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Editor's Introduction

I am overjoyed to be part of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* because of the excellent and interesting articles we receive from different fields, as we endeavour to reflect theologically on issues that affect the church and the world.

We start this issue with two articles on missions. Experienced mission and academic leader Rupen Das presents the state of mission in the Majority World, based on the experiences and lenses of prominent leaders in the field. Emmanuel Oumarou, from Cameroon, discusses how to minister effectively in oral cultures. Both essays can remind the body of Christ of ways to remove colonial or other cultural mindsets in reaching people with the gospel.

Three complementary articles present innovative approaches to racial issues. Daniel Wiley offers a great hermeneutics lesson as he negotiates the conflict between segregationist and abolitionist interpretations of Acts 17:26. Ron Lindo contributes a well-argued Old Testament perspective that illustrates the importance of both countering racial injustice and achieving reconciliation. Anna Droll, backed by significant insights from Acts, digs deeply into ways to bridge the divides that prevent believers from being joined together in the Spirit.

We also offer three interesting historical reflections. Dennis Petri considers what we can learn from three Christian political philosophers: Blaise Pascal, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer and C. S. Lewis. Leah Farish writes on the forgotten practice of communion tokens and how it reinforced the seriousness of communion and the communal aspect of Christianity. Geoffrey Butler probes the fascinating evidence that, while Luther battled with his fellow Reformers over the Lord's Supper, he found common cause with a representative of Ethiopian Christianity.

Finally, *ERT* editor Bruce Barron reflects on his long experience with the prosperity gospel to illustrate the importance of better equipping untrained pastors in the Majority World.

Call for Papers

We have developed a call for papers on two pressing issues:

Political theology in and for the Majority World. How does our confession of Jesus' lordship affect our approach to cultural issues (e.g. injustice, extrajudicial killings, relations with unfriendly governments)? How should we live as faithful witnesses in these contexts? Due date: 1 February 2023 for the May 2023 edition.

Digital theology. The digital world is affecting our understanding of the transcendent (God), the nature of the church (ecclesiology), human consciousness (theological anthropology), and the role of technology in our Christian witness. We are dealing with fake news, virtual reality, the power of the Web, and more. We need good theological thinking on these emerging topics! Due date: 1 May 2023 for the August 2023 edition.

We continue to welcome submissions on any topic as we seek to publish stimulating articles 'with clarity and relevance to both the church and the world' (WEA Theological Commission, https://theology.worldea.org/).

— Francis Jr. S. Samdao, Assistant Editor

What the Majority World Is Saying about Mission Today

Rupen Das

With the centre of global Christianity shifting to the Majority World, what do church and mission leaders in the Global South think mission should be about today? This article describes the situation through the eyes of some prominent mission leaders from across the globe.

The centre of gravity of global Christianity has shifted, with about 66% of all Christians now living in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This figure, up from 43% in 1970 and projected to reach 75% by 2050,[1] stands in marked contrast to the demographics of the Christian faith a century ago. Before 1910, four times as many Christians lived in the Global North as in the Majority World.[2] Since 1910, not only has global church growth shifted to the Majority World,[3] but that growth is also overflowing into the West as a significant number of refugees and migrants are either Christians or becoming followers of Christ.[4] Africa and Latin America are now sources rather than only recipients of mission activity.[5]

The legacy of Protestant missions is mixed at best. Colonialism, which facilitated access to the mission field for many missionaries, has had a damaging impact across the world, the residual effects of which are still evident in numerous countries and their cultures, especially amongst their indigenous populations. The recent discovery of hundreds of graves of children at residential schools for indigenous students in Canada exemplified the extent of the abuse and destruction of these peoples and cultures.

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1   G. Bellofatto and T. Johnson, 'Key Findings of Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970–2020', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37, no. 3 (2013): 157–64.
2   Pew Research Center, 'Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population' (2011), https://worldea.org/yourls/46301.
3   I will use the terms Majority World and Global South interchangeably, though there are distinctions between the two.
4   Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113–15.
5   Ebenezer Yaw Blasu and Joshua Settles, 'The "Surprise" in Mission History: Prospects for African Cross-Cultural Mission to the West', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, no. 4 (2021): 346; Alberto Arce, 'A Surge of Evangelicals in Spain, Fueled by Latin Americans', AP News, 4 January 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46302.

Despite the heavy criticisms of colonial missions voiced by contemporary post-colonial narratives, a significant number of Protestant missionaries were not part of the colonial enterprise and its exploitation.[6] Although these missionary initiatives, particularly in education and medical services, have often been reinterpreted and dismissed as tools of the colonial powers to control local populations,[7] other voices provide a compelling counter-narrative. Sri Lankan theologian D. Preman Niles writes that most early missionaries to South Asia came from the working class—craftsmen, small traders, shoemakers, printers, ship builders and schoolteachers. He says of William Carey, the father of the modern missionary movement, 'It was his social background and his identification with people of his class in countries to which he went that influenced his attitude and shaped his theology.' Niles contends that missionaries were never part of the colonial enterprise at home and rarely aligned with people in power: 'A missionary movement arose with the desire not to exploit nations but to take to them a divine treasure.'[8]

The shift of global Christianity to the Majority World has been accompanied by a distinct realignment of missionary efforts and investments. While there were still 121,000 active American missionaries in 2015, the top 20 countries sending missionaries included Brazil, the Philippines, China, South Korea, India, Nigeria and South Africa. These Majority World countries combined to account for 101,000 international missionaries.[9] And this number does not take into account the efforts of indigenous churches and mission agencies within their own countries. Mission has become increasingly polycentric, as the title of Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali's book *From Everywhere to Everywhere*[10] so aptly indicates.

Nevertheless, a commonly expressed refrain among many Christian leaders in the Majority World is that Western worldviews, theological frameworks, strategies and funding still dominate most discussions and literature on mission, evangelism and theological education.

We need to understand the dynamics driving the growth in missions within the Majority World. Gambian theologian Lamin Sanneh stated that a commitment to mission looks very different for people from outside the West:

> To a surprising degree, third-world Christians, or 'majority-world' Christians in the language of political correctness, are not burdened by a Western guilt complex, and so they have embraced the vocation of mission as a concomitant of the gospel they have embraced: The faith they received they must in turn share. … Christianity came to them while they had other equally plausible religious

6   Jione Havea, *Religion and Power* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Academic, 2018). A theme throughout most of the essays is Christianity's role in decolonization and resisting empire.

7   See Robert S. Heaney, *Post-Colonial Theology: Finding God and Each Other Amidst the Hate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019).

8   D. Preman Niles, *From East and West: Rethinking Christian Mission* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 74.

9   Cheng-Tozun, 'What Majority-World Missions Really Looks Like', *Christianity Today*, 26 August 2019, https://worldea.org/yourls/46303.

10   Michael Nazir-Ali, *From Everywhere to Everywhere: A Worldview of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991).

options. Choice rather than force defined their adoption of Christianity; often discrimination and persecution accompanied and followed that choice.[11]

The handful of voices of the colonized peoples from the Global South at the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (just 20 of 1,215 delegates came from outside the West[12]) were prophetic as they spoke about the need for the church and mission to be rooted in the local context. It would take almost another century before this vision started to materialize. The world of mission has changed and we need to listen to what Majority World voices are saying about the future of missions.

Listening to mission leaders in the Majority World

The seismic shift in the demographics and geography of the Christian movement is not the result of any strategy by mission agencies. It can only be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. The growth has not been coordinated and it crosses denominational lines. No master plan, blueprint or standardized methodology has been instrumental in this growth; rather, a variety of factors have influenced the growth in different countries and different regions.

Having worked with missions in the Majority World and related to them in different capacities for much of my life, I have had the privilege to witness this global shift taking place. My own experience influences my perspective. Argentinian theologian Jose Miguel Bonino states that any theologian belongs to a specific culture, a social class or group, and a tradition, and as a result writes from within that context, influenced by human, social and historical realities.[13] I am ethnically South Asian and have lived in 11 countries since childhood, making me a global nomad— that is, someone who feels comfortable anywhere in the world but has roots nowhere. While I straddle multiple worlds and cultures, I often find myself an outsider in all of them. As a result, it is hard for me to embrace any one ethnic or cultural identity because I view myself as a mosaic of identities.[14] My mixed background has given me the unique ability to listen to local voices through multiple cultural filters and see issues from a variety of perspectives.

Over the past few decades, I have intentionally listened to what Global South mission leaders were saying. I also read the writings of emerging voices from the Majority World. Prior to composing this article, I interacted with 38 individuals from 19 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. Most of these were living in their home countries, but some were based in Europe, the UK or Canada, in diaspora communities, theological institutions and mission organizations. This group of people spans the denominational spectrum in the Global South; all would

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11   Quoted by Saba Imtiaz, 'A New Generation Redefines What It Means to Be a Missionary', *The Atlantic*, 8 March 2018, https://worldea.org/yourls/46304.

12   Francis Anekwe Oborji, 'Edinburgh 1910 and Christian Identity Today: An African Perspective', *Missiology: An International Review* 41, no. 3 (2013): 302.

13   Jose Miguez Bonino, 'Doing Theology in the Context of the Struggle of the Poor', *Mid-Stream* 20, no. 4 (1981): 369–70.

14   A person's reactions, mode of thinking and intuition depend on the context in which the matter is presented, or 'what evolutionary psychologists call the "domain" of the object or event. … We react to a piece of information not on its logical merits, but on the basis of which framework surrounds it, and how it registers with our social-emotional system.' Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2010), 53.

qualify as theologically evangelical, though some might not use that label. A few were representatives of Western mission agencies and churches. I encountered these informants in such contexts as Baptist World Alliance member churches, Canadian Baptist Ministries, the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), Overseas Council, the Majority World Christian Leaders Conversation (MWCLC),[15] Tyndale University in Toronto, the Navigators in India (Shishya Sabha) and Thailand, and the United Bible Societies (UBS). I have limited my focus to the Protestant world; the Catholic Church would require a separate article.

Theologian Ivan Illich, writing about the growth of the Christian church into new peoples and beyond social and linguistic boundaries, described the church as marvelling at ever new images and experiencing the church as surprise.[16] Indeed, 'ever new images' and the 'church as surprise' probably best describe my own journey as I tried to discern my colleagues' understanding of God's mission, the concerns that weighed on their hearts, their missiological priorities, the challenges of developing missional leaders in their contexts, the complexity of partnerships with Western mission agencies and churches, and what the work of mission looks like to them. I have tried, where possible, to connect what I was hearing from my informants with existing literature, seeking to discern specific insights and recurring subjects and themes.

In spite of a growing trend to deconstruct and reinterpret the history of the modern missionary movement and to establish distinct non-Western voices, most leaders maintained a deep appreciation for what historical missions have contributed to the church and society. As one Asian church leader put it, there would be no church in his country and he would not be a Christian if not for Western missionaries. At the same time, he and others did not gloss over the abuses and malpractice that media coverage and post-colonial literature have often highlighted. They recognize the continuing damage these abuses have caused. There is a general agreement that some Western attitudes and practices are wrong and need to change.

The following discussion summarizes my findings under six headings: theology in context and biblical narratives, missiological concerns and priorities, missional leadership, partnerships, the work of mission, and overall conclusions.

Theology in context and biblical narratives

The church in the Majority World has moved beyond the days when there was an unquestioned acceptance of the theology, ecclesiology, and forms of worship and ministry delivered to them by Western missionaries. In spite of its foreignness, the church did take root across the world. However, while Christians became a distinct minority in the cultural and religious mosaic of many countries or established a

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15   The MWCLC enables voices from the Global South to speak about Christian mission. 'The MWCLC is not in opposition to anybody. The movement is not identified, not defined as anti-western but is an attempt at finding our own voice and speaking for ourselves. We believe that in itself, this is a major step toward decolonization of mission, but not by creating a new centre or by avoiding cooperation or partnership with agencies across the world who purport to be into the missio Dei.' Nico A. Botha and Eugene Baron, eds., *Majority Perspectives on Christian Mission* (Johannesburg: UJ Press, 2022), vii.

16   Ivan Illich, *Mission and Midwifery* (Gwelo, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1974), 7.

cultural Christianity in others, the message of Christ generally did not penetrate local cultures.[17] Christ was perceived as either a foreign god, irrelevant, or a cultural icon.

A new generation of emerging theologians is seeking to interpret what Christ and Christianity mean within their local cultural and social contexts.[18] One pioneer among evangelicals was the late Kwame Bediako, along with his colleagues at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture in Ghana.

All theologies are contextual. The history of contextualization is complex and replete with success, mistakes and pitfalls which have provided insights into the relationship between Christ and culture.[19] Contextualizations of the gospel fall into one of two categories: *inculturation*, where the gospel is expressed using different philosophical frameworks and cultural norms, or *liberation theologies* that use social analysis of a local context as the starting point for Christian reflection and praxis.[20] A number of streams of missional spirituality and strategy in the Majority World have their roots in liberation theology; amongst the most notable are Dalit, African, and Palestinian versions.[21] These have found fertile ground among specific marginalized and oppressed communities as they interpret the gospel within their own context as a way to respond to oppression.

Attempts at inculturation of the gospel have resulted in considerable writings on cultural conceptions of God and how they relate to biblical revelation.[22] These works explore differing worldviews and how they influence hermeneutics, soteriology and

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17 'With two-thirds of sub-Saharan Africa professing to be Christian it should be a concern to all Christians that the biblical worldview has had little impact on the shaping of contemporary African culture.' Jack Pryor Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa: Engaging Syncretism in the African Church through Philosophical Analysis of Worldviews* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2013), back cover.

18 Amongst the many publications from the Majority World grappling with contextual theology and missiology, I would note these works published by the Langham Global Library in Carlisle, UK: Rodney L. Reed, *African Contextual Realities* (2018); Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue and K. K. Yeo, *Jesus Without Borders: Christology in the Majority World* (2015); Timoteo G. Gener and Stephen T. Pardue, *Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives* (2019); Martin Heisswolf, *Japanese Understanding of Salvation: Soteriology in the Context of Japanese Animism* (2018); Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (2012).

19 H. Richard Niebuhr's taxonomy of the interface of Christ and culture is probably the best framework by which to understand the richness of theologies emerging from the Majority World. See Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

20 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 420–56.

21 Peniel Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities* (London: Routledge, 2010); Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993); Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017).

22 Archie C. C. Lee, 'God's Asian Names: Rendering the Biblical God in Chinese', SBL Forum, 2005, https://worldea.org/yourls/46305; Rodney L. Reed and David K. Ngaruiya, *Who Do You Say That I Am? Christology in Africa* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021); Samuel Escobar, *In Search of Christ in Latin America: From Colonial Image to Liberating Savior* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2019). On the controversy over the use of familial language in Arabic to describe the relationship between Jesus and the Father, see WEA Global Review Panel, *Report to World Evangelical Alliance for Conveyance to Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL International* (2013).

ecclesiology.[23] The challenge many face in developing contextualized theology is to avoid syncretism with local traditional religions and practices.[24] They grapple with their own history of Christian mission;[25] struggle with trying to find an indigenous identity rather than being agents of a foreign religion;[26] and seek to address sociopolitical issues such as corruption,[27] authoritarian governments,[28] oppression, persecution, living as a minority,[29] relating to other religions,[30] conflict,[31] "peace-

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23 On hermeneutics, R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Challenging the Interpretations* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Elizabeth Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2019). On soteriology, Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo, eds., *So Great a Salvation: Soteriology in the Majority World* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2017). On ecclesiology, some leaders are experimenting with John Travis' spectrum to describe Christ-centred communities as a way to define new forms of being the church in religiously pluralistic contexts. John Travis, 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of "Christ Centered Communities"', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (October 1998): 407–8. I was involved with Shishya Sabha (the Navigators) in India in the 1980s when they were using this approach amongst Hindu and Muslim followers of Christ.

24 David Chung, *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); David Lindenfeld and Miles Richardson, *Beyond Conversion and Syncretism: Indigenous Encounters with Missionary Christianity, 1800–2000* (New York: Berghahn, 2011).

25 Willem Saayman, 'Christian Mission History in South Africa: Rethinking the Concept', *Missionalia* 23, no. 2 (1995): 184–200; Eraston Kighoma, 'Rethinking Mission, Missions and Money: A Focus on the Baptist Church in Central Africa', *HTS Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (11 April 2019).

26 Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa in association with Paternoster, 2000); James Treat, *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1996); David Kirwa Tarus, *A Different Way of Being: Towards a Reformed Theology of Ethnopolitical Cohesion for the Kenyan Context* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2019).

27 Martin Allaby, *Corruption and the Church: Voices from the Global South* (Oxford: Regnum, 2018); Alfred Sebahene, *Corruption Mocking Justice* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2017).

28 Melba Padilla Maggay, *Dark Days of Authoritarianism* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2019).

29 Leaders of the Lebanese Baptists in Beirut speak about how Christians (especially evangelicals) can thrive as a minority in Lebanon. See also Sunday Bobai Agang, *God of the Remnant: The Plight of Ethnic Minority Groups in Africa* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021).

30 Moses Parmar, 'Missiological Challenges for Hinduism', in *Majority World Perspectives on Christian Mission*, ed. Nico A. Botha and Eugene Baron (Johannesburg: UJ Press, 2022), 33–43. Martin Accad has written on Christianity's relation to Islam in *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian-Muslim Divide* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019); Martin Accad et al., *Christian Presence and Witness among Muslims* (Cuxhaven, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2005); Martin Accad and Jonathan Andrews, *The Religious Other: A Biblical Understanding of Islam, the Qur'an and Muhammad* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2020).

31 African authors who have reflected missiologically on conflicts in their own countries include Eraston Kambale Kighoma, *Church and Mission in the Context of War: A Descriptive Missiological Study of the Response of the Baptist Church in Central Africa to the War in Eastern Congo between 1990 and 2011* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2021); Mipo E. Dadang, *A Cry for Help: A Missiological Reflection on Violent Response to Religious Tension in Northern Nigeria* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2022).

building",[32] and certain cultural values and rituals.[33]

Although Western theologians since Augustine have contemplated a theology of the state as an institution, some Majority World theologians have had to grapple theologically with issues of political power by non-state actors because as minorities they are often victims of the abuse of such power.[34] As critical as inculturation and contextualization of the gospel are, African theologian Emmanuel Katongole writes that as Africa continues to change, the key issues facing Africans are hunger, disease, poverty and violence. There is a need not only to respond to these systemic problems, but also to develop a theological framework to make sense of their prevalence.[35]

As important as these theological discourses are for the maturing of indigenous churches, they have mainly stayed within seminaries and among theologians. Based on my observations, they have not yet found traction in church life nor influenced missional strategy on a wider scale, even though these issues affect the daily lives of Christians. The understanding of mission amongst most Protestant (including evangelical) Christians in the Majority World focuses on the redeeming work of God through the death and resurrection of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ, his offer of forgiveness and reconciliation, and new life offered through the Holy Spirit. Out of these emphases, the work of mission occurs largely in the form of evangelism, church planting, discipleship, training leaders, and ministries of compassion.

One recurring theme among the mission leaders was that a missional theology must encompass all of life and creation and not be limited to reconciliation with God and reaching the world for Christ.[36] Rene Padilla understood integral mission as integrating faith and the gospel with life, not just pairing evangelism with social action.[37] In my conversations and in the emerging literature, the term 'Kingdom of

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32 The work of Salim Munayer and of Musalaha in the midst of the Israel-Palestine conflict provides an excellent example. Salim J. Munayer, *Journey Through the Storm: Lessons from Musalaha—Ministry of Reconciliation* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2020). Rula Khoury Mansour's work on peace studies at Nazareth Evangelical College is another example; see Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 'News from Nazareth Evangelical College: An Award for Rula Mansour', n.d., https://worldea.org/yourls/46306. Also see Levi Lukadi Noah, *Reconciliation and Peace in South Sudan* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2012); Sunday Bobai Agang, *No More Cheeks to Turn* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2016).

33 Hann Tzuu Joey Tan, *The Beasts, the Graves, and the Ghosts: A Study of Contextualized Preaching during Chinese Festivals* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2020).

34 William A. Dyrness, ed., *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 14; Havea, *Religion and Power*.

35 Emmanuel M. Katongole, *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 153–84. Katongole sees the role of the church as foundational in theologizing. He writes, 'The church's own existence and way of life can be the site from which Africa's social and material needs might be analyzed, mobilized, and shaped in a definite manner' (p. 169).

36 For example, see Joanne Beach, 'Is Our Gospel Too Small?' The Alliance Canada, 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/46307. Beach told of pastors at a conference in East Africa who spoke about their country, which is over 80% Christian, as beset by corruption, poverty, environmental degradation, ethnic strife and poor governance. They bemoaned the fact that Christianity has not had much impact on social values and commented that 'the missionaries brought us too small of a gospel.'

37 C. Rene Padilla, *Mission between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 83. I also was privileged to participate in conversation with Padilla during a two-day visit to his home in Buenos Aires in July 2007.

God' is frequently used to describe this all-encompassing focus on mission and ministry. This understanding of the Kingdom of God in the Global South as a missional framework, broader than the salvation narrative of God's redemption and forgiveness, subsumes the issue of forgiveness and eternal life within the larger context of entering the Kingdom.[38] For example, at the 2017 MWCLC in Malaysia, many participants expressed the need for a greater understanding of what it means to be a citizen of this kingdom, since they live in non-Christianized societies that may be hostile to the Christian faith and its values. The defining biblical narrative for these leaders is the Kingdom of God and the lordship of Christ, rather than just the salvation story.

