, persecution, and martyrdom from an ethical and application perspective at the level of the individual, the local church, Christian networks beyond the local level, and the global Christian community. Finally it recommends practical

³ For a detailed discussion on current (mis-) perceptions on persecution see Charles Tieszen, *Re-examining religious persecution: constructing a theological framework for understanding persecution* (Kempton Park: AcadSA Publishing, 2008), 17-36 (Online: www.iirf.eu).

⁴ The consultation was organized by the International Institute for Religious Freedom (www.iirf.eu), sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission, in co-operation with a number of other commissions.

⁵ Cf. WEA, 'Statement on prosperity theology and theology of suffering by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in 1994'. *ERT* 20:1 (1996), 5-13.

⁶ The *Bad Urach Statement* has been summarized in *The Bad Urach Call*, which is a short and more popular appeal. Both can be found at www.iirf.eu and are published as part of the compendium on the Bad Urach Consultation: Christof Sauer and Richard Howell, Richard (eds.), *Suffering, persecution and martyrdom: Theological reflections* (Kempton Park: AcadSA / Bonn: VKW, 2010).

applications both for Christian mission and for theological education.

1. The drama of God's history with the world

Obviously, the way we view Scripture will influence what we will find in it. Only a comprehensive view of God's cosmic plans, as far as they are revealed to us in Scripture, will help us to properly interpret suffering, persecution and martyrdom and its relation to mission. A salvation-historical approach to interpreting the Bible and to doing theology seems very helpful in that regard.⁷ The suffering of the church for Christ is so much a part of her mission in the period between Christ's ascension and his parousia that suffering has been declared a mark of the church by theologians.

2. Old Testament models of faithfulness

In contemporary Christianity it is quite common to bypass the Old Testament, going straight to the New Testament on any issue. However, suffering, persecution and martyrdom have been the lot of God's people over and over again, all through the Old Testament Scriptures, beginning with the martyrdom of Abel. Job exemplifies the suffering of the righteous allowed by God, and he serves as a typology of Christ. Conflict, persecution, and martyrdom were all characteristics of the true prophets (Neh. 9:26; Mt. 23:37). The election of Israel as the people of God brought

along with it suffering for its calling at the hands of the nations, beginning with her slavery in Egypt. However, often the cause of Israel's suffering was God's punishment for Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh (e.g. Lev. 26:14-39).

3. Christ the suffering servant

Jesus Christ as the centre of our faith plays the normative role in our view of suffering, persecution and martyrdom. Therefore it is crucial how we interpret his life and death. The way of Jesus, the Messiah, through suffering to glory is exemplary for his disciples. All Christian martyrdom has its basic foundational orientation and footing in Jesus Christ, the 'faithful and true witness' (Rev. 1:5; 3:14; cf. 1 Pet. 2:21-24; Heb. 2:14-18; 5:8). From his earliest childhood, Jesus was persecuted, and his first sermon met with bitter resistance. Finally, he stood up as a witness to the truth during his questioning before the judges (Jn. 18:37). To Jesus, the crucifixion was not at all a tragic failure of his mission, but rather its very fulfilment.

4. Discipleship: following in the footsteps of Christ

A key question in any theology of martyrdom is, how the cross of Christ relates to the cross of his disciples. The death of Jesus on the cross is both unique, compared to the cross of his followers, and at the same time serves as a model for his followers. Jesus' death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world as a substitutionary act is unique, completely sufficient, irreplaceable, unrepeatable, and cannot be copied. However, this does not negate the fact that as our

⁷ In exegesis this approach was propagated by Oscar Cullmann, and in missiology by Peter Beyerhaus.

representative Jesus gave us a model to follow.⁸

Therefore Christian suffering for Christ is a continuation of the suffering of Christ, and it is from him only that it receives its characteristic mark (Jn. 17:18; 20:21). His disciples are treated today as he once was, because Christ lives in them and they speak and act with his authority. Their fate is united with his. The core meaning of taking up one's cross in the discipleship of Jesus (Lk. 9:23) is witnessing to Jesus Christ, even in a situation of persecution and martyrdom.⁹

5. Super-human conflict

Here is another dimension that cannot be appropriately assessed when examining persecution and martyrdom with the means of secular sciences only. From a theological perspective, the world's hatred toward Christians is ultimately inspired by the even deeper hatred of Satan, who has been fighting against God ever since his primeval rebellion against him. Because Jesus totally stripped him of his power on Calvary, the anger of the dark powers is directed completely against Jesus and all who confess him.

Jesus saw his ministry as an assault on the rule of Satan in the world with the purpose of bringing in the rule of God or the kingdom of God. Jesus was sent as the Lamb of God to defeat the great dragon and to destroy his works

(1 Jn. 3:8). In the same way, he sends us as lambs to defeat the wolves by transforming them into children of God. Christ's ultimate weapon is self-sacrifice and our ultimate weapon must be the same, in order to draw people to Jesus (Jn. 12:24,26,32).¹⁰

The church suffers because of the hatred towards Christ by the world in rebellion against God (cf. John 15:20a). It is difficult to fully explain the irrational brutality of the persecution of Christians without taking into regard a demonic component in it. In the midst of such a stark realism of conflict, the church can be assured that no enemy or adversity is able to separate the believer from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:31-39).¹¹

6. God's salvation and comfort

Jesus points out the seriousness of remaining faithful to him and confessing him in moments of trial. Those who endure to the end and remain victorious will be saved (Mt. 24:13, Rev. 21:7-8).

While Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as God's angels, comfort and help the afflicted Christian (2 Cor. 1:3-11; Heb. 2:18; Mt. 10:17; Acts 5:18), God's helping presence does not relieve one of one's own responsibility to bear and to stand fast. God's help does not necessarily always have to consist of lives being spared. Some Christians, like James (Acts 12:2), receive God's help to remain faithful, despite torture and execution.

⁸ Young Kee Lee, 'God's mission in suffering and martyrdom', PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1999.

⁹ Glenn Penner, *In the shadow of the cross: a biblical theology of persecution and discipleship* (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice, 2004), 116-54.

¹⁰ Joseph Ton, *Suffering, martyrdom and rewards in heaven* (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 1997), 201-204.