One mission leader whom I taught and who now works in Pakistan spoke about the need for a theology of persecution and suffering after the bombing of a church that killed 81 people. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, Mani Chacko, General Secretary of the Bible Society of India, wrote about the need for a theology of death because of the devastation the virus has wrought on families.[39] Not much literature in the Western evangelical tradition has addressed the question of how to live a godly and Christ-centered life in the midst of pervasive evil, persecution, hardships, suffering and death.[40] There is even less on how one can be a witness to the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ in such a world.

Foundational to any theology emerging from the Global South is the understanding that their cultures use a different epistemology from Western cultures. Without denying the rational, their epistemology includes the miraculous, the supernatural, signs, wonders, dreams, intuitions and feelings as an integral part of how people perceive truth.[41] Many of the leaders with whom I interacted described appearances of the supernatural in their own lives and ministries.[42] In contrast, for the Western world, only human reason can provide the knowledge of reality and eternity. Modern Western philosophy has an inadequate explanation of the metaphysical because it devalues the supernatural and the non-material. We have

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38 Bill Houston from South Africa refers to the Kingdom of God as the missing framework in theological curricula, in 'The Kingdom of God and Theological Education in Contemporary Africa', *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 12 (2007): 1–14.

39 M. Mani Chacko, 'Toward a Theology of Death', *Bible Society of India E-Newsletter* (October 2021), https://worldea.org/yourls/46308.

40 J. Bryson Arthur, *A Theology of Suffering* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2020); Rodney L. Reed, *Christianity and Suffering: African Perspectives* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2017).

41 Ethnoepistemology is a growing but controversial discipline. For an in-depth understanding of how the poor in the Global South are encountering Christ through a non-Western epistemology, see Rupen Das, *The God That the Poor Seek: Conversion, Context and the World of the Vulnerable* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2022). Many converts from Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism have described the role of the supernatural in their conversion. Kelly Michael Hilderbrand, 'What Led Thai Buddhist Background Believers to Become Christians: A Study of One Church in Bangkok', *Missiology: An International Review* 44, no. 4 (2016): 400–415; J. Dudley Woodberry, Russell G. Shubin and G. Marks, 'Why Muslims Follow Jesus: The Results of a Recent Survey of Converts from Islam', *Christianity Today,* 24 October 2007, https://worldea.org/yourls/46309; Joshua Iyadurai, *Transformative Religious Experience: A Phenomenological Understanding of Religious Conversion* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

42 Bishop Emeritus Hwa Yung of Malaysia referred to miracles and dreams as part of their congregational life, a view that Western visitors have had a hard time appreciating.

much work to do in this regard, because most Western missions and academics do not acknowledge value in any non-Western epistemology.[43]

A few mission leaders from Asia and the Middle East spoke about the need for a better theology regarding the role of women in the church and society. At present, many Christian cultures in the Global South do not affirm God's calling in the lives and ministries of women. Nevertheless, women continue to play a vital role in the life of the church and in missions.[44]

Significant theological reflection is occurring in the Majority World with regard to the church, its mission, and the place and role of Christians in society. As Christians there look at their own faith history, they grapple with the reality of social and institutional evil (not just personal sin), wondering how Christ's followers should respond. Amongst the leaders I listened to and interacted with, theological reflection was a highly practical part of mission and evangelism, not just an academic exercise.

Missiological concerns

It is important to note what was missing in the leaders' comments. Phrases such as 'reaching the world for Christ' and 'transforming communities and society' were rare. These terms assume that one has the power, resources, and social and political capital to make such things happen. They tend to overlook the presence of sin and evil embedded in society that resist change.

There can be no doubt of the vibrancy of Majority World Christians' witness, as evidenced by the church's growth. But what is the vision that energizes such vibrancy? What do the Great Commission and the Great Commandment look like when Christians are minorities, often marginalized and lacking the resources to look beyond their community?[45] With mission still widely perceived as a Western enterprise, these questions have not been seriously considered.

Nico Botha of South Africa asked at the 2017 MWCLC what it means to be followers of Christ and citizens of the Kingdom in the midst of empire.[46] In the early church, the challenge was to follow Christ in the context of the Roman Empire. The choice was not just between worshipping the Creator God as revealed in Jesus Christ and worshipping Caesar; the early Christians lived in a culture steeped in debauchery, injustice, violence and idolatry and hostile to everything that Christians believed and valued. Those Christians had to choose how they should live. In

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43 Other than among Pentecostals, the acknowledgement of the supernatural by Western evangelicals is fairly recent. See Harold A. Netland, *Religious Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022); Travis Dickinson, 'Religious Experiences Are Common. Which Ones Should We Trust?' *Christianity Today*, 14 February 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46310.

44 Julie Ma, 'The Role of Christian Women in the Global South', *Transformation* 31, no. 3 (2014): 194–206.

45 Emerging examples are Christian housemaids from Philippines and Ethiopia working in the Middle East, who express their mission as being witnesses to the families of the middle class, the rich and the elite.

46 Nico A. Botha, 'Church and Mission: Unavoidable Issues Defining the Relationship', in *Majority World Perspectives on Christian Mission*, ed. Nico A. Botha and Eugene Baron (Johannesburg: UJ Press, 2022), 48.

contrast, Protestant missions that brought the gospel to the Majority World originated in Christendom and did not understand Christians as minorities living in hostile and alien cultures.

Western evangelical Christianity is very Constantinian—that is, it tends to view the church and state as working together in an alliance to achieve mutual goals, and it assumes a cultural context in which being a Christian carries positive social and political value. This tendency is reflected in Western teaching and training materials on discipleship, ethics and Christian living, which overlook the pressing question of how to be followers of Christ as religious and social minorities. Nor do these materials address issues of violence, poverty, and social and economic injustice, which pervade the life contexts of many Global South Christians. As a result, they produce what Emmanuel Katongole refers to as a disembodied spirituality,[47] where most people adhere to the Christian faith yet that faith does not permeate society or transform social values and cultural practices.

A number of leaders spoke about finding their place as a community within the social and cultural fabric of their countries. As minorities, they often face the stigma of not belonging to the mainstream of society.[48] They often wonder how they can contribute to their country's well-being or participate in nation building.[49] Contributing to the well-being of their nation while being a minority establishes their group's claim to be an integral part of their country and can also protect them.[50] They draw inspiration from Jeremiah's exhortation to the Jews in exile: 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon … seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper' (Jer 29:5, 8).

Despite the considerable talk about integral mission, I heard various leaders express surprise that Western evangelicals were trying to find a place for social concern within the gospel. The term 'integral mission' was coined by Rene Padilla, a theologian from the Global South. Understanding the mission of God holistically is natural for the church in the Majority World. Their worldview does not differentiate the spiritual from the physical and social. Unfortunately, the evangelical Christianity they had been taught and inherited denied this wholeness and focused only on the spiritual and eternal, ignoring the social dimensions of their faith as evidenced by evangelistic tools such as the Bridge Illustrations, the Four Spiritual Laws and the

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47   Katongole, *A Future for Africa,* 175. Katongole states that the African church has remained captive to a Western understanding of the church as a spiritual enclave or an agency for pastoral care.

48   For instance, a Protestant denomination in Turkey wrestles with being Christians within a hostile political and religious context. While they assert their Turkishness, they struggle with how closely they should align themselves with the ruling political party for their own protection.

49   Gideon Para-Mallam, 'The Role of Christians in Nation Building', in *Majority World Perspectives on Christian Mission*, ed. Nico A. Botha and Eugene Baron (Johannesburg: UJ Press, 2022), 88–113; Hwa Yung, 'The Gospel and Nation Building in Emergent Nations: An Evangelical Agenda', in *Majority World Perspectives on Christian Mission*, 172–95.

50   A Baptist leader in Lebanon, in personal conversation, said that the small Protestant minority in their country, by contributing to social well-being through their schools, hospitals, humanitarian programs and specialized human services, make themselves invaluable to the country.

Roman Road, and discipleship materials such as the Design for Discipleship. Christians in the Global South are having to rediscover this wholeness of their faith.

From my own experience of working with World Vision and church-based agencies, for most Western evangelicals integral mission means responding to disasters and addressing poverty through community development along with spiritual ministry. These responses mostly take the form of time-limited projects with specific budgets. Although there is a legitimate place for such activity, holistic or integral mission as described by many Majority World leaders is much more than that. It is a way of living and being that encompasses concern for the environment,[51] peace[52] and addressing social conflict.[53] It addresses ethical business practices (especially corruption)[54] and good governance.[55] These strategies depart from the traditional reliance on time-bound projects with specific outcomes.

Some leaders expressed concern about many people's inability to see God at work in the broader world. The model that the Global South received from Western missions implied that God works only through the church to reconcile the world to himself. But some, consistent with the theological idea of common grace, see God's hand in social reform movements outside the church that attempt to make society more equitable and safer so that everyone can be blessed.[56] They understand God's mission, the *missio Dei*, as redeeming, reconciling and restoring all creation. God's mission is greater than anything that Christians and the church can envisage, and he invites his people to partner with him in it.

Also, some leaders felt that Western evangelicals and mission agencies do not acknowledge or appreciate the growing contribution of indigenous missions in the Majority World unless they were funded or resourced by Western churches or

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51 The Africa Brotherhood Church (ABC) in Kenya, through its Agricultural Resource and Technology Center in Kibwezi, trains farmers in sustainable agriculture and water conservation to reduce negative impacts on the environment. See also Jean-Pierre Ibucwa Lipanda, 'Congo's Christians Confront a Climate Crisis', *Plough*, 17 May 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46311; Ken Gnanakan, *Responsible Stewardship of God's Creation* (New York: World Evangelical Alliance, 2014).

52 Paul N. Alexander (ed.), *Christ at the Checkpoint: Theology in the Service of Justice and Peace* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012). Christ at the Checkpoint conferences are hosted by Palestinian Christians living in Israel.

53 The work of Rev. Gato Munyamasoko of the Association des Eglises Baptistes au Rwanda (AEBR) in Rwanda and other parts of East Africa, stressing peace-building and reconciliation as an integral part of the church's mission, offers a significant model of addressing needs in areas affected by war and civil conflict.

54 Christian leaders with whom I spoke often referred to corruption because it affected their lives and ministries. See Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, *Breaking the Chains of Corruption: A Christian Approach* (Nairobi: Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, 2019); Vinay Samuel, 'Business and Corruption', paper presented at Integrity in Business in the Central European Context, 11–16 March 1994, Kastiel Kocovce, Slovakia, https://worldea.org/yourls/46312.

55 T. Pacho, 'African Churches and Good Governance in Africa', in *Anthology of African Christianity*, ed. I. A. Phiri, D. Werner, C. Kaunda and K. Owino (Oxford: Regnum, 2017), 110–11. There are a surprising number of articles in general publications and blogs on the role of the church in ensuring good governance, in such diverse countries as Singapore and Nigeria.

56 One example is an open letter written by Muslims to Christians to foster dialogue and social harmony. See 'A Common Word Between Us and You', 2007, https://worldea.org/yourls/46352. Other examples rooted in the Global South are indigenous land rights movements and the movement against apartheid in South Africa.

mission agencies. For example, a bishop of the Africa Brotherhood Church (ABC) in Kenya mentioned his disappointment that their North American partners showed no interest in their church planting and evangelism activity but only in their agriculture and orphans' programs and in theological education. The ABC was particularly excited about having grown beyond their own ethnic community in Kenya and having planted new churches in Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Missional leadership

Many of my respondents felt that Western models of leadership were not always appropriate in their contexts. These models focus more on management and results rather than on the pastoral needs of people and communities. Some leaders and theological educators in India and parts of Africa expressed the need for a more biblical model for leadership that highlights the character of the leader, the spiritual disciplines, and the needs of people.[57] Peter Tarantal of South Africa, who provides leadership to the MWCLC, argues that Global South leaders must have qualities not often emphasized by the Western church, such as being prophetic and having cultural awareness.[58] From their perspective, Western missional leadership is primarily managerial and the spiritual dimension is secondary.[59] Many participants at the 2017 MWCLC said that most conversations with Western mission leaders are all about strategy, results and accountability and rarely about spiritual issues. Some expressed with sadness that they yearned for leaders committed to holiness, prayer, listening for the voice and leading of God, fasting and being rooted in the Word. I would observe generally that mission has become too anthropocentric; the fact that it is *God's* mission is only given lip service and the practical implications of this conviction are rarely understood.

Almost all leaders expressed a huge need for leadership development, as research by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity suggests that only 5% of pastors globally have received formal training from a recognized theological institution. Unfortunately, there are very few non-Western models for training and nurturing leaders. The model of theological training that the missionaries brought initially was developed in Germany by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) in an effort to professionalize Lutheran clergy. But other models have since been developed that are

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57   This issue surfaced in discussions when I was involved in a project with the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) on connecting theological curricula with the context of the graduates. The pilot phase involved ten seminaries in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East. New models for theological training being implemented by African institutions are described in Bill Houston, 'The Future Is Not What It Used To Be: Challenges and Choices Facing Theological Education in Africa', in *Handbook on Theological Education in Africa*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2013), 108–16.

58   Peter Tarantal, 'Global South Christian Leaders: An African Perspective', in *Majority World Perspectives on Christian Mission*, ed. Nico A. Botha and Eugene Baron (Johannesburg: UJ Press, 2022), 1–16.

59   Missiologist Samuel Escobar used the term 'managerial missiology' as one approach to missions. Escobar, 'A Movement Divided: Three Approaches to World Evangelization Stand in Tension with One Another', *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 8, no. 4 (1991): 7–13.

more relevant and sensitive to local contexts and cultures.[60] Only recently has training specific to mission in the Majority World been introduced.[61] Very few books or resources from a non-Western perspective exist on developing and nurturing church leadership outside Bible colleges and seminaries.

The criticisms are not limited to Western leadership models. For example, Peter Tarantal spoke about the 'idolatries of power' among Christian leaders in Africa who seem to imitate secular political leadership.[62] There was concern (especially among Indian evangelical leaders) that some segments of church leadership in their own countries follow unethical local practices, politics and discrimination based on ethnicity, caste or tribe. Such behaviour has compromised the church's witness.

Partnership

Even though the centre of global Christianity has shifted to the Majority World, the basic premise of the 1910 Edinburgh Conference that mission was primarily a project of the Western church still infuses most discussions on partnership.

What does partnership mean?[63] Is it a contractual obligation between two parties, defined by terms and conditions imposed by the funding party? A different model, more relational and based on values of Global South cultures, describes accountability in partnerships as based on trust and mutually defined roles.[64] However, this model must also factor in the reality of sin, which can cause misunderstanding, undermine trust and poison relationships. Because of this challenge, partnership models tend to default towards being managerial and legal in nature.

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60 Re-Forma (see https://worldea.org/yourls/46313) is an initiative that seeks to upgrade pastoral and theological training by providing recognized benchmarks for informal and non-formal, biblically based ministry knowledge. Also see Rupen Das, *Connecting Curriculum with Context: Handbook for Context Relevant Curriculum Development in Theological Education* (Leicester, UK: Langham Global Library, 2015), 12–21 for six models of theological training. Access to theological training and upgrading non-formal training are critical concerns for ICETE. Theological Education by Extension (TEE) is having a significant impact as it tries to meet the need for theologically trained pastors. See Hanna-Ruth van Wingerden, *TEE in Asia: Empowering Churches, Equipping Disciples* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021).
61 Some organizations including Operation Mobilization and Youth with a Mission (YWAM) have been training leaders in the Majority World for some time. Other examples include the Missionary Training Institute in South Korea and the Asian Center for Missions in the Philippines. Leaders in the Philippines are starting a unique lay mission training program for Filipinos going abroad as overseas workers.
62 Tarantal, 'Global South Christian Leaders: An African Perspective', 2–4.
63 Patrick Fung's paper 'Mission Partnership in a Polycentric World', presented at the Global South Leaders Conference, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2017, explores the different dimensions of partnership in mission from a Global South perspective.
64 There is emerging interest in developing cross-cultural partnerships with churches and organizations in the Global South. See Beth Birmingham and Scott Todd, eds., *Shared Strength: Exploring Cross-Cultural Christian Partnerships* (Colorado Springs, CO: Compassion International, 2010); Mary Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010); Werner Mischke, *The Beauty of Partnership* (Scottsdale, AZ: MissionONE, 2010); Daniel Rickett, *Building Strategic Relationships: A Practical Guide to Partnering with Non-Western Missions* (Spokane, WA: Partners International and WinePress Publishers, 2003).

A second issue in any partnership is how the two parties relate to each other. Many Majority World mission leaders feel wounded by the treatment they receive from Western evangelicals and mission leaders. They often feel talked down to and not trusted. Their opinions are not valued. Some spoke of instances when their thoughts and ideas were not heard, even while similar ideas shared by Western mission leaders in clear, articulate English were embraced.

Many spoke about the problem of *managerial missions*. They felt that the management systems required for funding proposals, reporting, evaluations, rigid implementation schedules and personnel management were too onerous and of questionable value. How, they wondered, is this information ever used—if at all? I heard numerous stories of instances where the reports were merely filed away and the comments and lessons learnt were not even acknowledged.[65] Given the complexity of all these requirements, many wondered if there are other ways to manage missions. While supporting the importance of management systems and accountability, they were not convinced that what Western mission agencies required of them was always appropriate in terms of content.

The underlying question in any partnership is how the collaboration begins. A funding relationship is almost always the driving force behind the collaboration. For an indigenous mission to receive funds, it must accept the strategy and the ways of doing ministry prescribed by the funding partner. Quite often, other than a needs assessment, little effort is made to understand the local context, culture and challenges. When consultation occurs, it usually involves the funding partner assessing the capability and trustworthiness of the local partner.[66] There is no opportunity for the indigenous partner to assess the trustworthiness, integrity and cultural awareness of the funding agency! The strategies developed by the funding partner take priority over everything else, including local strategies. When I was with the Canadian Baptists, leaders of partner churches in East Africa and India proposed first engaging with people involved on the front lines, rather than developing a strategy and then engaging the local partner. There should be an understanding of how God is already at work and an attempt to discern how and where he wants the donor organization involved.

One leader summarized the challenge of collaborating by stating that although, in a healthy partnership, both parties should gain, a biblical partnership must also involve sacrificial service.

The work of mission

As mentioned earlier, the growth of the church in the Majority World is not the result of strategic decisions, but a work of God. Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako provided an insightful perspective in this regard: 'Missionaries did not bring Christ

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65 This was not only cited by the ABC and the African Christian Churches and Schools (ACC&S) in Kenya about their North American partners, but also by churches in Syria and Lebanon when receiving funding from overseas donors. One UK charity funding projects in Lebanon used subtle threats to withhold funding if they did not receive reports of a certain quality.

66 I developed an assessment toolkit for Canadian Baptist Ministries that assessed the ministry and capacity of their international indigenous partners and alignment with CBM's values and objectives.

to Africa—Christ brought them.'[67] His comment challenges the idea that mission is a Western enterprise and instead offers a divine perspective on God's mission and how he works. The growth in indigenously funded mission in recent decades is significant. One leader called it 'a great mess' because the growth is dependent on locals' own resources and is often not coordinated. However, several specific issues concerning the work of mission arose frequently.

The first is the concept of closed or restricted-access countries, a Western construct with which some church leaders in the Middle East, North Africa and central Asia struggle. To them, the construct implies that if a country is closed or restricted to foreign missionaries, it is closed to the gospel. But this is not the case! It may be difficult or illegal to be a Christian in such a country, but in every case, a remnant of local believers meets as their circumstances permit. Television and the Internet can and do penetrate through barriers for evangelism and training. In many of these countries, the church continues to grow in spite of restrictions, challenges and persecution. Some leaders in these countries said they want the global church to pray for them, encourage them and walk with them. Few are looking to leave their homelands or emigrate to the West.

Second, many indigenous movements, such as the Friends Missionary Prayer Band[68] in India, are rooted in significant prayer and fasting. Many leaders spoke of these spiritual disciplines as foundational to attempting any mission.

Third, there is growing concern about theologies and church models that have originated in the United States. Many African leaders mentioned the so-called prosperity gospel and some megachurches that have caused significant damage by giving the poor false hope of financial blessings while, in the process, enriching a select handful of people.[69] The lifestyle of many megachurch leaders has damaged the image of Christians in their countries.[70] One general secretary of a Latin American Bible society described other divisive theologies from North America that are gaining traction in Latin America. With large amounts of funding to train leaders and influence congregations, these interlopers often tend to alienate anyone who does not believe as they do.

Finally, based on the history of missions in their countries, some observed that the gospel does not seem to trickle down from the elites and leaders to the rest of

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67 Kwame Bediako, '"Missionaries Did Not Bring Christ to Africa—Christ Brought Them": Why Africa Needs Jesus Christ', lecture presented at the Annual School of Theology of the African Institute for Christian Mission and Research (AICMAR), Butere, Kenya, 1–4 August 2006.