¹¹ Christof Sauer, *Mission und Martyrium* (Bonn: VKW, 1994), 101.

There remains the question of what the suffering and martyrdom of a Christian can contribute to the salvation of others (Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 2:10; Phil. 1:12-26). While the work of the messianic martyr Jesus is complete, Christ's suffering in the members of his body is not yet complete (Rev. 6:11). Paul's apostolic suffering is 'instrumental' suffering,¹² because it serves to bring the gospel to those who need to be saved, and to keep faithful those who have been saved.

7. The body of Christ

So far, at any time in history, there have always been some Christians who were more intensely persecuted and others, who were less under pressure. The question here is, how those less and those more persecuted should relate to each other.

A Christian never suffers alone and a Christian martyr never dies alone, but is always a part of the body of Christ which sustains him or her. The body of Christ needs to be understood in three dimensions, across time, across space, and across divides.

The Christian confessors and martyrs of the past and the present need to be rightly remembered. Those who are currently suffering, are to remember that Christians all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering (1 Pet. 5:9). The body of Christ throughout the world participates in the suffering of members of the body of its time, through information, prayer, support, suffering and rejoicing with them. If one part of the body suffers,

all parts are equally concerned (1 Cor. 12:26). There is the potential of ecumenical solidarity being built, when Christians of different confessions and denominations suffer together for Christ.

A complication is added in cases, where one Christian group is, or has been persecuting another Christian group or has been complicit with government repression against other groups. Then a healing of memories is necessary concerning persecution and martyrdoms caused by other Christians in the past.

A further point in these ecclesiological dimensions concerns group egotisms. Advocacy for persecuted Christians must never be sectarian, only focussing on those from one's own denomination or confession, by ignoring the plight of those with differing theological convictions. Martyrdom serves to build up the church because those suffering and martyred are blessed by God.¹³

8. God's mission for the church

Suffering and martyrdom are not ends in themselves, but serve God's mission right to the end of time, and are linked to mission by multiple relationships (Mt. 24:14). Suffering and the weakness of the witness are a mode of mission (2 Cor. 12:9f; 4:7-10), and martyrdom becomes the most radical form of witness.

¹³ ICN, *Readiness to suffer*, 1996 (online: www.institut-diakrisis.de/PDEnglishVersion.pdf); Peter Beyerhaus, 'Martyrdom—gate to the kingdom of heaven' in Beyerhaus, *God's kingdom and the utopian error* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992), 163-179.

¹² The term is coined by Lee, *God's mission in suffering*, 46-55.

Witness to Christ is a core cause of suffering. While we might be perfect in contextualizing our message and in avoiding any unnecessary offence, as messengers of Christ, we must face the fact that the message of the cross has been, and always will be, a stumbling block to those without Christ (1 Cor. 1:18,23), and will attract the hostility of the world that does not accept the light coming into the world (Jn. 1:4,11). Suffering is also a test for the genuineness of our mission rather than a mishap to be avoided at all cost.

The widely quoted saying of the church father Tertullian, '*semen est sanguis Christianorum*',¹⁴ is often quoted out of context with a triumphalistic undertone as 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church'. This gives rise to the important question of how persecution and church growth are related. Does persecution automatically and always lead to church growth? Or is it rather growth of the church that leads to persecution?

A theologically reflected response must differentiate. Even the catastrophes of world history can be used by God as vehicles for the progress of his kingdom, and he seems to use them in particular. The willingness to suffer for Christ can give the message of those suffering a more convincing power. While the seed that falls into the ground will bear much fruit over time according to God's promise, martyrdom does not automatically produce visible and immediate church growth.

The 'fruit' of martyrdom remains a grace from God (Jn. 12:24). While in some places persecution has led to

the multiplication of the church, sometimes heavy persecution has completely destroyed or marginalized churches in other parts of the world. Martyrdom brings to a violent end the voice of that particular witness and might discourage the witness of others, or have the potential to silence the last and only witness.

9. The victory of the kingdom of God

What then should our expectations be regarding the future? The period in which we live, is marked by the tension between the victory of Christ that has already been accomplished and its visible consummation which has not yet taken place (Mt. 5:45; Rom. 8:19-22). Because Christ was raised from death, ascended to heaven and was installed as sovereign, we may rightly hope for a resurrection to a better life which gives us reason to stand firm and immovable in affliction, and reassures us that our work for God is not in vain, though deadly forces might seemingly destroy it (1 Cor. 15:58).

In contrast to optimistic visions of the future, dreaming of seamless transformation, the prophecies of the Bible foresee clearly an altogether troubled final stage of human and church history (Dt. 7; 1 Thess. 2; 2 Tim. 3:1-13; Rev. 13-19). Both the worldwide proclamation of the gospel to all ethnic groups and distress reach a climax with the passing away of the old world and the completion of the new (Mt. 24:9-25; Rev. 17:6; 6:9-11). This encourages each generation to discern and endure historically and locally-restricted preliminary forms of persecution in their own times as anticipations on a small-

¹⁴ Tertullian, *Apol* 50,13.

er scale of what is to follow later (1 Jn. 2:18).¹⁵

Christians should not focus on the horrors of the coming end times, but they should joyfully¹⁶ expect their returning Lord, as bridegroom, judge and king (Rev. 19:6-10; 21:1-5; 16:5-6). God is not in a hurry with his final victory. Rather he is patient with humankind because he does not want anyone to perish, but wants to give everyone an opportunity for repentance (2 Pet. 3:4,9).

10. The honour of God and his martyrs

In the end, a crucial question is: What does God think of martyrdom? Again, there are various aspects to a biblical response. God is honoured both by the life and by the death of his witnesses (Rom. 14:8; 12:1; Phil. 1:20; Acts 20:24). God is honoured by the witness in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10) to a seemingly foolish gospel (1 Cor. 1:18-31), and the faithfulness of the martyrs (Jn. 21:18-19), as well as by the church's confidence in his reign (Acts 4:23-30), and the occasional conversion of persecutors (1 Pet 2:12; Phil 2:6-11). Honouring God is the eternal destiny of God's children (Rev. 7:9-17; 15:2-4; 19:2). The glorification of God is the ultimate goal of mission, and everything must in the end serve his glory.

This leads us to interesting and debated questions: 'Does God reward faithfulness? When and how?'

We can differentiate three scenar-

ios. God bestows his glory already in this life on those who suffer for him, lets some martyrs have a glimpse of his glory in their hour of trial, and in heaven lets them share the glory of Christ (1 Pet. 4:14; Acts 7:55). But beyond the association with God's glory in this life, those suffering and martyred are led through temporal suffering to eternal glory and are honoured by God (1 Pet. 1:11; Heb. 2:9; Rom. 8:17-18; 1 Pet. 4:13-14).

More specifically, the Bible promises a heavenly reward to the faithful.¹⁷ The character formation and the testing of our faithfulness accomplished in suffering, persecution or martyrdom for Christ have clear corresponding results in heaven (Rev. 3:12,21; 20:4; Lu. 22:28-30; 2 Cor. 4:17). The content of the promised reward is being heirs with Christ, being glorified with him (Rom. 8:17) and reigning with him (2 Tim. 2:12).

These promises are a great source of inspiration, courage and strength for the Christians who are called to face persecution and martyrdom. Suffering and martyrdom are not human achievements to boast about, but it is the grace of God that enables us to go victoriously through such sufferings.

III Conclusion

The authors of the *Bad Urach Statement* are specifically calling on theologians, missiologists and Christian leaders to consider this message in view of fulfilling together in joint obedience the mission to which God has called us. They encourage you to:

15 ICN, *Readiness to suffer*.

16 Ajilt Fernando, *The call to joy and pain: embracing suffering in your ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).

17 Ton, *Suffering, martyrdom and reward*.

- study the *Bad Urach Statement* personally in the light of scripture,
- assess what relevance it has for you and your ministry,
- reflect how this statement could be used at your level of responsibility.

If we take a step back now and revisit the issue of globalizing theology, I see a need to move forward in two directions. Firstly, more non-western theologians need to be discovered who have reflected on that topic.¹⁸ Also, they could address deficits in western theology in a more differentiated manner. Taking note of the treasures hidden in oblivion or behind language barriers is a challenge.¹⁹

18 The contributing works of those who have participated in the discussion process surrounding the Bad Urach Consultation are listed in the references, whether they are explicitly quoted in this essay or not.

19 One such hidden treasure largely unknown outside the German speaking world is

Secondly, this exercise in globalizing theology has remained within the evangelical tradition. At the consultation in Bad Urach we have discussed the need to engage into conversations with Oriental and Eastern orthodox, Roman-Catholic and liberation theology approaches to the topic.

In presenting these thoughts on a theology of suffering, I personally want to encourage all readers to boldly pursue witness to the crucified and risen Christ, even in the face of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom. And doing so humbly, inspired and enabled by Christ to loving sacrifice.

the missiological interpretation of suffering for Christ by Karl Hartenstein. Cf. Christof Sauer, 'Towards a theology of "mission under the cross", a contribution from Germany by Karl Hartenstein'. In *Suffering, persecution and martyrdom*, edited by Christof Sauer et al. (Kempton Park: AcadSA / Bonn: VKW, 2010), 257-85.

Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology

Edited by Neil B. MacDonald and Carl R. Trueman

Karl Barth and John Calvin belong to the first rank of great theologians of the Church. Both, of course, were also Reformed theologians. Historically, Calvin's influence on Reformed doctrine has been much greater than that of Barth's, and continues to be so in the present day. In contrast, Barth's Reformed credentials have been questioned – not least in his understanding of election and atonement. The question is: who should be of greater importance for the Reformed church in the twenty-first century? Who has the better arguments on the Bible? Barth or Calvin? Doctrinal areas of focus are the nature of the atonement, Scripture, and the sacraments.

Neil B. MacDonald is Senior Lecturer in Theology, University of Surrey Roehampton, London, UK. **Carl R. Trueman** is Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA.

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Review Article: The Early History of the Evangelical Alliance and its Advocacy of Religious Freedom

Thomas Schirmmacher

Gerhard Lindemann, *Die Geschichte der Evangelischen Allianz im Zeitalter des Liberalismus (1846-1879)*, Theologie: Forschung und Wissenschaft Bd. 24 (English title translation: The History of the Evangelical Alliance in the Age of Liberalism (1846-1879). Theology: Research and Scholarship Vol. 24). Lit Verlag: Münster, 2011. 1064 pp. € 129.90

Since my dissertation on Theodor Christlieb in 1985¹ and the work of Hans Hauzenberger the following year, the Methodist researcher Karl-Heinz Vogt has contributed new material on Christlieb himself and on the topic of the Alliance and religious freedom. However, for the past 25 years what has been missing has been a significant advance in research into the history of the Alliance in Germany and, indeed, on its worldwide history from the time prior to World War II up until today. Also, there has not been anything substantial on the early history of the World Evangelical Alliance for a long period of time. Researchers have

likewise not shown much enthusiasm for the history of religious freedom in the nineteenth century in general. But now we have this excellent and mammoth piece of work on the Evangelical Alliance!

Lindemann's work is a large-format book with 947 pages of pure text, a large print area and small print. This 2004 professorial dissertation does justice to the reputation Germans have for writing the fattest of all books! Sometimes it is overly detailed, with everything meticulously documented from files and contemporary newspapers, but it makes the book the most rigorous (and best) depiction of the history prior to the commencement of the Evangelical Alliance as well as the early history of the organisation.

Today, the World Evangelical Alliance represents 600 million Christians worldwide, of which only a fraction

¹ Thomas Schirmmacher, *Theodor Christlieb und seine Missionstheologie* (Verlag und Schriftmission der Evangelischen Gesellschaft für Deutschland, 1985).

is German-speaking. It is disappointing that for this reason this treasure will remain hidden to the largest segment of these people. This is due to the fact that an English translation of this amount of text, while arguably urgently necessary, is unfortunately very unlikely.

Evangelical Alliance Origins and Ecumenism

Using whatever resources are available, this opus covers the actual history such as meetings, campaigns, and international expansion, which are chronicled for the reader; the role played by key personalities, and finally, the main areas of the Alliance's work (especially freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, weeks of prayer, missions, and publications). Whoever would like to pursue an individual topic—for instance the history of the international World Evangelical Alliance New Year Week of Prayer—can do this very well via the finely laid out outline and index. Whoever also wants to pursue the history of the Alliance up to 1879 in a variety of countries such as Great Britain, England, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Turkey, Iran, India, or Japan, will make a find.