68 On this organization, see Friends Missionary Prayer Band, 'Background', https://worldea.org/yourls/46314.

69 'The "Prosperity gospel" leads to a false sense of wellness, security and, ultimately, false hope. It is exploitation and often adds pain to the sufferer. In African culture, prosperity was linked to work ethic and communal co-existence.' 'African Institute for Contemporary Mission and Research', ACNS Anglican Communion News Service, 2006, https://worldea.org/yourls/46315.

70 On the other hand, Jared Wilson cautions that we should not dismiss God's desire to bless us. He writes, 'The spiritual dysfunction of this theology [the prosperity gospel] is largely about pragmatism, a turning of biblical principles into dubious formulas for wealth and accumulation. It is one thing to think of riches and material possessions as God's blessings. It's another thing entirely to think of them as God's debt to our faithfulness.' Jared C. Wilson, 'In Our Rejection of the Prosperity Gospel, Are We Missing God's Provision?' *Christianity Today*, 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46316.

society. Although leaders felt very proud that evangelical Christians had been elected as president in Guatemala and Malawi, these victories had done little for a greater openness to the gospel, as they did in historical instances in earlier times when a king in Europe or Central Asia converted and declared his country Christian. Others involved in campus ministries such as InterVarsity, Evangelical Union, or Campus Crusade said that university graduates rarely had a spiritual impact beyond their family, church or immediate community. Their spiritual impact did not reach the poor. In contrast, leaders affirmed that in their experience, that the gospel trickles up. Where the elite and leaders have been reached, the gospel tends to stay with them; when the poor are reached by the gospel, within two or three generations, they start moving up economically and socially in society and exert influence around them.[71]

Conclusion

These insights represent only a sampling of the diversity of voices in the Majority World. But if any single overriding issue was evident in all the conversations, talks, presentations and literature, it is that mission in the Majority World must be *rooted in the local*—local worldviews, local mission strategies, local funding, locally contextualized theologies and local understanding of what the Bible says to address moral and social issues. This because Scripture is read and Christ is perceived through the lens of a person's culture and life experiences.

Despite the deep appreciation of the positive value of historical mission from the West, God's people in the Majority World recognize that they now need to assume responsibility for mission and grow in maturity to handle all that it entails, even if they struggle to fund everything they would like to do. They wish to redefine the relationships with the Western church and mission agencies so that the conversations and partnerships are between mutually respecting equals.

Majority World mission leaders know that much work is needed to develop local missional theologies and strategies, understand local models of leadership and training and equip missionaries accordingly, and gain a greater awareness of how God is already working in the Global South. These then need to flow to local congregations. Much more thinking and research are needed on how to live as minorities who glorify God in countries that are hostile to the Christian faith. Locally rooted discipleship must inform what it means to a be disciple and follower of Christ in each place.

Probably the greatest challenges from listening to these leaders are their sense of Christ's sovereignty over the nations and their deep desire for mission to be rooted and grounded in prayer and fasting until God's Kingdom comes and his will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

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71   There is anecdotal evidence for these observations, but no research has been done to prove them. Research on the social mobility of Christian converts indicates a complex set of factors that facilitate upward mobility, with access to education being the primary one.

A Strategy for Christian Missions in Primary Oral Cultures

Emmanuel Oumarou

Nearly one-quarter of all people on earth today are illiterate or rely primarily on oral communication. Standard, text-dependent outreach and discipling methods do not work with these communities. This article, based on considerable first-hand experience as well as academic study, describes the distinctive thinking modes of oral cultures and how to reach them effectively.

The target for Christ's mission of making disciples, as specified in Matthew 28:18–20, is all nations (*ethnē*). By asking his followers to make disciples of all ethnic and cultural groups, Jesus showed strong interest in human cultures and accentuated the need for his mission to unfold within specific cultural contexts.

There are a great number of such contexts. People groups in the world, if categorized in ethno-linguistic terms, number between 11,500 and 13,000; if categorized as cultural-ethno-linguistic peoples, they number about 16,300; and if classified as *unimax* people (i.e. grouped along distinctives such as 'education, political and ideological convictions, historical enmity between clans or tribes, customs and behaviors, etc.'), there are about 24,000.[1]

In this paper, I highlight the urgency of reaching oral cultures with the gospel. This is an urgent matter because a huge portion of the world communicates in oral fashion. About 25% of the global population is *completely illiterate*, or 'unable to write a simple sentence in any language'; 35% is *functionally illiterate*, that is, 'having inadequate reading and writing skills for use in daily life'; 3% is physically unable to read due to visual impairment; over 90% of the so-called 10/40 window is illiterate;[2] and nearly 80% of the world population has a proclivity for learning orally, either by necessity or by preference.[3]

In my home country of Cameroon, the adult literacy rate was 77% in 2018. (The adult literacy rate indicates the 'percentage of people aged 15 and above who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement about their everyday life'.)[4] The remaining 23% depend on orality for their daily social

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1   Joshua Project, 'How Many People Groups Are There?' 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46317.
2   International Orality Network, 'Who Are Oral Learners?' n.d., https://worldea.org/yourls/46318.
3   Jerry Wiles, 'Orality Methods and Strategy', 13 Sept. 2017, https://worldea.org/yourls/46319.
4   MacroTrends, 'Cameroon Literacy Rate', 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46320.

interactions. Illiteracy is particularly acute in the northern part of the country.[5]

These staggering numbers of oral cultures constitute a colossal missiological challenge, especially since conventional, text-based mission and discipleship approaches are often inoperative in these cultures. Accordingly, this paper challenges missionaries to conceive and implement strategies that can enable them to share Christ effectively with oral cultures. It flows from the conviction that, to communicate Christ intelligibly and make disciples in oral societies, missionaries must learn the distinctive modes of thought and expression of oral minds and adjust accordingly. I term this strategy the 'thought-expression approach'.

First, I will briefly provide background on the concept of, research on, and types of orality. After that, I will consider challenges related to communicating Christ in oral cultures, highlight key characteristics of oral cultures, and suggest guidelines that can enhance effective missionary communication in oral cultures.

Understanding orality

The origin of orality and early studies

Although today's societies are deeply and irreversibly affected by writing, spoken language dates back to the very inception of humans. Orality is the most ancient form of consciousness and expression among humans. Wherever humans have existed on the planet, they had a language that was spoken and heard; human societies first developed with the help of oral speech.[6] This fact makes orality an inherent and enduring part of human life, since 'we [humans] have always and will continue to always use human speech arts in our various forms of communication.'[7] Comparatively, writing is a recent phenomenon in human history. According to Walter Ong, the 'earliest script dates from only 6,000 years ago.'[8]

Scholarly interest in understanding orality (in relation to literacy) and enhancing interaction with people from oral cultures is less than a century old. Contemporary development of orality as an interdisciplinary field of study dates back to the 1960s, finding an echo in the works of some Toronto School theorists such as Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock and Ong.[9] Although the term 'orality' was used in a theological sense as early as 1665, in the works of Catholic priest John Sergeant (1623–1710), and although it appeared as 'oral tradition' with a secular meaning in the 1760s,[10] only in the 1960s did interest in oral cultures explode, amidst the increasing impact of literacy.[11]

Ong, a Catholic priest, philosopher and linguist, appears to have been the most influential of the thinkers named above. Paula McDowell reports that the term

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5   Humanium, 'The Under-Education of Girls in Cameroon', 10 Apr. 2017, https://worldea.org/yourls/46321.

6   Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2002 [1982]), 2, 7.

7   Joyce I. Middleton, 'Clarifications on Orality', 15 Aug. 2019, https://worldea.org/yourls/46322.

8   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 2.

9   Richard Nordquist, 'Orality: Definition and Examples', 15 Aug. 2019, https://worldea.org/yourls/46322.

10 Paula McDowell, 'Ong and the Concept of Orality', *Religion & Literature* 44, no. 2 (2012): 170.

11 Paul Soukup, 'Orality and Literacy 25 Years Later', *Communication Research Trends* 26, no. 4 (2007): 4.

'orality' was initially incorporated in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a testimony to the influence of Ong's reflections.[12] His 1982 book *Orality and Literacy* has been widely read and, as of 2012, translated into 11 languages.[13]

Orality and literacy

Orality refers to thought processes (modes of thinking or consciousness) and linguistic systems (languages) that are principally oral (spoken). In the process of reasoning and communication, orality bypasses literacy technologies (tools) such as writing or printing and relies solely on spoken language. Oral cultures use speech rather than writing in their regular social interactions. Thus, their mental processes are chiefly 'influenced by spoken rather than textual forms of communication' such that they 'learn primarily or exclusively by speech, song, etc.'[14] Most oral populations are unfamiliar with literary tools and exhibit a 'lifestyle of dependence on non-print forms of communication'.[15]

Oral cultures can be contrasted with chirographic cultures, in which text (written or printed) is central in determining thinking and communication patterns. These cultures are so 'deeply affected by the use of writing'[16] that their modes of thought and expression are intimately related to or reconstructed by the experience of writing. In other words, writing does not simply make human intellectual activity possible but shapes it as it 'restructures consciousness'.[17] When people adopt writing, their mental processes are reconfigured directly or indirectly, such that without writing technology, the 'literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness.'[18] Literacy, therefore, represents not just an adoption of textuality by a society; it is also an incorporation into that society of new modes of thought and expression.

Types of orality

Orality can be divided into several categories. At one extreme, *absolute primary oral* (APO) cultures have no knowledge whatsoever of writing and are wholly unaffected by printed text. Nevertheless, these cultures 'exhibit distinctive ways of acquiring, managing, and verbalizing knowledge'.[19] *Predominant primary oral* (PPO) cultures include a minimal percentage of literate persons although the majority of their population is analphabetic.

Secondary orality, or new orality, is prompted by electronic technology and refers to the contemporary practice of listening to spoken words from devices such as the

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12 McDowell, 'Ong and the Concept', 169.
13 Soukup, 'Orality and Literacy', 3.
14 International Orality Network, 'Who Are Oral Learners?'
15 Grant Lovejoy, 'I Like to Learn, Not to Read: Orality and Missions', 13 Feb. 2018, https://worldea.org/yourls/46323.
16 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1.
17 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 82.
18 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 77.
19 McDowell, 'Ong and the Concept of Orality', 171.

radio, television, telephone and Internet.[20] This is an intentional, self-conscious orality that derives from written material. *Orality by necessity* describes situations where people have little or no opportunity to learn reading or writing; both aspects of primary orality described above fall into this category as well. Finally, *preferred orality* results from individual choice, i.e. when literate people favour orality as a means of thinking and communicating. This paper focuses on APO and PPO cultures.

By way of example, in a recent study, the Africa Network for Missional and Intercultural Research (ANMIR) determined that in the Adamawa region of Cameroon, two cultures, the Komas and the nomadic Mbororos, were APO groups, whereas the Mbums of Nganha were a PPO culture.[21] Augustine Longa, director of the Pan-African Institute for Missions and Intercultural Studies in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, reports that in Cameroon's far north, APO cultures include the Mbororos, Moufou, Mada, Podoko, Zouglo, Mougnan and others, whereas the Kanouri are a PPO group.[22]

The challenge of communicating Christ in oral cultures

Christian mission practitioners, especially those acquainted with cultural anthropology, have often sought to pay attention to the orality motif in their missionary efforts. Interest in the theme emerged chiefly from their missionary encounters with oral cultures and their extensive cross-cultural experiences. However, contemporary concerns for orality among missiologists surged from Ong's work in the 1970s, which turned the theme of orality/literacy into a field of academic learning. As Orville Jenkins argues, 'The orality movement in the Christian missions movement is based on the concepts of Walter Ong.'[23]

From the early days of the orality movement, several missiologists have emphasized that communicating Christ to oral groups should be culturally sensitive, taking into account 'cultural communication patterns and preferences of all ethnicities of the world'.[24] Some of these thinkers include Paul Hiebert, David Hesselgrave, Charles Kraft, Mathias Zahniser, James Krabill, Jay Moon, John Wilson, Jerry Wiles, Orville Jenkins and Grant Lovejoy. Their works and others have raised awareness of the need to conceive missions with the peculiarity of oral peoples in mind. Hence, a growing number of missions experts are convinced that coming to grips with the dynamics of orality is essential to contextual and effective missionary presentation. One reason for harnessing this understanding is the challenge that oral cultures pose to conventional missionary methods, since orality is not just a linguistic system but also a thinking pattern with specific cognitive processes that are not wired to respond to written or printed logic. Lovejoy explains:

> Oral cultures of the world pose a particular challenge for conventional Christian ministry. Oral cultures are not print-oriented and do not respond well to forms of witnessing, discipling, teaching, and preaching that are based on print. So

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20 McDowell, 'Ong and the Concept of Orality', 171.
21 ANMIR, 'Oral Cultures in Northern Cameroon' (unpublished manuscript, 6 June 2022).
22 Augustine Longa, interview with author, 11 June 2022.
23 Orville Jenkins, 'Orality in Christian Mission', 18 Feb. 2015, https://worldea.org/yourls/46324.
24 Jenkins, 'Orality in Christian Mission'.

tracts, Bible distribution, fill-in-the-blanks workbooks, and bookstores are largely unappealing and ineffective within oral cultures. Even spoken communication can be so print-influenced that it has limited impact in oral cultures. Sermons built around outlines and lists of principles communicate poorly with people whose life is lived in oral cultures. Putting those same print-influenced sermons on audio cassettes does make them audible, which is a step in the right direction, but their print-based way of organizing thought is still an obstacle in communication.[25]

Mission activists must grapple with these challenges and find ways to speak the message of Christ that make sense to oral cultures. This means much more than just communicating the gospel in audible forms. It also entails discerning thought patterns of oral cultures, outlining their basic epistemological assumptions about reality, understanding the dynamics of their social geography, and translating the gospel in keeping with their inner logic. Again, Lovejoy clarifies:

> Christian churches, mission organizations, and ministries have increasingly had to face the ways of communicating, relating, and thinking that characterize oral cultures. In the effort to take the gospel to all peoples, Christian workers have realized that they need to understand orality and to get a better grasp of just how extensive it is and how to respond to it.[26]

Characteristics of oral cultures

To understand and interact effectively with oral cultures, missionaries must come to grips with their psychodynamics (i.e. their underlying psychosocial configuration). Ong observes that oral cultures build on the following nine characteristic modes of thought and expression.[27]

1. *Additive rather than subordinating.* People from oral cultures tend to think or express themselves in a cumulative manner, adding data to data rather than seeking to outline relationships between data. They tend to use coordinating conjunctions such as 'and' repeatedly to connect data. Nordquist describes this feature of orality as being 'coordinate and polysyndetic … rather than subordinate and hypotactic'.[28] (The term 'polysyndetic' refers to a rhetorical approach in which sentences use many coordinating conjunctions, especially 'and', to highlight the redundant and copulative force of speech; 'hypotactic' denotes the use of connecting words, especially subordinating conjunctions, between clauses or sentences to highlight sequences and relationships between them.) A biblical example of additiveness in thought and expression appears in Genesis 1:1–5, where the text, which preserves recognizable patterns of the oral mind, incorporates nine introductory uses of 'and' in five verses.[29] Similarly, in Mark's Gospel (written from an oral mindset), the Greek *kai* (and) is almost ubiquitous.

25   Grant Lovejoy, 'The Extent of Orality', 2008, https://worldea.org/yourls/46325.
26   Lovejoy, 'The Extent of Orality'.
27   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 36–56.
28   Nordquist, 'Orality'.
29   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 36.

2. *Aggregative rather than analytical.* Oral minds tend not to think or express themselves analytically (through detailed explorations) but in *word clusters* as 'speakers rely on epithets ... parallels, and antithetical phrases.'[30] Instead of building thinking and speech on a single, integral concept, they lean on clusters of concepts. Ong elucidates:

> Oral folk prefer, especially in formal discourse, not the soldier, but the brave soldier; not the princess, but the beautiful princess; not the oak, but the sturdy oak. Oral expression thus carries a load of epithets and other formulary baggage which high literacy rejects as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant because of its aggregative weight.[31]

3. *Redundant and copious.* This dimension of orality describes thought and expression characterized by similarity or repetition (redundancy) as the same information is supplied in abundance (copious). Because oral thinking cannot store information outside the mind to ensure sequentiality and continuity of thought as written texts do, it needs to repeat itself constantly. Since oral utterance vanishes as soon as it is uttered, the oral mind 'must move ahead more slowly, keeping close to the focus of attention much of what it has already dealt with. Redundancy, repetition of the just said, keeps both speaker and hearer surely on the track.'[32] The volatility of oral speech, derived from the fact that conceptualized knowledge will vanish if not constantly repeated aloud, compels oral societies to 'invest great energy in saying over and over again what has been learned arduously over the ages'.[33]

4. *Conservative or traditionalist.* Oral societies tend to hold inflexibly to the status quo and preserve their existing worldviews, traditions, values and institutions. A correlation exists between this feature and the tendency to be redundant and copious, as both are encouraged by the investment of considerable time and energy in vocally repeating conceptualized knowledge in more or less the same form from one generation to another. Because these cultures embrace traditional values, they tend to be resistant to change and innovation.

5. *Close to the human lifeworld.* This phrase means that persons from oral cultures conceptualize thought and express it with a 'relatively close reference to the human world; that is, with a preference for the concrete rather than the abstract'.[34] Reality (physical, social or spiritual) is closely associated with and embedded in lived experience, the immediate human context, or the context of human interactions. As Ong observes, 'Oral cultures know few statistics or facts divorced from human or quasi-human activity.'[35] A basic implication of this feature is that instruction in oral cultures should not be very remote from their contexts and should be concrete. Apprenticeship based on realities of the living environment of the oral mind becomes cardinal in the teaching and learning process.

6. *Agonistically toned.* The thinking and expression of people from oral cultures are not always cooperative but are often polemical, combative or competitive. This

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30 Nordquist, 'Orality'.
31 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 38.
32 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 39.
33 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 40–41.
34 Nordquist, 'Orality'.
35 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 42.

feature is frequently visible in their use of proverbs and riddles. Ong explains that 'proverbs and riddles are not used simply to store knowledge but to engage others in verbal and intellectual combat: utterance of one proverb or riddle challenges hearers to top it with a more apposite or a contradictory one.'[36]

7. *Empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced*. In oral cultures, knowledge is primarily experiential rather than simply theoretical, speculative or impersonal, and it is achieved in the proximity between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge. In oral societies, establishing an epistemic distance between the knower and the known as a condition of objectivity (which characterizes 'objective' science) is immaterial, since the process of knowing personally engages the knower and the known. Therefore, 'for an oral culture, learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known.'[37] Knowing something in such a context would mean much more than simply formulating propositional statements about that thing or having only an intellectual grasp of it.

8. *Homeostatic*. Oral cultures can invoke their capacity for self-regulation so as to maintain stability while adjusting to changing conditions. This self-regulatory ability aims to survive change, maintain present relevance, and attain a dynamic equilibrium which enables change to occur even though relatively uniform conditions prevail.[38] To maintain homeostasis, oral cultures tend to 'live very much in the present ... by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance.'[39]

Present relevance in oral cultures may be evident in the use of words. Because they do not have dictionaries as do literate cultures, oral societies do not preserve the variegated dimensions (etymological, historical, cultural, literary) of words. As such, words emerge, acquire meaning and are controlled by the 'real-life situation in which [they are] used here and now' or the actual habitat in which they are utilized.[40] Jack Goody and Ian Watt describe this process as 'direct semantic ratification'.[41] They mean that in oral cultures, words do not 'accumulate the successive layers of historically validated meaning' as in dictionaries, but rather the 'meaning of each word is ratified in a succession of concrete situations, accompanied by vocal inflections and physical gestures, all of which combine to particularize both its specific denotation and its accepted connotative usages.'[42]

9. *Situational rather than abstract*. This feature implies that thinking and conceptualization in these cultures are more concrete (that is, close to real-world realities) than abstract. Ong clarifies, 'Oral cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld.'[43]

In this vein, David Hesselgrave identifies people from oral societies as *concrete*

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36   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 43.

37   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 45.

38   'Homeostasis', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 8 Apr. 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46326.

39   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 46.

40   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 46.

41   Jack Goody and Ian Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, no. 3 (1963): 306.

42   Goody and Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', 306.

43   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 48–49.

relational thinkers.[44] Concrete relational thinking is a pictorial worldview that sees life in terms of concrete pictures. Concrete relational thinkers tend to 'express, inform and persuade by referring to symbols, stories, events, objects … rather than general propositions and principles.'[45] This makes their language concrete rather than speculative. The use of proverbs is an equally convenient vehicle for conveying concrete relational knowledge and beliefs and for forming attitudes in oral societies.[46]

The above features of oral communities are foundational in understanding oral modes of thought and expression. Missionaries, whose vocation necessitates the crossing of important cultural frontiers, ought to pay special attention to them.

Guidelines for effective missionary communication in oral cultures

How can missionaries make their communication intelligible to and make Christ's disciples in oral cultures? The answer to this question, to a great extent, lies in their ability to adapt to the thought and expression patterns of oral cultures. This requires a prior understanding that people of oral cultures are not brutes but different types of learners with different modes of consciousness, communication systems and didactic approaches. Ong observes that although people of oral cultures 'learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom, … they do not study' in the conventional sense of learning from textual support.[47]

Building on the characteristics of oral cultures enumerated above, I propose that culture-sensitive missionaries should consider the following recommendations when interacting with and making Christ's disciples amongst oral people.

Oral memorization

Memory is central to oral cultures. It is the only support system in which data are stored, unlike literate cultures that generally stockpile information outside the mind. John Wilson notes that in oral cultures, memory is the 'crucial factor in the preservation and recalling of oral traditions, information, and knowledge'.[48] Therefore, to preserve information and retrieve it when needed, memorization is vital.

A good way to communicate information in oral cultures is to vocally express memorized content through the use of oral memory aids such as songs, narratives and proverbs. This adaptation synchronizes with Jesus' generally oral discipleship pedagogy as he ministered in ancient Palestine, where 'memorization of important traditions was an essential part of life.'[49] Jesus asked his disciples to teach all that he had instructed them (Mt 28:20) without having left a written record of his teachings, so clearly he expected them to have memorized, to some degree, what he had taught.

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44 David Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 302.

45 Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 325.

46 Nordquist, 'Orality'.

47 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 8.

48 John Wilson, 'What It Takes to Reach People in Oral Cultures', 1 Apr. 1991, https://worldea.org/yourls/46327.

49 Bill Pratt, 'Did Jesus Expect His Disciples to Memorize His Teachings?' 20 Feb. 2014, https://worldea.org/yourls/46328.

Didactic repetition

Ensuing from their commitment to memorization, oral societies tend to repeat information over and over to both rehearse and fix it in the memory. Accordingly, repetition is didactic and 'assists memory' in oral cultures.[50] It is a tool that the memory uses to learn, rememorate and preserve information. Songs, narratives, tales and fables enable this repetition. Using these channels when communicating Christ to oral cultures can yield invaluable dividends. Indeed, Jesus, who ministered to oral minds most of the time, effectively used repetition to drive home his teachings (Jn 21:15–17).

I first witnessed the pedagogical power of didactic redundancy with primary oral minds in my mother, Gnendie Marie, in the late 1980s. Because she never went to school, she was unable to read and write. When she turned away from Islam and embraced Christ, she could not be nurtured in the faith through classic, literacy-anchored discipleship methods. Instead, the Lutheran missionaries who led her to Christ engaged her in oral memorization through didactic repetition. At fellowship meetings (especially on Sundays), she, together with the congregation, repeated the Apostles' Creed in the vernacular languages of the locality. Shortly after her conversion and throughout her life, she could fluently recite the creed as well as other Bible verses and prayers in these languages.

Concrete thinking and communication

Oral cultures are concrete in thought and expression. Concrete thinking and communication avoid speculations that are disembedded from lived realities and real-world applications. To be effective in such contexts, missionaries need to learn concrete relational thought patterns and expressions. The grand themes of systematic theology, for instance, with their high levels of abstraction will mean nothing to concrete minds if these themes are not expressed in concrete relational terms. Communication based on symbols drawn from the environment, parables and analogical transmission approaches are useful instruments that missionaries may use to make their presentation of Christ concrete in oral cultures. The Lord Jesus exemplified concrete communication by his use of parables and other analogy-based approaches that made his teaching intelligible to his audience.

I awakened to the need to become a concrete thinker and communicator when interacting with oral minds in April 2011. I was on bed rest in Bafut, northwest Cameroon, with my wife, Rebecca. There we met an elderly man, Joseph (probably in his late sixties), who knew nothing about writing. After building a relationship with him over some days, I decided to present Christ to him. My presentation emphasized *concepts* of God's love, humankind's sinfulness, Christ's saviourhood and lordship, and repentance and faith as responses to Christ's message. Unfortunately, at the end of my preaching, it was obvious that he had grasped nothing. My wife came to my rescue and communicated Christ to him in proverbs and parables, using immediate realities from his context. Immediately, his face lit up. His facial expression as well as his constant nodding of the head to express agreement gave evidence that he understood the message. Some moments later, he was on his

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50   Wilson, 'What It Takes'.

knees, weeping in repentance, as he pledged allegiance to Jesus. When he got up, with overwhelming joy in his heart, he pointedly remarked that my wife was a wiser and better preacher than I. In the context of oral cultures, I was still a novice and inexperienced communicator.

Situatedness of modes of thought and expression

The situatedness of thought and communication highlights the proximity to and rootedness of mind and speech in specific contexts. This methodology permeated Jesus' approach to discipleship. By using contextual and familiar Palestinian images such as farming, fishing and daily social interactions to illustrate kingdom realities, Jesus modelled the need to draw didactic elements from the surrounding context for effective communication.

Likewise, effective missionary communication in oral cultures entails contextuality, which means more than just orally communicating in a people's language. It also demands an epistemological shift in thought processes and an adoption of oral cultures' mental patterns. Canadian missionary Don Richardson's (1935–2018) conceptualization of the 'peace child' that made Christ's incarnation and redemptive death intelligible to the Sawi people of Papua New Guinea is a classic illustration of situational missionary communication that draws from people's real worlds and aligns with their context's internal logic.

Personal and experiential knowledge

As emphasized earlier, oral minds tend to be cognitively empathetic and participatory, since they do not see an epistemic distance between the knower and the known. For them, knowledge is personal and experiential rather than speculative and impersonal (objectively distanced). In consonance with this feature, missionaries preaching Christ in oral cultures should present him in such a way that he can be experienced as the person the Bible affirms him to be. Oral societies need to experience the lordship of Jesus Christ in a manner that convinces them that he is real, saves souls, heals the sick, delivers from bondage, liberates from demonic oppression, and cares and provides for them. A presentation of Christ in purely propositional or intellectual terms with no direct bearing on people's lives and existential struggles will likely be unproductive, if not counter-productive, in oral cultures. Moreover, such a presentation is dissonant with how Christ presented himself to people as one who could be experientially known (Jn 8:32).

Modelling and apprenticeship

Apprenticeship and modelling stand at the heart of the teaching and learning process in oral cultures. Their pedagogy rests on elders, teachers or mentors modelling activities while young people or mentees emulate them. The transmission of hunting knowledge and skills, for example, requires learners to go hunting with experienced hunters until they have developed sufficient expertise. Ong calls this pedagogical approach *learning by discipleship*. Discipleship in oral cultures is achieved through listening, repeating what is heard, doing what the experts do, 'mastering proverbs …

assimilating formulary materials, and participating in corporate retrospection.'[51]

Missionaries who labour in these settings will enhance their effectiveness if they devise strategies for modelling and apprenticeship. By adopting learning by discipleship, missionaries replicate Jesus' favourite approach to mentoring and invite those whom they disciple into an apprenticeship journey with Christ. This is essential given that, as Dallas Willard observes, 'apprenticeship to Christ is the *status* within which the process of spiritual formation in Christlikeness runs its course'[52] (emphasis in original).

Narrational communication

Oral cultures 'think and express themselves through narrative discourse'.[53] For them, reality is socially constructed through stories, since experiences and narratives about these experiences are the source of knowledge.[54] Therefore, to be effective, missionaries working in these settings, like their master Jesus, should draw as much as possible from a narrative logic, designing sermons, teachings and discipleship approaches grounded in a narrative pedagogy. Most of the time, to make truths understandable and memorable, Jesus converted them into stories. His storytelling was intended to 'shed light on spiritual truths. Through his short stories Jesus did not entertain; he educated.'[55]

The force of narration-based communication in primary oral cultures is unfathomable. In an evangelistic outreach held in the late 1990s in a predominantly oral community of northwest Cameroon, I had the privilege to preach Christ, shortly after my graduation from Bible school, alongside an older minister named Mbawu Mathias. I opened the meeting the first day with a purely conceptual style of preaching, seeking to apply the literacy-honed evangelistic approach I had learned in Bible school. Throughout my preaching, the atmosphere was morose, insipid, tedious and uninteresting. All my efforts to spark enthusiasm in the audience proved futile. The following day, Mathias took over. He narrated familiar stories to the people and told them parables. As soon as he commenced preaching, the atmosphere was enlivened. People of the older generation, most of them analphabetic, as well as the youth present began responding to the message. Mathias' communication was more intelligible to the people as it related to their realities and thought patterns. When he launched the appeal, a multitude came forward and submitted to Christ's lordship. I was so astounded by the effectiveness of his communication style that I decided to enrol in his school.

Corporate learning

Since oral societies depend solely on the usage of spoken words in face-to-face interactions, they must develop a strong sense of communal participation. This explains the centrality of corporate or collective value orientations in how they organize their societies. To be effective in making Christ's disciples in these cultures,

51   Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 8.
52   Dallas Willard, 'Forward: Apprenticeship with Jesus', n.d., https://worldea.org/yourls/46329.
53   Nordquist, 'Orality'.
54   Soukup, *Orality and Literacy*, 12.
55   Roy Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 314.

missionaries must reprogram their worldviews to accommodate a collective or participatory logic which incorporates values such as sharing and, in terms of pedagogy, making teaching and learning participatory. The 'Oral Torah' in Mishnaic transmission that 'unfolded in an ongoing manner through debate, dialogue, and argumentation'[56] is a conspicuous illustration of participatory pedagogy in oral contexts. Akin to the Mishnaic tradition, Jesus also applied a participatory teaching style. Liv Fønebø's analysis of Jesus' teaching method demonstrates that he appealed to and used cooperation as an important didactic strategy.[57]

One significant vehicle for participatory apprenticeship in oral community is singing. It is 'one of the best "participatory didactic" media, because it includes not only participation, but repetition, rhythm, patterning, verbal and other acoustics.' As such, oral culture workers should 'compose songs in the indigenous style, or better, encourage local people to compose their own' given that 'indigenous songs are very effective for reinforcing a lesson.' Because, in oral cultures, 'songs frequently occur in myth and storytelling and function as mnemonic prompts' which reinforce communication through participation, missionaries need to view singing Scriptures and Christian doctrines as a valuable ministry tool.[58]

The Harris Movement (one of the largest independent churches in West Africa) is a prototype of how songs can enhance communal learning in oral cultures and, through that agency, preserve the faith, liturgical and theological legacy of a discipleship community. The outstanding evangelistic breakthrough of Liberian prophet William Wadé Harris (1860–1929) among the Dida people of Ivory Coast in 1913–1915 was primarily recorded and orally passed down to following generations via songs. Since 1913, over 250 hymns have been written for devotional purposes, constituting one of the principal discipleship approaches of this community up to the present. Jay Moon observes that this 'discipleship form has helped the church to survive over a period of almost one hundred years.'[59]

Long-term change negotiation

Although change is inherent to life itself, not all people and communities engage with change in the same way. Whereas some individuals and communities easily adjust to change or even anticipate it, others may vehemently oppose it. Oral cultures, in general, tend to be resistant to change, partly due to their preference for the status quo and their attachment to past values. Cognizant of this reality, missionaries, who are agents of Christ-centred change, must be patient with members of oral communities and negotiate the continuity and discontinuity factors involved in change gradually. Whether the change is individual or collective, missionaries should recognize that sudden change may be disruptive for oral cultures. Cross-cultural misunderstandings can easily ensue from hasty implementations of change, potentially resulting in persecution in some cases.

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56   Alexander Shanks, *Transmitting Mishna: The Shaping Influence of Oral Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.
57   Liv Fønebø, *A Grounded-Theory Study of the Teaching Methods of Jesus* (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2011), 121.
58   Wilson, 'What It Takes'.
59   W. Jay Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 59.

Because their behaviours are deeply anchored in values, beliefs and customs that are held in high esteem and have become solidified as strong traditions over decades or even centuries of repetition and memorization, sustainable change in oral cultures needs more than a change of action—it requires a change in worldviews. In general, a change in behaviour and ritual (the outer layer of culture) may be quick but usually lacks depth. Change in worldview (the core structure of culture) is deeper but frequently requires time.

The need for time in implementing change is even more acute in oral cultures because of their basic psychodynamic configuration. Sustainable discipleship that effects sustainable transformation in oral cultures therefore necessitates patience, because 'we cannot expect an instant transformation' at the worldview level.[60] Some missionaries with triumphalist tendencies, who hope for quick conversions and the hasty exhibition of impressive numbers of people filling out decision cards in evangelistic outreaches, may hatch superficial converts if they do not incorporate in their missionary method the patience needed to gradually transform conservative oral minds through teaching, modelling and apprenticeship. Long-term change negotiation is, therefore, essential in discipling oral cultures.

I know of a missionary who, in the early 2000s, hurriedly sought to introduce change in a predominantly primary oral culture of northern Cameroon and suffered overwhelming backlash from the people. As soon as he commenced work with this group, he decided to implement a particular dress code amongst his parishioners that was foreign to their culture. Their reaction was instant and confrontational. Several people left the church, convinced that the missionary was a false prophet. Had he taken enough time upstream to explain his perspective with the intent of provoking a worldview change, perhaps the people's response might have been much different.

Conclusion

This study, after providing background on the concept of orality, has reviewed the challenges involved in and has presented guidelines for effectively communicating Christ and making disciples in oral cultures. If well implemented, these guidelines may serve as catalysts for a shift from the traditional theorization of missions in exclusively literate terms to inclusive strategies which incorporate oral cultures as well.

This shift may seem herculean for missionaries who have known written text as their primary mode of consciousness and expression. Nevertheless, the transition is essential and urgent for at least two reasons. First, it offers the promise of making the gospel intelligible to about 25% of today's global population. Second, it draws mission and discipleship practitioners closer to the method Jesus utilized. Although cultural and technological changes have affected mission practice in many ways, it is still imperative to use Jesus' largely oral style with the many cultures that continue to rely on orality today. Missiologists, leaders of Christian denominations, churches, missionary agencies and individual missionaries should develop strategies to implement this strategic shift on the mission field.

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60   Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), Kindle edition location 201.

Moving Beyond the Bounds: A Response to the Segregationist Interpretation of Acts 17:26

Daniel Wiley

Conflicts over Bible interpretation frequently threaten to undermine the evangelical worldview, as sceptics claim, 'You can make the Bible say anything you want.' This article resolves a classic conflict that arose when people holding opposite views on racial segregation used the same Bible verse to defend their positions. It provides an excellent illustration of what can happen when we let cultural convictions guide our biblical studies rather than the reverse.

Acts 17:26 serves as a unique case study in the history of biblical interpretation, as it has been used by advocates of both the abolition of slavery and the segregation of the races. Abolitionists cited the first half of the verse, 'He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth', to emphasize the unity of humanity.[1] This first half of Acts 17:26 provided the foundation for the belief that all humanity comes from 'one blood' and thus all peoples of the earth are equal in value, dignity and worth.[2] However, segregationists countered by citing the second half of the verse, 'having determined their appointed times and boundaries of their habitation', to support the segregation of the races as part of God's eternal plan.[3]

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1   For an historical survey of the use of Acts 17:26 by abolitionists and its impact upon the rhetorical force of abolitionist speech, see Keith D. Miller, 'All Nations, One Blood, Three Hundred Years: Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, and Civil Rights Rhetoric as Transatlantic Abolitionism', in *Rhetoric Across Borders*, ed. Anne Teresa Demo (Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, 2015), 71–82. See also Karen D. Crozier, *Fannie Lou Hamer's Revolutionary Practical Theology: Racial and Environmental Justice Concerns* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 176; E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 314.

2   See Ronald R. Sundstrom, *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 20.

3   James O. Buswell, *Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 59–60; Carolyn Renée Dupont, *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945–1975* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 82–83; Barclay Key, *Race and Restoration: Churches of Christ and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State

They contended that because Acts 17:26 proclaims that God ordained the boundaries of the habitation of the nations, he meant for each race to have their own living spaces. Therefore, when the races overlapped, they were to be segregated,[4] and to challenge segregation would challenge the very decree of God himself.[5]

Historically, segregationists in the American South prior to the Civil War (1861–1865) cited Acts 17:26 in defense of segregation more than any other biblical text,[6] although the advocacy of this interpretation has taken place in other contexts, including apartheid South Africa.[7] Despite the similarity of argumentative method, there is no evidence that segregationists in the United States and South Africa who proposed such readings of Acts 17:26 drew their ideas from each other or shared a common source.[8] Nevertheless, there is similarity in interpretation and intent. This use of Acts 17:26 has troubled biblical interpreters in the present, who generally claim that social location becomes the final arbiter of the debate.

Contrary to the segregationist interpretation of Acts 17:26, I argue that abolitionists have a stronger case than a simple appeal to the 'one-blood doctrine'. To prove this, I first survey segregationist literature from both the antebellum American South and 20th-century South Africa, followed by a statement on the urgency of the challenge posed by the segregationist interpretation. In response to this position, I evaluate key terms in Acts 17:26 (particularly *ethnos* and *horothesia*) and how Luke presented the passage as part of Paul's argument in his Mars Hill address. From this evaluation, I demonstrate that the verse does not allow for a segregationist interpretation.

University Press, 2020), 67; Linda C. McClain, *Who's the Bigot? Learning from Conflicts over Marriage and Civil Rights Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 84. See also Walter H. Conser and Robert J. Cain, *Presbyterians in North Carolina: Race, Politics, and Religious Identity in Historical Perspective* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 197; Barclay Key, *Race and Restoration: Churches of Christ and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 67; John A. Kirk, *Race and Ethnicity in Arkansas: New Perspectives* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014), 119; LeeAnn G. Reynolds, *Maintaining Segregation: Christian and Racial Instruction in the South, 1920–1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 92; S. Joshua Swamidass, *The Genealogical Adam and Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 126; John R. Vile, *The Bible in American Law and Politics: A Reference Guide* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 440.

4   David Salter Williams, *From Mounds to Megachurches: Georgia's Religious Heritage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 110.

5   See Taylor G. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 21.

6   J. Russell Hawkins, *The Bible Told Them So: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 52–53; Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945–1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 54; Demetrius K. Williams, *An End to This Strife: The Politics of Gender in African American Churches* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 80.

7   Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Acts of the Apostles Throughout the Centuries* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 190; Johann Kinghorn, 'The Theology of Separate Equality: A Critical Outline of the DRC's Position on Apartheid', in *Christianity amidst Apartheid: Selected Perspectives on the Church in South Africa*, ed. Martin Prozesky (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 75.

8   Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 19.

The historical interpretation of Acts 17:26

The segregationist interpretation of Acts 17:26 is noted in several significant publications of the 20th century. In his 1948 article, 'Non-Segregation Means Eventual Inter-Marriage', J. David Simpson, addressing what he believed was a dominant theological view of his day, argued:

> I want to express my further conviction that the Scriptures teach Segregation, and most positively do not teach the pattern of non-segregation that is being so strongly urged upon the South by pressure groups and agitators from the outside. Acts 17:26 says: 'And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.' This verse, by some of our leading Biblical Commentators and Theologians, is used over and over again in defense of segregation of the races, and to their interpretation I agree. The fact is, that the latter part of the verse teaches just the opposite of non-segregation and free social inter-mingling.[9]

The primary implication of Acts 17:26, according to Simpson, is that determining such boundaries maintains the integrity of the races.[10] G. T. Gillespie's 1954 address 'A Christian View on Segregation' before the Synod of Mississippi of the Presbyterian Church took a similar posture. Arguing that choosing between segregation and integration was 'essentially a choice between the Anglo-Saxon ideal of racial integrity maintained by a consistent application of the principle of segregation, and the Communist goal of amalgamation',[11] Gillespie reasoned that segregation was defensible on biblical grounds. Appealing to Acts 17:26 alongside Colossians 3:10–11, he argued that the former 'affirms the unity of the race' and the latter 'the unity of all believers in Christ', but that Paul never meant to overturn the racial or societal structure of his day. He concluded:

> Since Christ and the Apostles taught the love of God for all mankind, the oneness of believers in Christ, and demonstrated that the principles of Christian brotherhood and charity could be made operative in all relations of life, without demanding revolutionary changes in the natural or social order, there would appear to be no reason for concluding that segregation is in conflict with the spirit and the teachings of Christ and the Apostles, and therefore un-Christian.[12]

James F. Burks's 1954 sermon 'Integration or Segregation?' argued that New Testament passages addressing spiritual unity among believers did not address physical kinship. Citing Deuteronomy 32:8 and Acts 17:26, Burks argued, 'The Word of God is the surest and only infallible source of our facts of Ethnology, and

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9   J. David Simpson, 'Non-Segregation Means Eventual Inter-Marriage', *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 15 March 1948, 7. For other articles defending the pro-segregation position from the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, see Dwyn M. Mounger, 'Racial Attitudes in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1944–1954', *Journal of Presbyterian History (1962–1985)* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 43, note 23.
10   Simpson, 'Non-Segregation', 7.
11   G. T. Gillespie, 'A Christian View on Segregation' (1954), https://worldea.org/yourls/46330.
12   Gillespie, 'A Christian View', 13. Gillespie also summarized his argument for segregation by pointing to the Old Testament's prohibition against interracial marriage.

when man sets aside the plain teachings of this Blessed Book and disregards the boundary lines God Himself has drawn, man assumes a prerogative that belongs to God alone.' Referring to 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, Burks further compared rebellion against these boundary lines to the rebellious attitude of the anti-Christ.[13]

Early editions of the *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*, dubbed 'the Pentecostal Study Bible',[14] included a list of 30 reasons for segregation of the races after Acts 17:26.[15] With regard to this verse, Dake argued, 'God wills any races to be as He made them. Any violation of God's original purpose manifests insubordination to him.' Citing several other passages in conjunction with Acts 17:26, he concluded, 'All nations will remain segregated from one another in their own parts of the earth forever.'[16] However, arguably Dake's most significant conclusion concerned the distinction between unity in the gospel and separation of the races. He noted, 'Jews [were] recognized as a separate people in all ages because of God's choice and command (Mt 10:6; Jn 1:11). Equal rights in the gospel gives [sic] no right to break this eternal law.'[17]

George Dorsett, making the same connection between Acts 17:26 and God's supposed will for segregation, stated:

> The Scripture tells us that God is not the author of confusion. He himself through Divine Process made the white species separate from the black, and mankind is trying to force them together and confuse the various characteristics and skin color. In Acts 17:26, in Daniel chapter seven, and Revelation 11:15 and 21:25, all nations are to remain segregated in their own part of the earth. God forbade intermarriage between Israel and all other nations in Exodus 34:12 and Deuteronomy 7:3. The mixing of races caused disunity among God's people, as we learn from Numbers 11.[18]

The subsequently published radio address *Is Segregation Scriptural?* by Bob Jones echoes these arguments and is especially important because of its nuancing of the segregationist argument.[19] Jones affirmed that he regarded the slave trade as evil and that segregation had nothing to do with the superiority or inferiority of any race. Instead, per Acts 17:26, segregation was solely based upon God's will for the races, and to stand against that will would lead to societal conflict.