This is the first time one finds documentation for many topics (e.g., the early Evangelical Alliance's advocacy of the protection of animals). I even found something new on Christlieb which complements my dissertation (Christlieb and Reconciliation with France in New York (747-752)—Christlieb's campaign against the opium trade (856-858) and the history of the West German Evangelical Alliance

(921-922)).

Lindemann sees the Alliance as being from the outset the first organized form of ecumenism and as the sole true ecumenical organization which emerged from the revivals in the nineteenth century (15). He shows that the Alliance itself frequently used the word 'ecumenical' in its early documents (938, and often). He believes that the Alliance 'produced a climate which facilitated the founding of organizations which were the precursor of the World Council of Churches (WCC)' (945). He criticizes the fact that historical depictions of modern ecumenism often begin very late and pass over the Alliance as well as a number of its earlier leading representatives as forerunners of the unity of Christians (21).

Lindemann sees the Alliance as a part of the transnational movement of revival after Pietism (25), which should not be judged in sweeping terms as 'anti-Enlightenment' or 'anti-modern' (25). Rather, with respect to questions of religious freedom or the fight against slavery, (28-29) it was in fact ahead of its time. Fed by revival in completely different languages and cultural circles, it, like Pietism, was marked 'by a wide-ranging network of international contacts and ties' (33).

However, I am bold enough to question his claim that one can trace the founding of ecumenical structures independent of the Alliance solely to the 'increasing "fundamentalization" of the 1880 Alliance' (945) in the form of the rejection of biblical criticism and a turning towards the Holiness movement. This is what Lindemann rather incidentally mentions at the very end. I suspect that a similar exhaustive work for the period after 1880 would

likewise allow another 'Alliance' to emerge which, like the Alliance which Lindemann depicts up to 1879, would not derive from the 'fundamentalization' cliché. Still, Lindemann is correct when he continues: 'Nevertheless, the body of thought of the Alliance lives on in ecumenism' (946).

The concluding words on the Evangelical Alliance of today which imply several phases in its development (an early good one, a worse one later as well as the present day organisation), do not fit too well with the characteristic style of the book. However, after 945 exceedingly fair pages presenting the Alliance from various sources, one should take this restrained criticism to heart, particularly since the recommendations taken from it have in part already been put into practice.

On the whole, Lindemann writes from a friendly yet critical distance. Thus, for instance, he criticizes the close proximity of many Evangelicals to the ruling nobility at the time of the 1848/49 Revolution (152-158), whereby the Evangelicals did not differentiate themselves from the churches of their time.

He frequently presents positive aspects. Thus already at the time of the founding of the Evangelical Alliance, there was unity in the condemnation of slavery—the fight against slavery belonged unalterably to the history of 'Evangelicals'. However, the degree to which groups and individuals who tolerated slavery were allowed to become members was, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, a point of dispute (65-72, 110-129, 159). Initially, in 1846, they were all excluded, later admitted in part, and then along with the abolition of slavery in the USA, irrevocably

banned (693). Never before have these complicated details been documented in detail.

There is also a lot of new material provided on the development of the statement of faith. He writes,

The understanding was one of an association of individuals. Also, in this connection, there was value placed on a personal decision of faith by each individual and an emphasis on the right of each individual's reading of the Bible. There was a sharp division between Catholicism (as well as high church groups in Protestantism) with its beliefs about the sacraments and the institutional church as objectively predefined entities, and the Evangelicals who gave priority to the decision of the individual. What counted for the Alliance in its 'statement of faith' adopted in London was a view of the divinely inspired Scriptures as sacrosanct, with the right of examination, however, granted to each individual. (205)

Tensions

The development of the first statement of faith is stirring (87-98). In my opinion it could have been more clearly pointed out that the first two sentences have produced a central tension up to the present day:

1. The divine inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures. (98)
2. The right and duty of private judgment in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. (98)

On the one hand, this is an unalterable position, but on the other hand,

it reflects an extreme pluralism, obligating each believer to interpret the foundation for himself. There are issues here which are worth discussing further.

First, Evangelicals are marked by two opposite poles, and one does not do them justice if only one pole is observed. First there is the *centrality of the Holy Scriptures*. Then there is *individual salvation* that arises from Luther's question: 'How do I find a gracious God?' It is a matter of each person having a personal relationship with God and then, as a corrective to the centrality of the Scriptures, the entitlement, even the obligation, of every Christian to study the Scriptures himself and to interpret them. The result is that such an individual stands on a level with every Evangelical theologian, no matter how learned, even if it is his pastor. Thus the Evangelical world unites dogmatic constriction, thanks to the position of the Bible, with an enormous democratic breadth, because every theologian is allowed to have a say.

The second tension is between missions and religious freedom. From the enormous emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, there arose a strong stress on the 'duty to witness' as well as a strong emphasis on religious freedom. The concept of voluntariness marks not only free churches, but also intra-church pietism, for whom faith is not something that is only external, or inherited, but rather something which is personally experienced. But for all that, no one can be forced into it. Indeed, coercion destroys the possibility of accomplishing a truly independent, personal repentance before God. Thus rather a smaller church with convinced members than

a large one with many members who belong only due to societal, family, or other pressures.

Redefinition of the Relationship of the Evangelical Alliance to the Catholic Church

Lindemann examines the anti-Catholic tendencies and activities in Great Britain in which the Alliance in part has its roots (45-50). Admittedly he also conclusively establishes what was my greatest 'aha' experience when reading the book. It was hardly the dogmatic differences which occupied centre stage. Rather, the Alliance, with its advocacy of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, represented the complete opposite of the Ultramontanist Catholic Church, which decidedly rejected religious freedom.

In part the Alliance had a radical, and perhaps restrained, emphasis on the separation of church and state but also a strong emphasis on the primacy of voluntary personal conversion—something which excluded any sort of coercion in missions or religious coercion from the side of the state. The Catholic Church saw the state as a servant of the church, at least in questions of religion and ethics. Local Catholics were seen to be bound more strongly than ever not only to the spiritual leadership, but also to the political leadership, of the pope.