In addition to these arguments, segregationists responded to the one-blood doctrine. Humphrey K. Ezell's *The Christian Problem of Racial Segregation* is a

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13   James F. Burks, 'Integration or Segregation?' 30 May 1954, typescript, folder 1, box 100, General Correspondence, Executive Papers, Gov. Thomas B. Stanley (1954–1958) (Liberty of Virginia, Richmond); cited in Jane Dailey, 'Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown', *Journal of American History*, 91, no. 1 (June 2004): 121–22.

14   'Scholars Scrutinize Popular Dake's Bible', *Christianity Today*, 10 January 1994, https://worldea.org/yourls/46331.

15   *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*, ed. Finis Dake (Atlanta: Dake Bible Sales, 1963), 159.

16   *Dake's Reference Bible*, 159. Cf. Gen 10:5, 32; 11:8–9; Deut 32:8; Dan 7:13–14; Zech 14; Rev 11:15; 21:24.

17   *Dake's Reference Bible*, 159.

18   Cited in James F. Kirkham, Sheldon G. Levy, and William J. Crotty, *Assassination and Political Violence: A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 334.

19   Bob Jones, *Is Segregation Scriptural?* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1960.

noteworthy example. As was common among segregationists, Ezell argued that the curse of Ham (cf. Gen 9:20–27) was still in effect and justified segregation. However, alluding to Acts 17:26 and abolitionists' appeal to the implication that humanity was created 'from one blood', Ezell responded that 'being of one blood does not destroy the differences in individuals and races. … Thus being of one blood does not take away the curse of racial segregation and servitude placed upon the descendants of Ham because of Ham's sin.'[20]

Acts 17:26 also played a role in apartheid South Africa.[21] The document *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, approved by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1974 and published in 1976, was the primary resource in defence of the segregationist position.[22] *Human Relations* used Acts 17:26 along with four other texts (Gen 1:28; 11:1–9; Deut 32:8; Acts 2:5–13) to justify the separation of the races.[23] Pairing Acts 17:26 with Revelation 21:24, 26, *Human Relations* argued that 'the "glory and honour" of the kings and nations will be brought into Jerusalem' and that interracial marriage would threaten the preservation of these distinct cultures, even while it admitted that the Old Testament prohibition against 'mixed marriages' was primarily for religious reasons.[24] Like segregationists in the United States, defenders of apartheid also emphasized a link between Acts 17:26 and Genesis 11:6, 9 regarding the dispersion of the nations to argue that segregation is the 'natural' intention of God's decree for the nations.[25]

Moreover, South Africans also cited Acts 17:26 as a response to communism. J. D. Vorster, responding to the growth of the South African Communist Party, wrote in 1947:

> It is particularly the fact that communism is becoming more and more the view of life and the religion of the coloured peoples which makes a peaceful solution to this problem almost impossible. … The Creator alone can explain the purpose of the different races and the proper relationship between them … and what the Book says can be abbreviated in the words of Acts 17:26.[26]

Like the segregationists of the United States, the segregationists of South Africa also rebutted the abolitionist use of 'one blood'. Afrikaans poet J. D. du Toit is

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20 Humphrey K. Ezell, *The Christian Problem of Racial Segregation* (New York: Greenwich Books, 1959), 14–15; see also O. R. Williams, *Segregation and Common Sense* (Boston, MA: Forum Publishing Co., 1961), 144.

21 Christo Lombaard, 'Does Contextual Exegesis Require an Affirming Bible? Lesson from "Apartheid" and "Africa" as Narcissistic Hermeneutical Keys', *Scriptura* 101 (2009): 276. The use of Acts 17:26 to justify apartheid in South Africa was even recognized by the US government. See *United States Policy towards South Africa: Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs on the Committee of Foreign Relations, One Hundredth Congress, First Session, October 22, 1987 and June 22, 23, and 24, 1988* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1989), 674.

22 Dutch Reformed Church, *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* (Cape Town: Dutch Reformed Church Publishers, 1976).

23 Robert Hamerton-Kelly, 'Biblical Justification of Apartheid in Afrikaner Civil Religion', in *Critical Moments in Religious History*, ed. Kenneth Keulman (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 169.

24 Dutch Reformed Church, *Human Relations*, 31, 99, 94.

25 For example, see W. A. de Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa* (London: Rex Collins, 1975), 171.

26 Cited in T. R. H. Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1997), 143.

representative of this rebuttal, using it in his address titled 'Die Godsdienstige Gronsslad van ons Rassebeleid' (The Religious Foundation of Our Race Policy).[27] For du Toit, although all humanity had come from 'one blood', God had still made distinctions between the races which required segregation.

The urgency of the segregationist position

Although segregation has now been outlawed in both the United States and South Africa, and although many organizations that held to segregationist positions in the past have rejected those views,[28] the use of Acts 17:26 continues to trouble biblical ethicists. While devout Christian abolitionists believed that Acts 17:26 taught the unity and equality of humankind,[29] segregationists claimed the very same zeal for scriptural authority. Commenting on this tension in the South African context, Richard Burridge notes, 'This is a challenge to those involved in biblical ethics, since both those who argued for apartheid and those in the liberation struggle used similar methods of exegesis to justify their opposition.'[30] Perhaps for this reason, historians who research the interpretation of Acts 17:26 generally agree that how one read the passage was simply a matter of perspective. For abolitionists, Acts 17:26 championed freedom, equality and brotherhood; for segregationists, it proclaimed the separation of peoples geographically and societally. With exegesis divided in this hermeneutical standoff, experience quickly became the final arbiter in one's exegesis, and such experience was dependent upon where one fell in the 'social order'.[31] Consequently, some scholars even question whether Scripture can resolve the issue.[32] However, Burridge concludes, 'The pro-apartheid exegesis serves as a warning that we must read the Scriptures with an inclusive community of interpretation where the voices of those most affected by any interpretation are properly heard. Only then can such oppression carried out under the supposed aegis of biblical justification be avoided in the future.'[33]

The history of and response to the interpretation of Acts 17:26 among segregationists present two challenges to the abolitionist position which have not

27 Robert Vosloo, *Reforming Memory: Essays on South African Church and Theological History* (Stellenbosch, South Africa: African Sun Media, 2017), 127–28. See also Marius Nel, *Pacifism and Pentecostal in South Africa: A New Hermeneutic for Nonviolence* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 144; Gerald O. West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 373–74.
28 For example, the Dutch Reformed Church rescinded its position on apartheid in its 1986 document *Church and Society*.
29 Kabria Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 31.
30 Richard A. Burridge, 'Apartheid', in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 76. See also the ambiguity suggested by Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 173.
31 See Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *Scholarship and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 78–79; Douglas E. Thompson, *Richmond's Priests and Prophets: Race, Religion, and Social Change in the Civil Rights Era* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 118.
32 See 'Jim Crow Ordained', in *Crossroads: A Southern Cultural Annual 2006*, ed. Ted Olson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), 17.
33 Burridge, 'Apartheid', 77.

been fully addressed in scholarship. First, the segregationists claimed that the so-called one-blood doctrine did not override the 'clear' message of Acts 17:26. Therefore, while all races may come from one stock, it does not, as the argument goes, negate distinctions between the races, and thus a simple appeal to Acts 17:26 by abolitionists does not counter the segregationist position. Second, there is the matter of epistemology. If both segregationists and abolitionists could so fervently and convincingly cite the same verse in defence of their positions, then is it possible that how one reads the Bible is shaped by one's social location or experience, to the extent that no objective truth can be found there?[34]

A response to the segregationist interpretation of Acts 17:26

I believe that a simple appeal to the one-blood doctrine is insufficient to counter the segregationist interpretation of Acts 17:26. Logically speaking, there is no inconsistency between believing that all humanity came from one stock and insisting on distinctions among humanity (note, for example, Israel's election and covenant privileges; Ex 19:1–6; Deut 7:6–8; Rom 9:3–5). Furthermore, I cannot deny that one's cultural background can influence one's interpretation of the biblical text, nor that a multiplicity of perspectives can help overcome presuppositions and biases. However, I am not convinced that Acts 17:26 supports the segregationist position or that its meaning is dependent upon power, experience or social structures. My conviction is based upon an examination of both key words in Acts 17:26 and the verse's function in Paul's Mars Hill address.

The Lukan use of ethnos in Acts 17:26

The segregationist interpretation of Acts 17:26 demands that *ethnos* be understood as 'race'. However, this interpretation is unlikely. 'Race', a biological term which argues that physical, mental and moral characteristics are transmitted genetically through distinct groups of human beings over time, is a modernistic construct derived from the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods.[35] Recent studies have (rightly) challenged the concept of race, the very idea of which has led to the practice of racism during the modern period.[36] These studies aside, the idea of 'race' postdates

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34   See also Ludger H. Viefhues-Bailey, *Between a Man and a Woman? Why Conservatives Oppose Same-Sex Marriage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 39. Using the segregationist interpretation of Acts 17:26 as an example of 'cultural exegesis', Viefhues-Bailey suggests that evangelical opposition to homosexuality may also be culturally conditioned and therefore incorrect. Such a claim reinforces the importance of clarifying that one can determine a reliable interpretation of the meaning of Acts 17:26.

35   Joel B. Green, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 653; E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understanding the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 54.

36   Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1–8. See also Wongi Park, 'Multiracial Biblical Studies', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 140, no. 3 (2021): 443–44; J. A. Manickam, 'Race, Racism and Ethnicity', in *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, ed. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 718–23.

Scripture by at least 1,500 years. To simply read modern concepts of race back into the biblical text to define *ethnos* is anachronistic.

In the New Testament, *ethnos* is used to indicate 'a body of persons united by kinship, culture, and common traditions', or a 'nation'.[37] It can also be used in more specific ways to identify groups outside the people of Israel (i.e. non-Jews, or Gentiles), believing Gentiles, or even unbelievers distinct from both believing Jews and Gentiles (including unbelieving Jews).[38] However, all these definitions assume a unity of kinship, culture and common traditions.[39]

The Lucan usage of *ethnos* follows these general distinctions,[40] yet there is no indication in this usage that modernistically crafted racial characteristics distinguish one *ethnos* from another. In fact, the text argues against such an understanding. For example, in several places, the Jewish people are identified as an *ethnos* (Acts 10:22; 24:17; 28:19). However, in Acts 2:5, Luke notes that the Jews present at the festival of Pentecost were 'devout men from every *ethnos* under heaven'. These Jews were not proselytes, for proselytes are mentioned as a distinct group amongst the nations (2:10),[41] nor are these individual God-fearing Gentiles.[42] Instead, they were likely members of the diaspora who had returned to Jerusalem to retire.[43] Nevertheless, the text emphasizes their nationality,[44] a category distinct from their Jewish identity.[45] That these Jews heard the 120 speak in their native languages (2:6–11) reinforces their identity with the people groups mentioned (which would have included non-Jews) while confirming that they were still Jewish.[46] That Jews could belong to different kinds of *ethnē* supports the broad definition of *ethnos* as 'a body of persons united by kinship, culture and common traditions', the referent of which is specified by its context rather than by supposed racial characteristics.

Luke's understanding of *ethnos* has significant bearing upon the interpretation of Acts 17:26. The burden of proof rests upon the segregationist to show that *ethnos* means 'race' in Acts 17:26 when Luke's use of *ethnos* gives no evidence of this definition and even contradicts it.

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37 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 276.

38 Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 276–77. See also Mark G. Brett, *Ethnicity and the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 334.

39 Karl Lutwig Schmidt, '*Ethnos* in the NT', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 369, argues that *ethnos* is broader than its synonyms *phylē* ('national unity of common descent'), *laos* ('political unity'), and *glossa* ('linguistic unity'), 'denoting the natural cohesion of a people in general'.

40 Cf. Acts 2:5; 4:25, 27; 7:7, 45; 8:9; 10:22, 35, 45; 11:1, 19; 13:19, 42, 46, 47, 48; 14:2, 5, 16, 27; 15:3, 7, 12, 14, 17, 19, 23; 17:26; 18:6; 21:11, 19, 21, 25; 22:21; 24:2, 10, 17; 26:4, 17, 20, 23; 28:19, 28.

41 Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 100.

42 F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, revised, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 55, note 23.

43 Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 135.

44 This emphasis is thematic. As I. Howard Marshall notes in *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 75, a reference to these 'devout men from every nation under heaven' acted as a symbol 'of the universal need of mankind for the gospel and of the church's consequent responsibility for mission'.

45 William Tillman, *Understanding Christian Ethics: An Interpretive Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 1988), 147–48.

46 See also Christopher Stroup, *The Christians Who Became Jews: Acts of the Apostles and Ethnicity in the Roman City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 57–58.

'Determining the boundaries of their habitation'

Also critical to the interpretation of Acts 17:26 is God's determining of the *horothesia* (boundaries) of all peoples (*pan ethnos*). Understanding *ethnos* as 'race', the segregationist interpretation demands that God's determination of the *horothesia* of the 'races' indicates that humans must enforce segregation to keep such boundaries intact.

Issues with the interpretation of *ethnos* as 'race' aside, this understanding of *horothesia* is also problematic. Even if one grants the segregationist his definition of *ethnos*, the administration of the *horothesia* requires definition. *Horothesia* is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, used only in Acts 17:26.[47] However, while *horothesia* is also rare in extrabiblical documents, its use there consistently indicates the designation of national borders.[48] This strongly suggests that the *horothesia* of *pan ethnos* is addressing the territorial limits of the nations (or at least the collection of peoples which represent any given nation) rather than segregated spaces for 'races' within nations.

Even if one could argue that *ethnos* means 'race' and that *horothesia* were the boundaries of the dwelling places of the 'races' (or even people groups, rather than nations as political entities), the segregationist interpretation begs the question. By definition, nations create 'impassible boundaries'—i.e. except for disputed territory, an area of land belongs only to one nation. However, this is not the case with 'race' which, by its definition alone, does not include segregation. In short, any given 'race' could remain within ordained boundaries per God's decree while dwelling alongside other 'races' which have overlapping boundaries, also per God's decree.[49]

The purpose of Acts 17:26 in the Mars Hill discourse

The second major argument against the segregationist position concerns the use of Acts 17:26 in Paul's Mars Hill discourse. Because Acts 17:26 is part of the larger discourse of Acts 17:16–34,[50] it must be understood and interpreted in that context.

The outline of the text itself is simple. An introduction (vv. 16–21) introduces the reader to Paul's evangelism in Athens and his disturbance caused by the idolatry

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47   Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 724.

48   Flavien Pardigon, *Paul against the Idols: A Contextual Reading of the Areopagus Speech* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 171.

49   See also Glenn Feldman, *Politics and Religion in the White South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 133. Feldman cites the Reverend Stanley Frazer of St. James Methodist Church, who argued that God determined the boundaries of the races to live on (and thus be relegated to) each of the major continents. Of course, it is ironic that so-called 'whites', who were placed in Europe, jumped from their own continent to dominate the continent of the so-called 'red race' in North America, thus violating the segregationists' own stance. In a further irony, whites brought African slaves to North America and then later supported segregation. Nevertheless, it is hypothetically possible for the segregationist to disavow the argument and simply state that races must remain segregated, regardless of any migration or political developments that may have placed them in proximity to each other. In response, I would refer to my arguments above.

50   The unity of Acts 17:16–24 is undisputed, even by critical scholars. For example, Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles,* Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 139–40, argues that although the address 'should not be interpreted as a supposedly historical event', the 'scene and speech are woven together to form a whole.'

in the city. Paul then addresses the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (vv. 22–31) and the passage concludes with a description of the reaction to Paul's address (vv. 32–34).[51] The structure of Paul's speech (vv. 22b–31), however, is more difficult to outline because, as Richard I. Pervo notes, 'it contains a series of theses that are supported with a minimum of argumentation.'[52]

While there are a number of different ways to outline Paul's address, Schnabel helpfully divides the address into three parts: (1) an introduction with a commendation of the Athenians and summary of the issue at hand (vv. 22–23); (2) a 'proofs' discourse presenting Paul's view of God as creator and Lord (vv. 24–29); and (3) a conclusion calling for his audience to repent based upon the coming judgement by Christ, whom God has raised from the dead.[53] As part of the 'proofs' section, Acts 17:26 begins Paul's second line of argumentation, which continues into verse 27 (the first line is found in verses 24–25).[54] This sentence advances three points.[55]

First, God's sovereignty is displayed through his creative acts: generally in his role as creator of the world and all things in it (v. 24), and then specifically as the creator of every nation of men through Adam, and through his sovereignty over the nations and their longevity and prominence (v. 26). Second, God's sovereignty is also displayed in his independence. He neither lives in temples made by man (v. 24) nor is dependent upon man (v. 25). Instead, man is dependent upon God for his very life (v. 25). Third, a recognition of God's sovereignty in creation and providence should cause humanity to seek after God (v. 27a). Unfortunately, even though humanity is aware of God and knows something about him (vv. 27b–28), he has distorted the truth and thus lives in gross ignorance (vv. 29–30a); hence the religious worship at Athens (vv. 16–23). Nevertheless, while God has overlooked this ignorance in the past, the messianic age has dawned and God now demands repentance and faith in Jesus Christ from all people (vv. 30b–31).

The flow of Paul's thought is thus as follows: God is sovereign, his sovereignty is displayed in his nature and works (particularly in his power over the prominence of the nations), and therefore, the only logical response is worship.

This understanding of Paul's Mars Hill address, one that consistently derives from the text itself, is problematic for the segregationist interpretation. First, there is no hint that the segregation of the races has any place in Paul's purpose. According to the segregationist interpretation, God's division of the nations was for the purpose of racial and cultural preservation. However, this implication does not fit into Paul's argument in any meaningful way, nor is it suggested by the text itself. In contrast, the prominence of the nations (i.e. their times and boundaries) is used in Paul's argument to defend God's sovereignty (specifically, that God controls the destiny of such powerful entities).[56] Though segregationists attempt to link Acts 17:26 with

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51 Bock, *Acts*, 558.
52 Richard I. Pervo, *Acts*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009), 432.
53 Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 719.
54 Schnabel, *Acts*, 734.
55 Schnabel, *Acts*, 734.
56 See Jack Cottrell, *Tough Questions—Biblical Answers, Part II* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 111.

passages such as Revelation 21:24, 26 to argue for their understanding of preservation,[57] the flow of Paul's thought and particularly his comments regarding the 'times' of the nations make Acts 17:26 more closely related to passages such as Daniel 2:21. Ultimately, the segregationist is left with the burden of explaining how an imperative for segregation advances Paul's argument before the philosophers, especially when imperatives are given as a response to the argument (v. 30).

At this point, one counterargument should be mentioned. Josiah Nott and George Gliddon, (in)famous for their work *Types of Mankind*, insisted that Acts 17:26, along with the Genesis narratives, was not describing the origin of all humanity but rather that of 'white types' of humanity, including Israelites but not blacks, and that therefore Acts 17:26 could not be used to support abolitionism.[58] In other words, Paul's use of *pan ethnos* was a figure of speech with a limited referent, and thus his purpose on Mars Hill was not to address the origin of all the peoples of the world, but only particular peoples. Therefore, one cannot not use Acts 17:26 to defend abolitionism.[59]

However, Nott and Gliddon's conclusion creates an awkward interpretive situation when applied to the entirety of Paul's speech. What would Nott and Gliddon make of the merism 'heaven and earth' in verse 24? Is 'heaven' a reference to the entire heavens but 'earth' only the 'earth' known to the writers of Scripture? If Nott and Gliddon hold to the full force of the merism, then what exegetical evidence suggests that 'earth' means anything less in verse 26? Furthermore, should only 'white types' of humanity repent in response to Christ's resurrection per verses 30–31? If so, does this mean that Philip went beyond God's call by preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40)? If Nott and Gliddon argue for a universal application of the call to repentance, then what exegetical evidence is there to argue for a change from a limited referent to a universal referent between verses 26 and 30? Clearly, their interpretation, when applied consistently, results in unresolvable conundrums.

Second, Acts 17:26 does not provide any clear regulation for segregation. As stated above, the verse's purpose is to defend God's sovereignty in such a way that

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57   This argument was heavily criticized by John Stott in *Involvement*, vol. 2: *Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1985), 92. Using the example of the intermingling of the Irish, Welsh, English and Scots in the British Isles, Stott argued that such intermingling of peoples and cultures did not result in the destruction of these cultures, nor does it lead to assimilation. To add to Stott's criticism, arguing that passages such as Revelation 21:24 indicate that cultures and nations must be preserved 'for the good of the Eternal State' contains the underlying assumption that only those nations and cultures that survive until the Eternal State will bring their glory into the Eternal State, or that those which survive longer will bring greater glory into the Eternal State. Since the resurrection will contain peoples from nations and people groups which do not exist in the present day, such a conclusion is absurd.

58   See Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 144.

59   See G. Blair Nelson, '19th Century Americans on Preadamist Polygenism', in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: 1700-Present*, vol. 1, ed. Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 157. Nelson argues, 'There is not demonstrative refutation of Nott's claim that "all nations", in Acts 17:26, is an example of a universal term representing a limited referent. That is a matter of opinion, an assessment of the extent to which God has accommodated revelation to the limited knowledge of the recipients in a given situation.'

Paul's audience would recognize their need for God. The passage issues no command for the church or greater society; rather, it proclaims God's sovereignty over the nations.[60] In fact, the only command found in Paul's Mars Hill address comes in verse 30b: 'God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.' The command in verse 30b further supports this interpretation of verse 26, because it serves as a recapitulation of Paul's argument—namely, that the recognition of God's sovereignty over the destiny and location of the peoples of the world should have led men to worship the Lord. In the past, God has delayed his judgement, but now, at the coming of Christ, there is great urgency to repent because the resurrection proves that a day of judgement is coming. While this command for men to repent is present and urgent, there is no similar present and urgent command for segregation.[61]

Perhaps the segregationist will admit to the emphasis of Acts 17:26 on God's sovereignty while still arguing that segregation is demanded by way of implication. Nevertheless, this implication is weakened when one compares Acts 17:26 to other so-called 'segregation passages' (e.g. Ex 34:12; Deut 7:3). Most importantly, these passages contain purpose statements, intended most notably to prevent Israel from becoming corrupted by religious influences contrary to Yahweh. Thus, the prohibitions were religiously and not racially motivated, and no similar purpose is given for any supposed segregation of the races in Acts 17:26.

In contrast, as noted above, the use of *ethnos* in Acts 2 demonstrates a multiethnic church from the very beginning. There is perhaps no better example of such 'violation' than Paul's ministry before and after his Mars Hill speech. In Acts 17:1–9, Luke records the founding of the church in Thessalonica. Both Jews and God-fearing Greeks responded to Paul's message in the synagogue (vv. 1, 4). Following his initial ministry in Thessalonica, Paul was joined by one Aristarchus, 'a Macedonian of Thessalonica' (27:2), who had assisted Paul in Ephesus (cf. 19:29). Aristarchus would join Paul's ministry team along with Sopater of Berea, Secundus of the Thessalonians, Gaius of Derbe, Timothy (who was both Jewish and Greek; cf. 16:1), and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia Minor (20:4).[62]

Amidst all this multi-ethnic record of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica and beyond, the segregationist must persuade his dialogue partner that Paul was ignorant of the 'implications' of Acts 17:26 both before Mars Hill and after Mars Hill. In other words, Paul did not segregate himself from non-Jews, nor did he encourage segregation of the races amongst his ministry team or the churches he planted (note especially the household codes of Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1; Tit 2:1–10; 1 Pet 2:18–3:7). Therefore, in the segregationist's mind, Paul must have not understood the implication of his own words! If this were the case, one would expect some condemnation of Paul's ministry, if Acts 17:26 truly demanded segregation and he failed to follow this principle. Yet one finds no condemnation of the church

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60 Cottrell, *Tough Questions—Biblical Answers*, 111; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 3: *15:1–23:35* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2651.

61 Kenneth A. Mathews and M. Sydney Park, *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011), 118.

62 See Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930–1975* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 77.

or Paul for refusing to segregate themselves from other 'races' in their fellowship and ministry. Furthermore, the New Testament does not contain a single biblical statement condemning the early church for its failure to segregate. Obviously, neither Paul, his ministry team nor the rest of the New Testament church understood Paul's words as calling for segregation.

Conclusion

Despite the appearance of ambiguity presented by some in mainstream scholarship, the segregationist interpretation fails to accurately represent the text of Acts 17:26. It reads a racial understanding of *ethnos* into Acts that is not supported by Luke's use of the term throughout the book, and it cannot defend the claim that *horothesia* identifies impassible boundaries that 'races' should not cross. Furthermore, the segregationist interpretation does not fit into the flow of Paul's argument, nor are there any clear prescriptive commands for segregation in the text. Ultimately, Acts 17:26, read in its context, offers no support for the segregationist interpretation.

Of course, one would be hard pressed to find an evangelical defending segregationism today. Nevertheless, we still have much to learn from the history of culturally bound exegesis exhibited by the segregationist interpretation. Scholars have noted that many doctrinal issues, including the extent of salvation,[63] church government,[64] and the millennium,[65] as well as ecclesiological trends such as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,[66] have been influenced by culture or reflect 'current' sociological conditions. Although I do not intend to imply any moral equivalence between segregationism and any position on these other matters, the example examined in this paper reminds us that cultural exegesis can always be a threat.[67] Evangelicals should recognize in the segregationist position an example of the worst kind of cultural exegesis and should remind themselves that all of us can be vulnerable to cultural influences on our theological conclusions.

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63   Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, 'Introduction', in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 9.

64   Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1005; cf. 1002.

65   Stanley N. Gundry, 'Hermeneutics or Zeitgeist as the Determining Factor in the History of Eschatologies', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 1 (March 1977): 50.

66   Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118–71.

67   In some cases, certain scholars use accusations of cultural exegesis as leverage in debates. For example, Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 228, points out that complementarians sometimes accuse egalitarians of conforming their interpretation of key biblical texts to changing cultural norms regarding the roles of men and women. Note also the centrality of culture in J. P. Holding and Nick Peters, *Defining Inerrancy: Affirming a Defensible Faith for a New Generation*, narrated by Philip D. Moore (Tekton Apologetics, 2015), chapter 1, 21:10–22:12. Holding and Peters contend that 'traditionalist inerrantists' use a hermeneutical method that is influenced by modernistic or Enlightenment literary expectations rather than those used by first-century writers.

From Blackpain to Much Gain:
A Biblical Reflection on Dealing with Racial Injustice

Ron Lindo, Jr.

We are all called to oppose racism, but reconciliation requires both change by the oppressors and victims' ability to move beyond bitter focus on their victimization. This article finds, in the exodus story and in Deuteronomy, a pattern by which God uses remembrances of past injustices to spur us towards providing justice for all.

Racial reconciliation is an important issue for the church today. In America, the Southern Baptist Convention has established the Unify Project, which aims to help Baptist churches work 'toward racial unity together so the world will encounter the hope of Christ'.[1] In Germany, the World Council of Churches assembled under the theme that 'Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.' The moderator, Agnes Abuom of the Anglican Church of Kenya, noted that the theme was 'very timely' since 'xenophobia and racism are nurtured by national populisms and their politics of fear.'[2] Meanwhile, in London, the Archbishop of Canterbury delivered a speech on the connection between diversity and Christian reconciliation, stating, 'Reconciliation amongst Christians with all their diversity liberates the church to reflect the image of God.'[3]

While various church leaders worldwide have agreed that the stain of racism must be removed from the church and society, acts of racial aggression continue to occur in many places.[4] The United Nations has labeled the Indonesian government's treatment of West Papuans as 'deeply entrenched' in 'discrimination and racism'. The Yazidis have been fleeing parts of Kurdistan because of their fear of racially

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1   This quotation is taken from the Unify Project website. The website should be operational in fall 2022. See https://worldea.org/yourls/46332.
2   George Conger, 'Moderator's Address to the WCC Central Committee, June 2022' (speech delivered on 18 June 2022), *Anglican Ink*, https://worldea.org/yourls/46333.
3   Justin Welby, 'Archbishop of Canterbury Gives Keynote Lecture on Reconciliation' (speech delivered on 1 July 2022), *Anglican Ink*, https://worldea.org/yourls/46334.
4   Most of the information found in the paragraph is drawn from Alastair Bonnett, *Multiracism: Rethinking Racism in Global Context* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2022), introduction.

motivated attacks by radical Islamic groups. In the US, several major cities have witnessed violent attacks driven by racism.[5]

These racial conflicts have stirred many church leaders to call for action that moves beyond the church's walls. However, most of these actions have focused solely on correcting racism in the context of Western society. In fact, most research on racial issues has been concerned with American culture. As Alastair Bonnett explains, 'Ethnic and racial studies are dominated by studies of racism in the West. Many of these studies assume that racism is a uniquely Western, European, and White practice and ideology.'[6] The term 'racism' is often used to refer exclusively to how US blacks have been mistreated by whites simply because their skin is of darker pigmentation.

In the United States, those motivated to pursue societal actions to fix racism have been polarized into two main camps. One argues that the federal government should undergird anti-racist measures so that they can be systemically imposed upon the governed.[7] In contrast, others affirm that slavery is in the past and that American society should move on from the issue, because in general, racist behaviour is declining. People in this group would steer away from overarching governmental involvement. For them, the groundwork has already been laid for all Americans to prosper.[8] Instead of focusing on governmental programs, Americans should focus more on their actions, choices and relationships.

For church leaders elsewhere, these questions can be hard to resolve. For example, can governmental action genuinely be beneficial in non-democratic settings? How does a focus on individual action help Christians who are living in collectivist cultures? In addition, Christian leaders should continue to reflect on how Scripture deals with correcting racism in society.

In this article, I first seek to establish at least one way in which research on race relations in the US can impact racial issues globally. Second, I explore how one particular literary technique used within the Old Testament provides guidance on moving forward towards racial justice in any culture or society. I cannot deal with these issues exhaustively here, but I aim to lay some groundwork so that others can build on this foundation.

Blackpain as representative of universal oppression

In many ways, the racial tension between blacks and whites in the US serves as a microcosm of global race-related issues. This is not so much because Americans or the American church has achieved racial equality more than others. Rather, I start

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5   See Jim Sergent, Janet Loehrke, Raom Padilla and Nora G. Hertel, 'George Floyd Protests: How Did We Get Here?' *USA Today*, 29 May 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/46335.

6   Bonnett, *Multiracism*, introduction.

7   For a discussion of possible government actions to deal with the effects of slavery, see Jamar Tipsy, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 192–212.

8   For example, the United States engaged in a civil war that eliminated slavery and has passed various laws related to equal rights and opportunities. See Candace Owens, *Blackout: How Black America Can Make Its Second Escape from the Democrat Plantation* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2020), 10.

with the American situation primarily because historically it has often been compared to the conflict between ancient Israel and Egypt.

Scholars have frequently noted that 'African Americans heard, read, and retold the story of the Exodus.'[9] Many blacks have viewed their 'own aspiration for liberation' as parallel to the 'story of the ancient Hebrew slaves'.[10] This fact suggests that the suffering of African Americans is not unique. Instead, the pain of the ancient Israelites can be compared to that of blacks. Moreover, this comparison can be projected to other oppressed people groups, such that the exodus story has 'long been a source of hope for oppressed people everywhere'.[11]

Debra Walker King has coined the term 'blackpain' to summarize how 'the visual and verbal representation of pained black bodies … function as rhetorical devices, as instruments of socialization, and as sociopolitical strategy in American popular culture and literature.'[12] King demonstrates that black bodies are frequently presented within American culture as pained images, allowing escapism from the realities of racism. Yomna Saber elaborates on King's research by explaining that blackpain is

> a political means of separating blacks and pushing them to the periphery. Since they fail to fall under the mythological rubric of pain-free American identity, blacks become 'outsiders who can never be "let in", the ones who do not belong but who, by virtue of their pain, are failed Americans' [quoting King]. … Blackpain maintains the racial hierarchy and keeps blacks in an inferior position by inflicting a social disability that excludes them from mainstream culture.[13]

In other words, both Saber and King argue that the high frequency of black bodies visualized in pain within American culture results in a subtle form of racism. Blacks become less likely to participate in American society because their lives are not depicted in the media as 'pain-free' like those of their white counterparts. This tendency leads both blacks and whites to view blacks as outsiders instead of inviting them to be united with their neighbours as Americans.

The full implications of blackpain are beyond the scope of this paper. My point here is to demonstrate one racist phenomenon that has been argued in the literature. Although the experience of blackpain has been identified in African Americans, its repercussions need not apply only to that group. Instead, just as various cultures

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9   Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 83. See also Kenneth Chelst, *Exodus and Emancipation: Biblical and African-American Slavery* (New York: Urim Publications, 2014), 20; Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, *Slavery in America* (New York: Facts on File, 2010), 112; Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 5; Alan Raice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 66.

10   Callahan, *The Talking Book*, 83.

11   Jerry Windley-Daoust, ed., *Living Justice and Peace: Catholic Social Teaching in Practice* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2002), 21.

12   Debra Walker King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 16. King distinguishes between the terms 'black pain' and 'blackpain'. She uses the former to refer to the pain black individuals experience and the latter for the concept of black people suffering through the use of pained images presented within American society.

13   Yomna Saber, 'Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*: Hearing the Silent Voice of Pain', in *Voices of Illness: Negotiating Meaning and Identity,* ed., Peter Bray (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 156.

have identified themselves with the oppression of the ancient Israelites, these same cultures might also seek to identify themselves with the experience of blackpain. How any culture depicts a minority group might lead to similar results. Though blackpain does have its distinctive features, suffering is common to all ethnic groups.[14] As such, other oppressed peoples can find solidarity with blacks since, far too often, being black 'in America has very little to do with skin color. … To be black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are.'[15]

Still, for Christians seeking to pursue racial reconciliation and unity under the lordship of Christ, just identifying the problem is not enough. Instead, we should desire to identify ways in which we can help all people groups to avoid participating in blackpain. Many different solutions might be offered. Below, I detail one such solution as gleaned from the beginning of the exodus story.

God's solution for the Israelites

The Israelites' suffering in Egypt did not seem to leave a permanent burden on them as blacks have been burdened in America. In other words, the realities of blackpain have had an enduring effect on the black race in ways that the Israelites' slavery did not. As Rochelle Riley argues, 'Slavery continues to color our journey [as African Americans]—darkly.'[16] Given the similarities between the two ethnic groups, why were the Israelites able to focus more on their redemption while blacks appear to be more focused on their victimization?

The most obvious answer is that the Israelites did not remain powerless. A few hundred years after their time of enslavement, the Israelites became a nation-state. Furthermore, they had been promised a kingdom (see Gen 17:16) long before they were enslaved. The Israelites did not adopt a form of victimology because they foresaw a redemptive future. Because of their trust in God's providential promise, the Israelites could move from being oppressed to being in power. However, there is more to this promise.

For the Israelites to inherit God's *real* kingdom, they needed to fulfil all the requirements of God's laws, which were meant to provide the nation-state of Israel with instructions on how to live.[17] These instructions were not to be followed as if

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14   See King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain*, 11. As she states, 'Although black people make up the largest colonized minority in the United States, they are not the largest minority group or the only racial group to suffer objectification, alienation, disfranchisement, and racially motivated brutality in America. They are, however, the only ethnic group whose skin color has been identified consistently with such happenings since the birth of this nation. Racial loathing associated with black skin has encouraged and developed the problems of racism in the United States for almost three centuries.'

15   See James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 151; Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 47.

16   Rochelle Riley, *The Burden: African Americans and the Enduring Impact of Slavery* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), 4.

17   See Marc Zvi Brettler, 'The Hebrew Bible and History', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 112. Brettler explains, 'Torah means "instruction", and the stories of the Torah, and the laws embedded in these stories function as instruction.'

they were legal documents but as wisdom. As Deuteronomy 4:6 states, 'Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."'[18]

A legal document is meant to be as airtight as possible and is to be followed precisely, word for word. In contrast, a wisdom text is intended to provide parameters by which one is to perform a specific task. In other words, a legal document tells someone *exactly* what to do, whereas a wisdom text only provides guidelines on how generally to act. This factor is essential for understanding the following statement found in Deuteronomy 15:15: 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you; therefore, I command you *to do* this thing, today.'

There are four other occurrences of this same statement within the book of Deuteronomy, with slight variations (see the table). I have placed them alongside parallel passages from Exodus 5 that depict the plight of the Israelites under Pharaoh.

Exodus 5	Deuteronomy
And Pharaoh said, 'Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest (*hišbattem*) from their burdens' (5:5)!	However, the seventh day is a Sabbath (*šabbāṯ*) to Yahweh, your God. Do not do any work … so that your male and female servants may rest you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt (5:14–15).
'You shall no longer give (*lāṯēṯ*) the people straw to make bricks' (5:7). 'Thus says Pharaoh, "I will not give (*nōṯēn*) you straw"' (5:10).	As Yahweh your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt (15:14b–15).
'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness (*wəyāḥōggū lî bammiḏbār*)"' (5:1).	Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks. You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt (16:10–12).
Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, 'Why do you treat your servants like this … behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people' (5:15–16).	You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless … but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you from there (24:17–18).
So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble (*ləqōšēš qaš*) for straw (5:12).	When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner. … You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt (24:21–22).

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18 For more on this understanding of Deuteronomy 4:6, see John Sailhamer, 'A Wisdom Composition of the Pentateuch?' in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke*, ed. J. I. Packer and Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 28. As Sailhamer explains, Deuteronomy 4:6 embodies 'the basic message of the Pentateuch as a whole. Wisdom comes from knowing and obeying the written word of God, the Torah.'

Though each of these five statements is unique, they all contain at least two of the following three elements: (1) remember your time of enslavement, (2) remember that God redeemed you, and (3) obey God's commands.

More interestingly, all five of these statements can be contrasted with the racial injustices the Israelites faced at the hands of the Egyptians.[19] Exodus 5 records how 'the corvée system was tightened in such a way that it now definitively crossed over into degradation, forced labor, and persecution.'[20] At this moment, Pharaoh's oppressive leadership moved the Israelites' suffering to a level very similar to that of the black slaves' plight in America. As Jan Assmann states, 'It was Egypt that remained indissolubly liked with the idea of conscripted labor, transformed into slave labor by pharaonic injustice.'[21]

As wisdom for moving forward, God provided Israel with a contrastive statement for each racial injustice they faced while living in Egypt. Because Pharaoh did not want the Israelites to have any rest, they were to make sure that this injustice was corrected by allowing everyone to observe the Sabbath (see Deut 5:14–15). Because Pharaoh did not give the people bricks, they should share their abundance with those who have earned their freedom (Deut 15:14–15). Because Pharaoh did not let the Israelites participate in a feast to Yahweh, they were to make sure that all could join in the Feast of Weeks (Deut 16:10–12). Because Pharaoh perverted the law such that the fault was with his people (Ex 5:15–16), the Israelites were to ensure justice for all (Deut 24:17–18). And lastly, because Pharaoh made them scatter throughout the land to gather their stubble, they were to ensure that all had access to the supplies they needed (Deut 24:21–22).

Thus, the Israelites were to ensure that no one in their future kingdom would place others under the same injustice they had experienced. As Assmann concludes, the message of these verses is that 'If you [Israel] had never been foreigners and slaves in Egypt … you could never have founded a new form of society in which nobody is oppressed or degraded anymore.'[22]

Conclusion

Americans often treat racism as either something that has been overcome (conservatives) or as a lived political ideology (liberals). I would argue that a thoughtful reflection on the literary technique explained above affirms the appropriateness of both responses. Blacks should acknowledge and remember their past oppression by refusing to be labelled as victims while inspiring others not to allow such oppression to resurface. The Israelites were commanded to draw from

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19   James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 115. Hoffmeier states that 'In Exodus 5, Israel's oppression reached its climax when Pharaoh doubled the daily quota while expecting the Israelites to find their own straw.'
20   Jan Assmann, *The Invention of Religion: Faith and Covenant in the Book of Exodus*, trans. Robert Savage (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 98.
21   Assmann, *The Invention of Religion*, 98. As Hoffmeier (*Israel in Egypt*, 115) states, 'These captives could be assigned to whatever tasks Pharaoh and his officials desired. Farming, fowling, and vine tending, and pressing grapes are among the most common agricultural labor done by these prisoners.'
22   Assmann, *The Invention of Religion*, 105.

their slavery experience in Egypt so that they might treat slaves in their own society better. Similarly, African Americans should not only seek to reverse racial injustice in America but should also vow to deal graciously with all people, never using any aspects of their own freedom to oppress others. The past harmful actions performed by whites should not be accompanied by future vicious retaliatory measures from blacks. In this way, the plight of the Hebrew slaves provides oppressed groups not just with an example of solidarity in suffering but with motivation for steps towards true reconciliation.

Again, we should recall that God's solution to the Israelites' history of pain is presented as wisdom, not law. This awareness will help us apply the solution to the problem of blackpain in America and to racial oppression globally. For example, the statements in Deuteronomy presuppose a nation-state that will itself have slaves. However, slavery (even non-chattel slavery) is not God's ideal.[23] Instead, God provided Israel with wisdom for dealing with such situations until he would bring forth the ideal kingdom.