These were all positions which the Catholic Church first officially gave up in the Second Vatican Council but already after both world wars increasingly had to relinquish. In the culture war in Germany at the time of Bismarck,

it was less a matter of the content of faith and more to do with the question of power and political influence of the church(es). In contrast, according to Lindemann, for the Alliance, there was the consideration that Ultramontanism was 'a conspiracy against the spiritual development and spiritual freedom of humanity' (49, 321-337).

From the year of the founding of the Alliance onwards, there was consistent advocacy for persecuted Catholics in Protestant countries and a lack of support of anti-Catholic governments for their actions (205). (At the founding in 1846 there was no provision for the non-admission of Catholics) (131). The Alliance challenged Sweden with a delegation in 1858 after the highest royal court expelled six women from the country who had converted to Catholicism, by calling for religious freedom for these Catholics; this was greeted throughout Europe with a storm of outrage outside of the Alliance (295-300). The Alliance was then significantly involved in the Swedish Parliament's 1860 abolition of penalties for leaving the Lutheran state church.

Lindemann writes:

Through its concentration on dogmatic and spiritual elements, the Alliance differentiated itself from other anti-Catholic groups. Furthermore, engagement for the Waldensian church made it clear that the Association did not let itself be led by blind hatred of Catholics. Rather, it was able also to speak out against diplomatic and military support of governments which did not respect the principle of religious freedom, even when it found itself in conflict with Catholicism. In this connection Sir Culling Eardley made it clear

that political freedom without religious freedom is unthinkable and also not worthy of being supported. According to the understanding of the London Alliance Committee, it was a matter of the 'most holy of human rights' (205-206).

He adds,

As early as the start-up phase of the Evangelical Alliance, it proved itself to be in no way a purely anti-Catholic movement. Priority was given to the interest in unity among Christians, while current events and developments were viewed more as triggering factors for the step to a Protestant affiliation. The evangelization of the world and the desire to contribute to peace among peoples through cooperation across borders, the latter above all from the American perspective, were considered to be fundamental objectives (205).

New Chapters in the History of Religious Freedom

Lindemann shows the effort against persecution for religious reasons and in defence of religious freedom to be the main topic for the Alliance; this issue had never before been presented so thoroughly (in part. 141-151, 205-321, 592-645, 773-811, 858, 868-913). Especially interesting are the insights into the Alliance's efforts for religious freedom, which Lindemann gained from the files of the 'British Foreign and Commonwealth Office'.

Since the Alliance took advantage of the fact that foreign policy became the topic of the press and of the emerging parliament (207), efforts relating to those persecuted for religious rea-

sons were in central focus from 1849 to 1858 (207).

Let us choose as an example the actions taken for the controversial Italian Signor Giacinto Achilli (1803-1893), who converted from Catholicism to Protestantism, and who for that reason was incarcerated for life by the Roman Inquisition. In a diplomatic tug of war, which lasted almost one year and included the participation of British and French foreign ministers, the media, their newspapers, and numerous delegations, a trick by the French secured his freedom so that he could leave Rome and be handed over to England (208-223).

Matters such as these are repeatedly presented by Lindemann in minute detail. If these matters were known about at all, they had up to this point never been traced out in their individual steps. They document just how well organized, networked with governments and media, and ahead of its time this aspect of the Evangelical Alliance was.

Lindemann writes:

In their efforts for those disadvantaged due to reasons of belief, the Alliance clearly profited from increasing pluralism, above all the pluralism of British society and of the development of a broader media audience which allowed the exertion of influence by 'pressure groups' on the foreign policy decision process. It was soon noticed that in certain cases joint action beyond national borders appeared to promise more success, such as in the initial example of the Italian Giacinto Achilli where it was able to lead to joint governmental action. At the same time, reference to

English public opinion was able to either deter states from the repression of people of other religions, end such repression, or, at least, to reduce it. It is not only through using new methods in this undertaking that the Evangelical Alliance had its part in the modernization process of Protestantism in the nineteenth century. (943)

For instance, the British Alliance used a position paper sent to the Prussian king opposing persecution of Baptists to achieve the return to Berlin of the Baptist leader Johann Gerhard Ocken who had earlier been driven out of that city (235-237). With letters from the British queen and the Prussian king, the Tuscan Grand Duke Leopold II was assailed in an audience on account of the incarceration of a married couple by the name of Madiari. 'The deputation met with a strong response all across Europe' (254). Even the tough minded Lutheran Ernst-Wilhelm Hengstenberg, who was truly no friend of the Alliance, praised the action, since it refuted the Catholic charge that the Protestants were hopelessly split.

At this point they had spoken with a single voice (254). The affair spread as far as the USA, and other Italian princes likewise became active, as was the French emperor, until after a year the married couple was finally released in 1853. This makes it especially clear how closely tied the thought of ecumenism among Protestants and religious freedom was: working together makes you stronger.

The extent of denominational generosity is also shown by the fact that there was a campaign before the Sultan not only for converts of Islam to Protestantism but also for the Greek

Orthodox Church (300). The cause of Nestorians was supported in Iran (610-613).

After the execution of a convert in 1853, the Alliance, in cooperation with the Turkish Alliance, activated its contacts in a considerable number of European governments until finally in 1856 Sultan Abdülmejid I—admittedly in connection with the complicated politics between the Ottoman Empire and western powers—issued an edict granting greater freedoms to Protestants and abolishing the death penalty for conversion (300-319). In 1874-1875 a further large campaign was led by a delegation of the Alliance to the Turkish foreign minister, and by diplomats even all the way up to the sultan. However, their impact has been disputed (879-902).

Lindemann writes that the Czar's suspension of cases against pastors in the Baltic states was 'the responsibility of [the result of] the push forward by the Alliance in London' (800). The deliberate confusion surrounding an attempt at a meeting with the Czar, who finally sent his foreign minister ahead, is resolved by Lindemann (779-800).

The audiences which the Alliance had before the Prussian king, for instance in 1855 in Cologne or in 1857 within the framework of the Alliance's Berlin Conference before Friedrich Wilhelm IV (286f.), always revolved around freedom of religion in Germany. The same applies for conversations the secretary of the Alliance held with the German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm I and the Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in 1875 (919). A deputation of the Alliance before Emperor Franz Joseph I at the Hofburg (Austrian royal residence) and subsequent conversations with the

prime minister and the minister for education and the arts in 1879 led to noticeable relief for Protestants, and in 1880 even to their legal recognition as churches as well as almost incidentally to relief for free churches in Vienna (913).

The same applies to the visit by the entire group of participants from the New York Conference with the American President Ulysses S. Grant and his cabinet in 1873 (755-756), only that the American government no longer required convincing about freedom of religion.

It should be noted that all this happened at a time when traditional churches were still very far from giving up their status as state churches, not to mention allowing religious freedom for all and still less demanding it. When religious freedom was called for at that time, it was mainly from Jews, religious minorities, and atheists, not, however, from very religious representatives of the prevailing religion. The contribution the Evangelical Alliance made to religious freedom in Germany has up to this time not been acknowledged anywhere.

Foundations

The 1853 Homburg Conference for Religious Freedom was a landmark in the history of the Alliance and for tolerance in Germany and Europe (263-267). The central result was the rejection of any use of ecclesiastical force against separatists and the rejection of the use of any state power by churches against others as a milestone in the development of the rights of religious freedom (266). Furthermore, this deliberately counted not only for Christians

but for all religions. It naturally led to internal controversies and to sharp criticism from the side of Protestant state churches (267-272), but it did so without moving the Alliance away from its basic principle.

In 1861 a French pastor advanced a new thesis which gained more and more acceptance in the Alliance, namely that 'religious freedom guarantees state order and its inherent peace' (592). Oppression of individual religious freedom, on the other hand, feeds revolution and strife and divests the state of its God-given foundation! Interestingly enough, international academic investigation confirms precisely this: Religious freedom promotes a peaceful society, the oppression of religious freedom promotes unrest and violence, and practically all terrorist movements in the world which have a religious hue come from countries from

the latter group.²

Lindemann writes:

With its commitment to religious freedom, the Alliance, the Anglo-American wing of which did not content itself with mere tolerance but saw public confession of faith as a fundamental right, has also in the establishment of freedoms in countries concerned rendered a notable service and made no insignificant contribution to the development of a civil society in Europe. (943)

Lindemann deserves our thanks for telling the story of the directions set by the early leaders of the Evangelical Alliance, especially in regard to religious liberty.

² Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, with my commentary on this work available at <http://www.thomasschirrmacher.info/archives/1792>].

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Book Reviews

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The African Memory of Mark Reassessing Early Church Tradition

Thomas C. Oden

Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic,
2011

ISBN 978-0-8308-3933-9
Pb. pp 279, indices, illus.

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

True to its title, this book by veteran American evangelical theologian, Thomas Oden, aims to bring to the attention of a largely western audience the extensive amount of information which is well known to the African (mostly Coptic) churches about the life and ministry of the disciple, John Mark.

This is the second book (reviewed *ERT* 33:2 and 36:3) in a project stemming from the author's *Ancient Christian Commentary series* which alerted him to the strength of the traditional sources about Mark. As Peter is seen as so important for the church at the heart of the Roman

empire, so too Mark is tied to the church in Alexandria, the second city of the empire and one with such a great intellectual history. However, while European and Asian founders of the church are well known in the west, the same is not the case for Mark, a situation which Oden wishes to change.

This is also a personal project for the author who states clearly how he once was so committed to the western critical historiography which could only speak of the 'worthless character' (Harnack, p. 183) of the African traditions of Mark. But as Oden points out, this negative approach is little more than a century old whereas the African memory developed very early and has persisted now for nearly 20 centuries. Furthermore, over that long period of time it has helped sustain the living faith of the church in that region through some extremely difficult experiences. Oden argues that even though the method used in that tradition may be quite different from the critical scholarship of the west, it has its own logic and has a right to be known and understood beyond its own regional confines. It needs a different approach from western scholarship, a new 'ge-

stalt' so that it can be assessed on its own merits rather than being denied a place at the table. To understand and appreciate it in this way is to give not only a fairer approach to historical matters but also to further the prospects of ecumenical and even inter-faith relations.

So Oden's task is to present the substance of that memory and to set out its sources, development and significance. The book, which is written for the lay reader as well as the scholar (which affects its style) consists of 13 chapters divided into 5 parts.

After an explanatory preface and an introductory chapter, the first part presents the basic details of the African memory, including an outline of what is commonly and universally accepted by African Christians about their founder, Mark, information about his African roots (having been born in Libya) and the literary sources of the memory. The latter consists of liturgical material of early provenance, hagiographic material, edited collections dating from the 10th century and the scholarly works of the late Pope Shenouda III.

The second part gives an African understanding of the extensive material on Mark in the New Testament, which although often passed over superficially, in fact, reveals Mark and his family to have been involved in the founding and expansion of the church in association with both Peter and Paul (and others), which included a great deal of travel in the course of apostolic ministry on three continents as well as writing the first Gospel.

Part III is devoted to an historical outline of Mark's life in Africa, covering his birth through to his pioneering efforts in founding the church in Alexandria and to his violent martyrdom there. This data is subjected to historical analysis

in the single but lengthy chapter of Part IV, emphasizing the antiquity of the basic elements of the African memory of Mark, the core of which was already evident early in the 2nd century.

The many strands of the case come to a focus in the final section where the author re-presents the wide-ranging evidence from the New Testament and the early church. Mark appears 'unexpectedly in so many crucial points of the New Testament' (p. 219) and emerges in the mind of the African church as its founder and leader. Because the evidence for this story is not of the kind that is familiar to western critical historiography, it has been severely discounted but Oden argues that the very 'ubiquity of Mark' demands the attention of scholars and church people. It is implausible to dismiss the 'memory of Mark', his leadership and his martyrdom as merely hagiography, or as a pious or perhaps political creation to give the church credibility and status in difficult times. What is needed is a more sympathetic way of looking at the data, and above all a new 'gestalt' that will see the various elements in a harmonious manner, leading to a new 'hypothesis in which all the pieces of the puzzle fit' (p. 223).