Similarly, oppressed racial groups can look to their past to help them identify ways to ensure that future generations will not have to suffer as our ancestors did. Governmental actions may never be able to redeem all aspects of blackpain. The Egyptians never did this for the Israelites, nor did the Israelites' escape by itself eliminate bitterness. Such a change must take place in a person's soul. However, each individual can pursue a path that advances justice for all ethnic groups. Such a path might involve a combination of advocating for governmental actions and engaging patiently in the daily persuasion of individuals.

I am not suggesting that such a path is easy. Indeed, it will often be more demanding than others. God 'is not blind and deaf to black suffering' or the suffering of any other oppressed group.[24] Instead, his 'suffering love as manifest on the cross is a source of great comfort and strength for any oppressed people. This understanding of God brings not merely resources to endure hardship but a determination to seek freedom from all forms of bondage.'[25]

We should be seeking freedom and equality not just for African Americans, but for everyone. Strength for this type of action will not come from anger but from a heart transformed by the love of Christ, a heart that seeks to present God's wisdom to the world.

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23 For a full discussion of the concept of slavery in the Hebrew Scriptures, see Richard E. Averbeck, 'Slavery in the World of the Bible', in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber and John Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 423–30.

24 James Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 109.

25 Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, 109.

Toward Healing the Cataract of Racial Segregation: Spaces and Places for Spiritual Formation

Anna Droll

Notions of race which promote segregation constitute a present-day cataract that distorts the vision for true spiritual formation in the church. The remedy, as presented in this article, is a theology of belonging which contradicts racial segregation by promoting spaces and places where biblical intimacy can be enacted.

Mission and discipleship for the contemporary church

What does it look like for followers of Jesus to recognize our 'cataracts', our areas of distorted vision, and to yield to God as agents of mission? This crucial question leads first to the question of what God's mission today is. Richard Bauckham, in *Bible and Mission*, offers two paradigms (or dynamics) that have commonly been placed as the centrepiece in discussions of mission. The *centripetal* mode of mission is linked to the Old Testament prophetic vision of the nations coming in towards the centre, which is Jerusalem or Zion. Nevertheless, Bauckham points out, the foreshadowing of agency in God's subjects who 'go out'—for example, in the life of Jonah and his mission to Nineveh—is not completely absent in the Old Testament. But the *centrifugal* dynamic of going out with the message of God's goodness is more explicit in the accounts of the early church. That mode envisions the church as the centre and those carrying the gospel as outward bound.[1]

Beyond the centripetal and centrifugal, Bauckham suggests a third mode found in the early church, which is the exilic community of the diaspora. Bauckham notes that this community holds the promise of God's intended 'counter-cultural movement living for a different God in a different way and with a different future in view'.[2]

This third definition of mission as a counter-cultural movement comes closest to the concept of mission I wish to promote in this article. Here, the mission of God

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1 Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 72–73. See also Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 501–3, 523–25.

2 Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 80.

is expressed in its opposition to social constructs that violate God's desire for human relations. The display of hospitality reported in Acts 10 exemplifies this type of counter-cultural move to share space as led by the Spirit of God. We could even say that Cornelius and Peter participated in the Spirit's mission to re-create space and place for the enactment of divine community. On the other hand, a distorted spiritual vision can block us from moving towards the ideal of biblical intimacy today.

The Constantinian cataract

Development towards a spiritual formation that embraces the biblical intimacy of the Spirit requires reorientation towards God and others. The idea that we have spiritual cataracts that distort Christian vision, and which need to be recognized and healed as part of the project of spiritual formation and Christian discipleship, comes from Lee C. Camp's book *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World*. Camp coins the phrase 'Constantinian cataract' and describes its manifestation in US Christianity as a metaphor for an unwanted syncretism of Christian thought and practice with the more expedient elements of 'this-worldly concern'.[3]

Camp's main concern parallels what Gambian theologian Lamin Sanneh observed in his study of the history of the translation of the Scriptures—namely, the 'co-opting' of interpretations of Scripture by other ideologies.[4] In particular, Camp points out the problem of 'pursuing the purposes of God by pursuing the purposes of the empire'.[5] He describes the Constantinian cataract as a symptom of 'false identity' and of confusion about the nature of the kingdom of God and its values, as distinct from certain claims for allegiance promoted by the state.[6]

Camp explicitly addresses the problem of racism as symptomatic of an ideology of superiority generated by systems of powerholding, an ideology that contradicts the true spirit of Christian formation. In the US, racism has not been simply a demonstration of the private preferences of selected persons; rather, as Richard Rothstein explains, 'Racial segregation … was a nationwide project of the federal government in the twentieth century, designed and implemented by its most liberal leaders.'[7] The separation of white and black communities was driven by *de jure* segregation and required the cooperation of US presidents, federal agencies such as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and local supervisors and city planners who adhered to the zoning policies of local government agencies.[8]

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3   Lee C. Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 30, 41. Camp is professor of theology and ethics at Lipscomb University in Tennessee.
4   Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 99.
5   Camp, *Mere Discipleship*, 43. Camp pursues the topic further in a more recent publication, *Scandalous Witness: A Little Political Manifesto for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).
6   Camp, *Mere Discipleship*, 43.
7   Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), xii.
8   Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 20, 24, 28, 31, 33, 43, 83.

Sadly, many leaders of Christian churches led the way in vocalizing their insistence on segregation and in creating segregated communities. In Chicago in 1928, for example, the priest of St. Anselm's Catholic Church solicited signatures to bar black people from their neighbourhood; in 1946, leaders of the Congregational Church of Park Manor (a Chicago neighbourhood) joined in a campaign to oust an African American physician from his home in a white community.[9] Such incidents, driven by false underlying assumptions about race, are by no means a thing of the past. Just this year, the pastor of a church in Arkansas apologized publicly for the 'racially insensitive encounter' that a black woman reported after attempting to attend a Baptist worship service.[10]

These reports manifest an allegiance to cultural and social norms that nullify the values of the kingdom of God found in Scripture. Segregation does more than just exclude bodies from spaces; it ensures that the benefits to be found in certain spaces, or under certain conditions, are held away from or are made unattainable by the excluded. I will now suggest ways in which making space and place for biblical intimacy can override the Constantinian cataract of racial segregation.

The abnegation of shared space and place: A US case study

The impact of racial segregation on the church has resulted in the abnegation of shared space.[11] Imagine the church as a metaphorical city, either engaging in or resisting the planting of 'parks' and restful places for 're-creation'. Imagine those parks as metaphors for places of fellowship and shared belonging as a community born of the Spirit, places where socialization is re-created by means of the expression of grace. These types of spaces and places for enacting biblical intimacy and a shared sense of belonging have often been disregarded.

While the problem of the cataract of racial segregation is by no means solely an American phenomenon, I will present examples from that context since I know it best.[12] The significance of the conversation about race relations for Pentecostals, for example, is made clear in the interviews embedded in a video presented by the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA) in 2019 to commemorate the 'Memphis miracle'. The 'miracle' referred to was a meeting of black and white Pentecostal leaders in Memphis, Tennessee in 1994, which led to a time of open repentance and foot washing. Those who had been present at the event and who were interviewed for the video included Bishop Charles Blake of the Church of God in Christ; George O. Wood, former general superintendent of the Assemblies of God USA; and Clyde Hughes, overseer of the International Pentecostal Church of Christ.

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9   Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 104–5.
10   Sarah Einselen, 'Baptist Pastor Apologizes after Black Woman Says Church Turned Her Away', The Roys Report, 30 June 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46358.
11   David P. Leong points out the connection between theology and geography on the issue of race relations in *Race and Place: How Urban Geography Shapes the Journey to Reconciliation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017).
12   I self-identify as an evangelical Pentecostal and a member of the Assemblies of God denomination. However, my students at South Florida Theological Seminary who come from Myanmar and Nigeria have informed me of the cataracts of racialization embedded in their own Christian cultures.

In the video, Hughes described his experience of the meeting, saying, 'It's sin to see sin and to remain silent and do nothing. And so I was particularly hurt when I heard the stories of black leaders expressing their hurt at the absence of the white church during the civil rights movement.' Blake stated, 'In essence, it was a time of brokenness. The whites had some repenting to do and some forgiveness to seek. We also had some repenting for prejudices that might have existed in our hearts and resentments that might have been within us.' George Wood commented, 'In looking around, quite frankly, I didn't know most of the African Americans. I probably knew only one in the whole group, which was the shame of the great divide that occurred.' Yet it is not surprising that church leaders had lived distant from one another, for this racial divide mirrored the social conditions of the American milieu.[13]

This great divide existed because churches had succumbed to socio-cultural cues set in place largely by *de jure* or lawful segregation. In Camp's terms, churches, or the people in them, had acquired cataracts that promoted the alienation of white and black congregants rather than the unity for which Jesus prayed when he said, 'Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one' (Jn 17:11b, NRSV). Therefore, Pentecostal churches followed suit in manifesting a segregated society. The abnegation of space and place for the experience of shared life was the result of taking on the cultural cues for racial socialization.

The spirit of belonging for spiritual formation

If space and place represent the *location* for enacting biblical intimacy, the pouring out of divine desire at Pentecost is the *impetus* for initiating relationship in those locations. Willie James Jennings speaks cogently to a theology of belonging in the Spirit, drawing from the experience of black Americans who have lived and often still live under the pressures induced by the powers of segregation.[14] Jennings' concern for authentic expressions of biblical intimacy in Christian community and discipleship is particularly relevant where racial bias has permeated and corrupted Christian vision.

If there is a crisis in discipleship in the American context, as Camp suggested above, enlightenment on the issues of identity, belonging and desire is part of the remedy, especially for understanding race relations. Jennings explains that these issues are understood only once the meaning of the Spirit's outpouring on the church is fully grasped. For example, a reading of the tongues display at Pentecost which interprets the events only as God's verification of the universality of the

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13 For a sensitive response to the racial divide in the US South by a white Baptist pastor, see Malcolm O. Tolbert, 'The Confessions of a Would-Be Change Agent', in *The Theological Educator: A Journal of Theology and Ministry* (New Orleans, LA, 1973), also presented to the Association of Baptist Public Relations Agents in New Orleans, 27 March 1973; available online at https://worldea.org/yourls/46359.

14 The extent to which the black American experience has been one of disenfranchisement, pain and often terror is addressed in Vincent Harding's historical work *There Is a River: the Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1981). It has been addressed from a theological standpoint by James Cone in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), by theologian Howard Thurman in *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), and by pastor and civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. in *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010).

gospel, or only as a miracle of hearing, or only as divine empowerment, but without grasping the *implications for relationship* misses the point. Jennings writes, 'If, however, one recalls the significance of language for entering the world of another, then the work of the Spirit in Israel begins to signal a powerful new reality of relationship.' Jennings points out how intimately bound up with cultural understanding language acquisition is and adds that 'such learning inevitably involves learning either directly or indirectly the land out of which the language came to life in the operation of everyday practices.'[15] Jennings sees Pentecost as a 'gesture of communion' generated by the Spirit of God and demonstrative of God's desire.

The significance of the role of language for mediating mutual understanding, or what Jennings calls 'entering the world of another', should not be understated. Entering the other's world requires engagement with the sentiments of the other as they are communicated, so that a resonance of meaning can be shared. That resonance can be hampered by making pre-emptive moves to redact or redefine what has been communicated before the work of understanding can take place. One such negative example is the rephrasing of 'white privilege' as 'white blessing' by pastor Louie Giglio, in an interview in which his discourse reframed the history of slavery in the US. His refocusing of the issues appeared to marginalize the experience of blacks and to circumvent black vocalization in favour of adjustments that would make the discussion more palatable for whites. Therefore, rather than listening deeply to black pain, he caused the redemptive possibilities inherent in the gift of prophetic language to be disabled.[16] From a practical standpoint, when mutual understanding is disabled, the possibility of communion is also aborted.

Conversely, communion is the end goal of the Spirit in Acts. We must not overlook the fact that this overture of desire for communion came as a revelation to men who were expecting something different, that is, men 'who awaited the beginning of Israel's new age as a world power'.[17] Jennings sees 'the revolution of the intimate signaled by the events in Cornelius' home' as a pivotal moment in the reorientation of the disciples, especially Peter.[18] Jennings' point is an important one, since to some extent, the meeting with Cornelius sealed the death of any notions that the gospel would remedy Israel's socio-political situation. On the contrary, the gospel compelled Peter to serve the Roman centurion as one would serve a brother. Yet Peter's willingness to accept Cornelius' hospitality posed enough of a dilemma as to require him to offer a defence before contentious brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11). Jennings concludes that Acts demonstrates the joining of disparate groups by the Spirit 'who was driving Israel toward the Gentiles in the space constituted by Jesus' body'.[19] It is at this point of recognition of kinship that new identity is formed. Jennings writes, 'If Jesus constitutes a new space for Jew and Gentile existence, then

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15   Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 266.
16   Sarah Pulliam Bailey, 'Atlanta Megachurch Pastor Louis Giglio Sets Off Firestorm by Calling Slavery a Blessing to Whites', *Washington Post*, 16 June 2020, https://worldea.org/yourls/46360.
17   Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 267.
18   Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 269.
19   Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 270.

in that new space a common life must ensue that allows the formation of a new identity.'[20] For Peter and the church, the realization dawned that the new communal identity in Christ had usurped the notions of power and of racialization found in the scripts that informed life in the Roman Empire.

Jennings develops his ideas further in his subsequent commentary on the book of Acts. There he describes Acts as a display of divine desire and 'a divine fantasy of a creation turned in love and embraced by its creator'.[21] Therefore, the imperative driving the formation of new social order in the Spirit is the quality of desire at work in the new age of the church. God is at work impressing that new, social desire in the hearts of those who yield to that formation of the interior, and that desire is characterized by great strength. He writes, 'The enemies of the Way repeatedly believed that violence would thwart the Spirit of God and end discipleship to Jesus. They misunderstood … the nature of divine desire.'[22]

Conclusion: Towards enacting biblical intimacy

Biblical intimacy is the antithesis of racial segregation. That is because intimacy requires the experience of shared life in the spaces and places dedicated to the enactment of belonging in the biblical community. Returning to the precedents set in the encounter between Cornelius and Peter, I will close with a few suggestions for the development of spaces and places today that enable the full sharing of Christian life.

First, both Peter and Cornelius were receptive to God in prayer and, consequently, were open to being led through visions. Today's disciples must function with epistemic humility, learning to trust godly intuition and living in a posture of expectancy of the voice of God.[23] Second, just as messengers were sent to Peter, the chasm between disassociated fellow Christians today might be dealt with creatively through the mediation of others. While I do not mean to divert attention from the pivotal invitation that brought Cornelius and Peter to meet directly, all venues of discussion and teaching can serve as essential means of heightening awareness of the mission of the Spirit. I had a powerful mediated experience of that type as a student, which helped to remove my cataracts regarding racial issues, and I now try to stimulate similar awakenings in others as a teacher.[24] Processing that awareness of God's call to intimacy and shared life is important to initiating and developing relationships. Perhaps the need for extensive processing is made evident by the fact that Peter experienced the vision repeatedly (Acts 10:16).

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20   Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 271–72.
21   Willie J. Jennings*, Acts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 10.
22   Jennings, *Acts*, 10.
23   See Anna Droll, 'The Spirit and the Poor in West Africa and Tanzania: A Pentecostal Response to David J. Bosch's "Mission in the Wake of the Enlightenment"', *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 2 (2020): 185–86. My forthcoming book *African Pentecostal Spirituality: the Sub-Saharan Horizon of the Pneumatological Imagination* (Brill) addresses the significance of visionary experience in Pentecostal spirituality.
24   A course offered by The King's University, titled 'Racism in the Church' and facilitated by Bishop Ulmer with Greg Waybright and Wayne Cordeiro, was that important venue for me. Today, I teach 'Racism and Reconciliation' to the seminarians of South Florida Theological Seminary as a space for fostering awareness about the mission of God to heal the cataract of racial segregation.

The invitation itself, of course, is the main factor driving the story, since the opening up of a space for a meeting of minds and hearts and for hosting the presence of the Spirit is the crucial event. It leads to an encounter that not only serves as a reorientation of Peter's own understanding of the mission of God but also positions the church for its future mission. Christian practice today should include the extending and receiving of invitations to experience a sense of Christian belonging in shared spaces. Herein is the answer to living out the mission of the Spirit as the counter-cultural enactment of biblical intimacy.

Political Advice from Three Great Christian Political Philosophers

Dennis P. Petri

In this essay, one of the world's leading advocates for religious freedom shares what he has learned from three of modern history's greatest Christian political philosophers: 17th-century French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal, Dutch lawyer and statesman Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, and British apologist C. S. Lewis. The article offers practical principles with plenty of application.

Blaise Pascal

In 1670, Pascal gave three lectures to a duke, including advice on how to be a good ruler.[1] He shared his first piece of advice by way of allegory, which is a very biblical method of teaching.

Once upon a time, according to Pascal's story, there was a simple man living a simple life. One morning, the man woke up and discovered, much to his surprise, that he was not in his own bed. Instead, he was on the shore of an island. He had no idea how he had been transported there and he did not recognize the island at all. He had never been there before and had no idea how to leave the island.

The man felt very disturbed. Soon, though, he learned that the island had a king who was loved by all but who had mysteriously disappeared. As coincidence would have it, this lost and confused man looked remarkably similar to the missing king—so similar that they thought he *was* the king and happily celebrated his return.

The man thought to himself, 'I am a simple man, and this is an incredible dream. But I will accept their notions and continue to pose as their king, since that's what they already believe.' But he remained fully cognizant of the fact that, regardless of how the people revered him or what privileges they granted him, he was still just a normal person, not their king.

After completing this story, Pascal told the duke, 'This is the situation you are in. You are a duke and with that come authority, properties and the various privileges of ruling over your subjects, but you must always remember that you are just an ordinary man. You are just like all of your subjects.'

Pascal was not revolutionary by any means. He supported the aristocracy and the system through which one could become a duke and enjoy the associated

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1   Blaise Pascal, *Pensées sur la justice. Trois discours sur la condition des grands* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011 [1670]).

privileges of such a title. But he emphasized that members of royalty must keep in mind the similarities between them and their subjects, and that it is crucial not to become too proud.

This first piece of advice applies to all leaders in business and politics—in fact, to everyone. No one is entitled to their talents, properties or privileges. Pascal is very conservative, certainly far from Marx and Engels' concept of property as theft, but he expects those entrusted with leadership to be fair and honest.

In his second piece of advice to the duke, Pascal differentiated between the 'greatness of establishment' and the 'greatness of nature'. Establishment is everything related to the duke's status: his title, his property and the institution that gave him this position. Pascal told the duke, 'When I speak to you, I kneel down as a result of your greatness of establishment. It is what you deserve because you are a duke.' The greatness of nature, however, is very different. Speaking about a mathematician whom Pascal considered better than himself, he explained that this other mathematician possessed greatness of nature because it was based on the man's merits. Through this comparison, Pascal conveyed to the duke that as a ruler, he should strive to be honoured because of his accomplishments and merits, not simply as a result of his position.

This advice on how to be a good ruler is quite unlike what Niccolò Machiavelli said to the prince he worked for. The most important difference is that Machiavelli was much more interested in methods of conquering and maintaining power, including how utilizing manipulation and deceit can help one achieve those goals.[2] Pascal's advice, however, was in no way perverse. Instead, he offered a moral approach based on values and principles.

Finally, Pascal told the duke that to be a good ruler, he must satisfy the needs and desires of his subjects. In so doing, he would avoid becoming an autocrat who abuses power and takes advantage of his subjects. Pascal went on to say that following this path is the minimum requirement, but that if one wants to be an excellent ruler, he must do more than that—he must also guide his subjects towards charity. Pascal explained what he meant by that instruction: 'You need to lead them to understand and overcome their primitive desires. You need to make them less selfish and more altruistic, less worried about their own needs and more interested in serving others.'

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, a Dutch Reformed statesman of the 19th century, delivered a famous series of lectures called *Unbelief and Revolution*.[3] In these lectures, he provided advice and helpful governing principles to rulers, all of which can apply to a variety of areas such as politics, business, economics and even the personal sphere. Here, I will cover only a few points from his seminal lectures. I cannot come close to doing justice to the depth of his teachings, which also addressed larger topics such as the legacy of the Enlightenment and the French

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2   Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1532).
3   Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie* (Barneveld: Nederlands Dagblad, 2008 [1847]).

Revolution, the problematic concept of popular sovereignty (as a negation of divine sovereignty) and the foundations of the rule of law.

First and most importantly, Groen highlighted the existence of a creational order, or a biblical template on how society should be organized.[4] As part of this creational order, Groen interpreted the 'cultural mandate' in Genesis 1 as a call for social transformation and invited everyone to work towards this transformation. The underlying concept, he noted, appears in both the Old and New Testaments as well as in literature, and it is rather simple: God transforms something ugly into something beautiful. That is a central idea in the biblical myth of creation, but the narrative itself is actually about re-creation. It suggests that something was already there, but that it was dirty and dark, difficult and ugly until God made it something beautiful. In the New Testament, this concept appears in a different way in that Jesus' death, though tragic and awful, held great meaning and promise. In this instance, something negative opened the pathway for something very positive—the world's salvation.