Oden concludes, 'Treating as myth two thousand years of testimony is bad historical method' (p. 256). He also reports that 'Such suspicion is today giving way to a greater respect for the stories of the saints'. Oden's work is devoted to this end with the expectation that through it the 'obliteration' of much African Christian (and cultural) history will be reversed, thus giving the church in a continent where Christianity is burgeoning so strongly a chance to regain its confidence. After all, he says, 'For Africans to neglect Mark is analogous to European Christians forgetting Paul' (p. 253).

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The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of our Calling

John Stott

Downers Grove: IVP Books. 2010.

ISBN 978-0-8308-9

Hb pp 142pp

Reviewed by Roger E. Hedlund. This review first appeared in Dharma Deepika, 15:1 (January-June 2011), 90-91 and is used with permission

A farewell address to the worldwide church by John Stott at age eighty-eight following more than sixty years of ministry is in itself an event. In the preface John Stott explains his title: 'disciple' was the earliest designation of the followers of Christ; the word 'Christian' came later and is found only three times in the New Testament, and 'radical' has to do with roots. A radical disciple is one fully committed to Christ, one whose life is deeply rooted in Christ. In this book Stott calls us to consider eight frequently neglected characteristics of Christian discipleship.

Nonconformity: Disciples are called to holiness, to a Christian counterculture. Four common threats are pluralism, materialism, relativism and narcissism (love of self).

Christlikeness: If we claim to be Christian, we must be like Christ. God has given us his Holy Spirit to enable us to fulfil his purpose. [This chapter is based on Stott's last address given at the Keswick Convention in July 2007.]

Maturity: We all are amazed and thrilled at the phenomenal growth of the church in China and many parts of the world today. How do we assess this reality? Stott's summary: 'growth without depth' (38). Christian maturity means having a mature relationship with Christ in which

we worship, trust, love and obey him (42). Christian discipleship requires a clear, true vision of the authentic (Biblical—not Gnostic or New Age) Jesus.

Creation Care: Climate change, pollution, the greenhouse effect project a global crisis calling for creation care as part of a biblical concept of mission.

Simplicity: A 1980 International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle is not much known but produced a radical change in the lifestyle of at least one Chinese Christian from Hong Kong who resolved 'not to accumulate wealth but to give it away' (62). Dan Lam devoted himself to training Asians to win Asians in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Mongolia. He also created two foundations which (following his death) carry on the work he had pioneered, 'all because of the simple lifestyle he had embraced' (64).

Balance: We are called to both individual discipleship and to corporate fellowship, to both pilgrimage and citizenship, 'and not to emphasize either at the expense of the other' (98).

Dependence: The Lord's Prayer teaches us about dependence—our dependence on God's mercy. Three illustrations are given: (1) John Stott's utter dependence on others following a fall and broken hip; (2) the stubborn old widow dependent on her African American driver in the movie 'Driving Miss Daisy', and (3) Christ himself born a baby totally dependent on his mother, and finally again on the Cross totally dependent—'if dependence was appropriate for the God of the universe, it is certainly appropriate for us' (111).

Death: Life through death is a profound paradox in the Christian faith and the Christian life. Adoniram Judson arrived in Burma/Myanmar in 1813 and suffered intensely, but when he died in 1850 after

37 years there were 7,000 baptized Burmese and Karens - and today more than three million Christians in Burma. Some Christians suffer martyrdom, but death holds no horror for Christians. 'Death is unnatural and unpleasant. In one sense it presents us with a terrible finality. Death is the end. Yet in every situation death is the way to life. So if we want to live we must die' (133).

Fitting valedictory words from John Stott who has been described as a pastor to the worldwide church during half of the twentieth century.

ERT (2013) 37:3, 286-288

**Invitation to World Missions:
A Trinitarian Missiology for the
Twenty-First Century**

Timothy C. Tennent

Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010

ISBN 978-0-8254-3883-7

Hb., pp559

Reviewed by Roger E. Hedlund: This review first appeared in Dharma Deepika, 14:2 (July-Dec 2010), 88-89 and is used with permission

The great merit of this book is the way in which the author grounds the discipline of missiology in the theology and practice of mission. Examples from the author's own experience of working in India add particular interest for use in South Asia. The result is a valuable biblical, contextual and contemporary missiology textbook suitable for any theological or missiological institution East or West or in the Global South.

Mission today is multi-directional, from Africa to Europe, from Sri Lanka to Britain, from India to North America. That this was true from the earliest Christian era is demonstrated by the

claim that the apostle Thomas brought Christianity to India, which 'highlights the multidirectional mission of the early church' (235). Christian mission was in progress long before the advent of William Carey. Carey was not the first missionary, neither the first Protestant missionary, nor the first Baptist missionary. Tennent notes the prior activity of Moravian and Pietist missionaries, but finds the genius of Carey in his discovery of the missing Protestant structure, the needed 'means' to make mission possible, leading to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society and numerous new voluntary mission societies. The magnitude of this discovery, modelled after secular trading companies, is the reason why Carey is known (among Protestants) as the Father of Modern Missions (259-260).

Increasingly mission today is Pentecostal. Tennent celebrates the arrival of Pentecostalism as the fastest growing Christian movement in history, with more than a billion adherents, second only to the Roman Catholics (286). In Latin America the Reformation has finally arrived, and it is Pentecostal! In Africa a somewhat parallel development is found in more than 10,000 African indigenous denominations, founded and led by Africans, preserving African heritage, with emphasis on holiness and the role of the Holy Spirit (294).

The author celebrates the translatability of the gospel. In North India where he has worked with Indian missionaries, it was found that traditional theological education failed to equip students to respond to the questions Hindus were asking. Theology in that context needs to grapple with Hindu concepts of karma which make it difficult for Hindus to comprehend the efficacy of Jesus' death on the Cross and the meaning of the Christian doctrine of grace. Theologi-

ans must explain the *uniqueness of the Incarnation* in contrast to Hindu belief in many such advents of the deity. Various cultural practices need examination, e.g. the eating of meat, eating of food offered to idols, participation in festivals, questions of dress and ornaments, as well as other issues raised. In Islamic settings such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and parts of North India, a different set of questions arises as to how best to contextualize the Christian message for Muslims. A succinct summary is given of a broad spectrum of Christ-centred communities of Muslim followers of Jesus.

Should western Christians support Indian missions and ministries? The author examines the arguments on both sides of the issue and calls for discernment to differentiate investments which produce dependency from those which do not. Tennent finds that providing funding for training institutions may be a sound and strategic investment. His conclusion: 'interdependence and collaboration are the hallmarks of twenty-first-century missions' (385).

Two chapters stand alone as distinct contributions to the theology of mission. Chapter six, A Trinitarian 'New Creation' Theology of Culture, affirms God the Father as the Source, Redeemer, and final goal of culture. God is on a mission to bless the nations, a mission which finds its culmination in the New Creation. A theology of culture relates to biblical Christology. In the Incarnation God embraces human culture. 'Jesus is not like the passing, ephemeral avatars of Hinduism. Jesus fully steps into our history and becomes God the Father's supreme example of what it means to be fully human, to live in history and to participate in culture. The life of Jesus models for all cultures what it means to fully realize our true humanity' (180).

Chapter seven presents 'An Evangelical Theology of Religions'. Tennent finds the relationship between special and general revelation crucial for developing a theology of religions (195). In this discussion he endeavours to move beyond the pluralist, inclusivist, exclusivist paradigms as well as the contemporary postmodern acceptance model which is found inadequate for evaluating the claims of the world's religions. Jesus is the ultimate standard by which to judge all religions, including Christianity (223). In this debate the emergence of a global church must not be ignored. 'The rise of the Majority World church... is taking place in the midst of religious pluralism' similar to that of the first century (215). 'Any theology of religions today must be articulated from the perspective of the global church, not the dwindling community of Enlightenment scholarship' (220). Tennent's solution is a call to *revelatory particularism* centred in Christ and the Bible. 'An evangelical theology of religions can never relinquish the normative nature of biblical revelation or the final primacy of Jesus Christ' (221).

This book was written to commemorate the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference and celebrates the 'marvelous translatability of the gospel of Jesus Christ in an increasingly global context' (10). As such, *Invitation to World Missions* is a worthy contribution to the 'Invitation to Theological Studies' series published by Kregel. It is highly recommended for mission practitioners as well as for scholars. The author, Timothy C. Tennent, is president of Asbury Theological Seminary, USA. He previously taught and directed mission programmes at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, and for twenty years lectured at New Theological College in Dehra Dun, India.

The One God: a critically developed evangelical doctrine of Trinitarian unity by Michael L. Chiavone (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co., 2009) ISBN 978-0-227-17362-6 Pb., 2342 pp, bibliog.

In this short book, the author, who teaches at Temple University, TN., and Liberty Seminary, VA, sets out to construct an evangelical theology of the unity of God which avoids the faults of other efforts and is still orthodox, biblical, understandable and does not lead to the problems with other aspects of theology, especially the unity of God and the incarnation. He does so by interacting with four recent examples of Trinitarian theological reflection (Karl Rahner, Millard Erickson, John Zizioulas, and Wolfhart Pannenberg), a chapter on each forming the core of the book. The opening chapter lays out the aims and an overview of the project, together with a survey of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity and a short discussion of theological issues involved.

The final chapter summarises the findings, reviews the criteria for a successful doctrine and then sets out the author's position both in overview and in detail. He argues that the solution to the long standing problems of theological unity is to be found in the fact that 'God is three divine persons, three centers of choice and consciousness who eternally and perfectly love and fellowship with one another. These three persons possess a numerically singular essence, which provides a basis for their personal reality and divine attributes.' (220f.) The author's case is made clearly and the book is a model of logical development and effective presentation; he is comfortable with this relatively simple conclusion because he believes that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* means that 'true (working) knowledge of the Trinity' is possible; even if 'the entire truth about the Trinity' is not attainable, he claims there is no need to think that it must be 'severely limited'.

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

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Interfaces. Baptists and Others

David Bebbington & Martin Sutherland (eds)

The book is a collection of twenty-one essays discussing how Baptists throughout the world have related to other Christians and to other institutions and movements over the centuries.

The theme of this collection of twenty-one essays, 'Baptists and Others', includes relations with other Christians and with other institutions and movements. What, the authors ask, has been the Baptist experience of engaging with different groups and developments? The theme has been explored by means of case studies, some of which are very specific in time and place while others cover long periods and more than one country. In the first half the contents are arranged by period. The first section examines early Baptists, the second nineteenth-century Baptists in Britain and America and the third Baptists in the twentieth century. The second half turns to various parts of the world. There is a section on Australia, another on New Zealand and a third on Asia and Africa. The overall picture is one of a complicated series of relationships as Baptists defined themselves as different from other bodies and yet, especially in the twentieth century, tried to co-operate in mission and ecumenical endeavour.

Contents

Brian Brewer, Free Church Sacramentalism; *Ruth Gouldbourne*, Episcopate without Episcopacy; *Derek Murray*, Scotch Baptists and the Churches of Christ; *Timothy Whelan*, William Wilberforce and John Ryland; *Daniel Dunivan*, Denominational Identity in Frontier Indiana; *Terry Carter*, Baptist and Catholics in the US; *Michael Collis*, Baptists and Church Unity in Wales; *Callum Jones*, Western Canadian Baptists and Ecumenical Initiatives; *Brian Talbot*, Baptists and Other Christian Churches; *Geoffrey Treloar*, Baptists and the World, 1900-1940; *Ken Manley*, Australian Baptists and the State; *John Walker*, South Australian Baptists and Other Denominations; *Ian Breward*, Donnan Mitchell (1890-1954); *Graham Paulson*, Baptists and Indigenous Australians; *Laurie Guy*, J.J. Doke: Baptists, Humanity and Justice; *John Tucker*, New Zealand Baptists and Social Justice; *Steve Taylor*, Baptist Worship and Contemporary Culture.

Baptists are often regarded as enthusiastic separatists and unenthusiastic ecumenists. These essays, based on hard evidence rather than passing impressions, are a necessary correction to superficial prejudices and show the reality to be much more complex and nuanced, as well as varied over time and place.

Derek Tidball, formerly Principal of London School of Theology

This volume demonstrates not only the extent of the Baptist witness but also its depth, diversity, and spirituality. It is an important contribution to understanding Baptist history identity, and ecumenicity.

Timothy George, Dean of Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, USA

David Bebbington is Professor of History at Stirling University; Martin Sutherland is Vice-Principal at Laidlaw College, Auckland.

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