These stories are powerful and formative myths of Western, Judeo-Christian culture, even for those who don't believe in them. Everyone subscribes to the narrative of social transformation—being able to transform something bad into something good. This is, in fact, the true task of politics and, perhaps even more surprisingly, the true task of business. We are not called only to be transformed, but also to contribute to the transformation of culture.

I would argue that the simple goal of taking the resources you have and transforming them into something better is the philosophical basis for the progress and development that have happened in the Western, Judeo-Christian world. These values have shaped our culture as we know it today. This call to transformation, then, is incredibly powerful and can be implemented daily within a company, in politics or in the personal sphere.

Groen's second important teaching concerns the call to witness. This call does not mean that people should say 'Hallelujah' everywhere they go, but rather that in every sphere of life, people should glorify their Creator. A proper understanding of politics can be derived from this concept. Politics is about promoting a development vision of society based on values. Promoting values, which for Christians essentially means glorifying the Creator in every sphere of life, also translates into promoting social transformation.[5]

Social transformation requires consistency and integrity. People cannot promote values by which they do not live. For example, Bishop Fernando Lugo, a former president of Paraguay, lived a very complicated life. He was a former Catholic bishop, he had children, and he was involved in corruption. His personal life was convoluted, to say the least. Yet people said of him, 'We don't care what he does in his personal life. He's promoting good values and good policies.' Groen would

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4   Dennis P. Petri and Frans Veerman, 'Revisiting Sphere Sovereignty to Interpret Restrictions on Religious Freedom', in *Christian Faith, Philosophy and International Relations: The Lamb and the Wolf*, ed. Simon Polinder and Govert Buijs (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 240–62.

5   André Rouvoet, *Reformatorische staatsvisie. De RPF en het ambt van de overheid* (Reformed Concept of the State: A Christian Political View on the Task of the Government) (Nunspeet: Marnix van St. Aldegonde Stichting, 1992).

explain, however, that this is not possible. A person simply can't promote good values if he or she fails to live by them. Rather, the call to witness encompasses walking in integrity and leading by example.

Although Groen argued that we have a moral duty to play an active role in the transformation of culture, he also warned that we should never expect salvation to come from the state. On the contrary, he believed strongly in the political significance of the sinful nature of humanity, which affects all social structures, including the state. This truth has two implications for how we view the state. First, it's a worthless endeavour to place our faith in changing structures, because they won't change human nature and because earthly perfection is unattainable. Again, this is not an argument for passivity in public life, but a fair warning that there are limits to what government can achieve. Second, the reach of the state should be restricted, because an omnicompetent state will lead inevitably to unlimited oppression.

Finally, Groen established firmly that neutrality in politics is impossible. Political choices always stem from ideological preferences, so there is no such thing as a neutral or secular state, because it will always embody a preference for one worldview at the expense of others. Groen went even further by arguing that when politicians get caught up in worldly ideologies, they lose all reverence for the truth and are unconsciously drawn to violence to impose their ideologies. This reflection has caused Groen to be identified as an early predictor of the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century.

C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis is not particularly known as a political philosopher. Most people know of him as a literary scholar, a very famous fiction writer and an outspoken Christian apologist. Nevertheless, he was also a very interesting political philosopher. That part of his life remains largely overlooked, as a result of Lewis' hatred for party politics. Many other people hate party politics too, and that fact has great bearing on how they conceptualize politics. But politics is so much more than just parties and elections.[6] It is about promoting a vision of society based on values, in line with Groen van Prinsterer's vision.

One of Lewis' important observations in political philosophy concerned the importance of returning to natural law in order to justify morality.[7] In *The Abolition of Man*, a series of three lectures on postmodernism and moral relativism,[8] and more generally throughout his work, Lewis advocated for applying moral principles to politics but urged not using the Bible to justify one's morality, explaining that, if nothing else, it's a sounder debate strategy. To appeal to natural law is to appeal to a moral common ground, which allows for engagement with those who do not believe the Bible. It means that people can reach a consensus on basic social issues by

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6   John G. West, *Public Life in the Shadowlands: What C. S. Lewis Can Teach Us about Politics* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 1998).

7   Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson, *C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

8   C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009 [1943]).

employing honesty and reason. Additionally, although the Bible is the Word of God, it merely reaffirms the laws of nature and the principles that already exist.

Justifying morality based on natural law is essential to avoid being dogmatic. It provides the opportunity to reflect genuinely on why a certain policy is more desirable than another, rather than just imposing biblical dogmas. Lewis developed this point further in another series of radio lectures, published as *Mere Christianity*.[9] People who impose dogmas, whether they take the form of ideologies or biblical convictions, are dangerous, or at least Lewis perceives them as such. It is for these reasons that the Bible cannot and should not function as a political manual.

On the topic of being a good ruler, the second thing Lewis would point to is the importance of humility. Social issues are complex and difficult to solve. It's not easy to translate natural law into public policy. The complexity of the task calls for thoughtful consideration, consultation with experts and a great deal of research. Throughout his work in political philosophy, Lewis repeatedly returns to the point that it is simply not enough to be a good person, or even a good Christian. Good intentions are not enough. Facilitating social change requires quality and excellence.

The third virtue Lewis pointed to, and another key word he used when giving advice to politicians, is prudence. Consequences matter. Lewis warned strongly against idealists of any kind, on the basis that their tendency to take precipitous actions makes them dangerous. That kind of behaviour often leads to mistakes and, at its core, negates the sinful nature of humanity. We have limited knowledge about the world around us. Therefore, we can never pretend we can solve all its problems.

Like Groen, Lewis emphasized that the biblical narrative of creation contains a strong message that man is sinful and has limited knowledge about the world around him. This makes it very difficult to address the complexity of the problems that need to be solved. At times, people are blinded by selfishness or greed without even realizing it. At other times, they may be blinded by utopias, ideologies or formulas. Prudent policy makers must remember that earthly perfection is unattainable. In the end, as Jesus said, the poor will always be with you.

Ideologies imply that if we simply change the structures and the institutions, then people will behave. For example, if there's crime in a neighbourhood, some well-intentioned neighbours might propose setting up an arts facility with the hope that people will go to the theatre and no longer engage in crime. That example is quite obviously idealistic, but that doesn't keep consultants from recommending such policies. Creating some kind of institution will not, by itself, cause people to change. It's important to be pragmatic and realistic about the human condition, which is exactly where all the idealists and ideologies are wrong. This does not mean that creating institutions to help people behave in a better way is inherently bad, but we should not expect salvation (or the complete elimination of crime) to be the outcome.

Lewis' best advice, then, is to be humble, work quietly and solve one problem at a time, not all problems at once. People who believe they can solve all the problems in the world are caught up in formulas and ideologies. Don't be deceived by such people. Also, there are often unintended consequences—that is, an attempt to solve

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9   C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000 [1952]).

a problem may create a new problem or even exacerbate the original one. For example, environmentalists may encourage people to reduce the use of paper tissues because of the associated waste and pollution. But if they turn to cloth handkerchiefs instead, that could turn out worse for the environment because of the energy and chemicals required to wash them. Again, good intentions are not enough to counter the possible consequences.

Lewis underscores the importance of thinking, humility, prudence and the application of scientific knowledge, but he also makes clear that moral decisions themselves cannot be left to experts and technocrats. This conviction also leads him to advocate against giving too much power to unelected experts who claim they can engineer and remake society for good, as he brilliantly illustrates in his fictional work *That Hideous Strength*.[10] We should consult the experts and gather all the information and data necessary to make an informed decision, but the experts themselves should not be the ones making the decisions. In the end, these are not technical decisions but political and moral ones.

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10   C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Scribner, 1996 [1945]).

By the Same Token: How Communion Can Heal Communities

Leah Farish

Every Christian practice, even those that have been long forgotten, had a purpose. This article looks at the historical practice of requiring tokens for admission to communion, encouraging us to recapture the individual and communal benefits of taking communion seriously.

Most Christians know that taking communion or 'the Lord's Supper' is important. But few realize that in many parts of Europe and North America, this ritual was once a community-wide, multi-day process, sometimes called the 'Communion Season' or a 'Holy Fair'.[1] And it looked quite different from how communion is practiced today.

This article looks back at past ways of celebrating communion, particularly the use of 'communion tokens', with the goal of challenging evangelical Christians to recover the sober self-examination and community healing that once resulted from approaching the body and blood of our Lord.

Early tokens

As early as pre-Christian Greece and Rome, 'tesserae' were small pieces of metal identifying members in all 'oath-bound secret societies'.[2] Some scholars believe the infant Church adapted their use to prevent 'the entrance of spies' amid threats of persecution.[3] As the Church spread through Europe, tesserae began to be marked with Christian symbols and used as 'credentials when persons were sent to confessors in prison to minister to them … [and] for giving admission to shows, or

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1 Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). For a model service reconstructed from early Protestant church records and an eyewitness account of a 1767 service in Maine, North America, see David A. Ramsey and R. Craig Koedel, 'The Communion Season', *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 203–16, https://worldea.org/yourls/46336.
2 Alexander J. S. Brook, *Communion Tokens of the Established Church of Scotland, Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Neill and Co., 1908), 3. In this lecture-format book, Brook refers to many primary historical documents and artifacts, though without citations. A link to a digitized version of Brook's text can be found at Presbyterian Heritage Center, 'Communion Tokens', https://worldea.org/yourls/46337.
3 Brook, *Communion Tokens.*

entitling [holders] to share in the distribution of grain. … They may also have been used to identify the faithful when they desired admission to religious gatherings.'[4]

One scholar says that according to ancient records of the Church, 'When a brother went abroad on business, he was given by his Church a metal tablet with an inscribed watch-word, which secured him brotherly aid and Church privileges wherever he went.'[5]

Eventually, after years when almost all European adults attended services and church discipline had been distorted into either inquisitions or laxity towards egregious priestly and royal misdeeds, believers wanted the Lord's Table to be treated with reverence. 'Whereas the Catholic Church at times sold tokens, or distributed them after taking the Eucharist',[6] amongst early Protestants tokens symbolized readiness to partake of communion after examination by a 'spiritual authority'.[7] The individual disciple was to self-examine (1 Cor 11:27–32; 2 Cor 13:5) but also was accountable to his or her shepherd, who in turn held the keys of the kingdom (Mt 16:19; 18:18).[8]

Thus in 1560 John Calvin proposed the use of communion tokens (*méreaux*),[9] though the Geneva Council never implemented the idea. However, Dutch believers, the German and French Huguenots, and Presbyterians of Scotland were using them by then.[10]

John Knox's Scotland developed communion preparation into a week-long 'Holy Fair', which opened with teaching on sin, progressed to messages on the Saviour and culminated in the taking of communion. According to a 1697 'Session Book' in Presbyterian Scotland, Communion Season 'comprised a Fast Day, usually Friday, followed by a Preparation Day (Saturday), Communion Sabbath and a Thanksgiving Monday. Over this period there would have been as many as six services as well as the Communion Service itself.'[11]

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4   Mary McWhorter Tenney, *Communion Tokens: Their History and Use, with a Treatise on the Relation of the Sacrament to the Vitality and Revivals of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1936), 11–16, available at Material History of Religion Project, 'Communion Tokens', https://worldea.org/yourls/46338.

5   Thomas Warner, *Communion Tokens. A Descriptive Catalogue* (privately printed, 1888), 8–9, https://worldea.org/yourls/46339.

6   Brook, *Communion Tokens*, 6.

7   Brook, *Communion Tokens*.

8   Travis   Fentiman   and   R.   Andrew   Myers,   'Communion   Tokens', https://worldea.org/yourls/46340.

9   'Calvini Opera XVII, 711', a letter dated 30 January 1560 and cited in Musée Protestant, 'Méreaux', https://worldea.org/yourls/46341. Calvin said, 'Each person should receive tokens of lead for those of his household who were instructed; and the strangers who might come, on giving testimony of their faith, should also receive tokens, and those who had none should not be admitted to the tables.' Translated in Glens of Antrim Historical Society, 'Presbyterian Church Communion Tokens', 17 October 2005, https://worldea.org/yourls/46342.

10 For example, see Warner, *Communion Tokens*, 7. See also B. Waugh, 'What Are Communion Tokens?' Presbyterians of the Past, 12 June 2017, https://worldea.org/yourls/46343; Stephen Nichols, 'Bonnie Banks and Communion Tokens', 8 August 2018, https://worldea.org/yourls/46344; David Powell, 'Communion Tokens of the British Isles', n.d., https://worldea.org/yourls/46345.

11 Glens of Antrim Historical Society, 'Presbyterian Church Communion Tokens'; Ramsey and Koedel, 'Communion Season'.

In 1907, scholar Alexander Brook wrote that 'There was no more familiar object in Scotland from the Reformation down to half a century ago than the Communion token.' To be admitted to the table, church people were 'seriously exhorted to study the Scriptures, and the knowledge of God, and to walk in some suitableness to the Gospel, and so receive tokens. … [Participants might be instructed to] repeat the shorter Catechism. … Lads among themselves two and two, and the lasses among themselves two and two.'[12]

This might seem a cumbersome and legalistic process. But in most places where tokens were found, there were practical reasons for using them. In times of power struggle between Protestants and Catholics, leaders needed to discern who was sincere in coming for communion. A token that only an approved Christian could possess was a safeguard of the Table and of the congregation. As one example of how seriously congregations took this safeguarding, men were named to stand at the west door so that 'all may be kept out who want tokens' and at 'the east door that none comes in at that door but go immediately from the tables.'[13] An exception is the charming anecdote told by Rev. Robert Wodrow. In 1711 an English soldier sat down to partake, and the reverend,

> seeing that he had no token, desired him to come out to the churchyard, where he asked him why he had presumed to seat himself at the Lord's table without a token of admission. 'In my native country', replied the soldier, 'there is no such custom as you refer to, and if I have given offence, it was not of intention, but in ignorance of Scottish ways.' Wodrow then examined him, and being well satisfied with his answers, gave him a token and told him he might go forward.[14]

The admission process was usually most developed where communion was infrequent, such as in wartime. Communion was offered only once a year in some parishes, or even as seldom as once in seven to nine years.[15] Also, when 'ministers were scarce' and two or more parishes combined to take the Lord's Supper, the visiting minister was furnished tokens to give to

> those of his own flock who might be present. This was done originally, most probably, to guard against impostors, and gradually grew to be a part of the Communion ceremony. It finally became the established custom, at the conclusion of the Saturday service before the Sunday of Communion, for the elders to assemble before the pulpit, when the minister formally constituted the session by prayer, and then the members came forward and received their tokens from the hand of their pastor, and in sight of all members present.[16]

Another account from Glasgow in 1638 says that 'the Assembly thereafter sits down; the church door was straitly guarded by the town, none had entrance but he

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12 Brook, *Communion Tokens*, 6. Spelling and capitalization have been modernized in this quotation and others from early sources.
13 Glens of Antrim, 'Presbyterian Church Communion Tokens'.
14 Brook, *Communion Tokens*, 7.
15 Brook, *Communion Tokens*, 14.
16 Warner, *Communion Tokens*, 9.

who had a token of lead, declaring he was a covenanter.'[17]

Communion season and its customs yielded other benefits too. In 17th-century Scotland, 'Popular piety began to revolve around these massive outdoor gatherings … [and] these occasions frequently resulted in religious revival.'[18]

The process in the New World

Many settlers of the US colonies of North and South Carolina brought the tradition of tokens with them.[19] It was also observed among Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists and others in America in the 1700s and 1800s.[20]

Early New World Protestants were often scattered in small villages. Though building a plain clapboard church was a priority as soon as a few homes clustered in the wilderness, not everyone had their own pastor and elders. Methodists would ride over the countryside serving a circuit of multiple congregations, earning the name 'circuit riders'.

Tokens were helpful in the quickly expanding culture of American Christianity. 'A token was not only a passport admitting to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but was also, in an indirect way, a certificate of character. … When a member of a church left his native parish he often took his token with him, and it served to admit him to Church privileges in the parish to which he went.'[21] A minister moving to a new parish, even overseas, might take a supply of tokens with him.[22]

A few days before communion, a minister or elders leading a rural congregation would visit the homes of their members, meeting with them privately and inquiring about the state of their souls. Members might be quizzed on the Ten Commandments or the Lord's Prayer. Others were asked about their behaviour, personal as well as public. Fathers were held accountable for how well they were catechizing and teaching their children about Scripture. For example, Mennonite leaders

> would pay individual visits to each church member to ensure that no conflicts or hard feelings existed between any of the members. If such discord existed, people were expected to go and seek forgiveness and to set things right before receiving communion. In that framework, peace-seeking and peacemaking preceded the table.[23]

Inevitably, quarrels and controversies were reported to the visiting shepherds. These problems had to be resolved publicly before participants could take communion. Resolution must have been vital in remote areas where there were no

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17 American Numismatic Society, 'Coin Sales', *American Journal of Numismatics, and Bulletin of the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society* 9, no. 1 (1874): 13, https://worldea.org/yourls/46346.

18 D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, 'The Lord's Supper: How Often?' Orthodox Presbyterian Church, https://worldea.org/yourls/46347.

19 Nichols, 'Bonnie Banks and Communion Tokens'.

20 Fentiman and Myers, 'Communion Tokens'.

21 Brook, *Communion Tokens*, 28.

22 Brook, *Communion Tokens*.

23 Joetta Schlabach, 'Communion and Peace', Bridgefolk, 11 January 2009, https://worldea.org/yourls/46348.

courts (or therapists, or social media) to address interpersonal squabbles. As Calvin wrote, one reason Christ instituted the sacrament was 'specially to exhort us to union and brotherly charity'.[24]

While all this was going on, deacons or volunteers would be setting up tables and benches. Setup was usually outdoors because so many people were expected to partake. They came from remote areas for this special occasion, since the Supper was so rarely offered. Brook describes records of a ceremony at which each table had 40 to 80 partakers, with a total of 2,361 people present.[25]

Fencing the table

Today, many churches include in their communion liturgy a message called 'fencing the table', when the pastor warns that partaking of the elements is restricted to repentant Christian believers. In the 17th and 18th centuries, men would cut switches from trees to weave a simple perimeter (a 'wattle fence') for the communion area.[26] They were literally 'fencing the table'.[27]

When an elder was satisfied that the people interviewed were in a proper spiritual state to take the sacrament, he would give them each a 'communion token'.[28] These were rectangular or coin-shaped objects of lead, pewter, brass or other metal, wood, leather or ivory.[29] Glass and, later, even celluloid tokens have been found.[30] One type of token was a paper one prepared in Virginia by the Rev. Samuel Davies, bearing this little rhyme:

> Do this says Christ 'till time shall end,
> In Mem'ry of your dying Friend.
> Meet at my Table and Record
> The Love of your departed Lord.[31]

Other messages on the tokens included 'Let a man examine himself', 'I am my beloved's and he is mine', 'I am the bread of life', 'Do this in remembrance of me', 'Keep the feast' and 'Give me thy heart'. On some, images including hearts, stars, communion cups or bread, flowers or even the rare crucifix were stamped or embossed. In later years, a church might make tokens bearing images of that parish's church building.[32]

As always, one had to present a token or be denied admission to the fenced tables. That would scandalize churches today, but exclusion was seen as temporary—not the same as permanent excommunication, because taking communion was good for the individual and those around him or her. As Calvin said, 'If we allege as an excuse

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24 John Calvin, *Tracts Containing Treatises on the Sacraments*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 167.

25 Brook, *Communion Tokens*, 15.

26 D. W. B. Somerset, 'The Origins of Fencing the Table', Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, https://worldea.org/yourls/46336, and citations therein.

27 Powell, 'Communion Tokens of the British Isles'; Presbyterian Historical Society, 'Communion Tokens', unpaged, https://worldea.org/yourls/46349.

28 Presbyterian Heritage Center, 'Communion Tokens'.

29 Brook, *Communion Tokens*, 8–9.

30 Presbyterian Historical Society, 'Communion Tokens'.

31 Presbyterian Historical Society, 'Communion Tokens'.

32 Brook, *Communion Tokens*, 17–20.

for not coming to the Supper, that we are still weak in faith or integrity of life, it is as if a man were to excuse himself from taking medicine because he was sick.'[33] On the other hand, 'The goal [of exclusion] was a careful protection of the Table from profanation by immoral or unfaithful people. It was part of a larger system of church discipline.'[34]

The practice of tokening for admission had virtually disappeared by the mid-20th century,[35] with the last use of tokens being a more commemorative use, as a souvenir from a conference or denominational milestone.[36] As one Presbyterian source explains the decline, 'By the early 20th century, use of tokens ceased as clergy and elders viewed communion as [exclusively] a means of grace, as opposed to a reward for knowledge and good behavior.'[37]

Modern application?

Imagine all this taking place in a 21st-century congregation. An uproar would likely ensue over privacy, judgementalism, authority and more. But the intent was to facilitate the self-examination required by I Corinthians 11:27–29: 'Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died' (ESV).

Questions naturally arise: Do today's evangelical churches help individuals examine themselves properly before communion? How would we know if people have properly examined themselves? How do we take the elements in a 'worthy' manner as defined by Scripture?

Whatever answers communion tokens held in the past, there seems to be no suitable replacement for them in today's church: 'Through the acculturation of the church and the rise of liberal theology during the nineteenth century, communion tokens fell out of favor. … Socially, members came to see church discipline as unfashionable and 'judgmental'.[38]

One source bemoans 'placing nearly the whole of the obligation of preparation upon the individual, the fencing of the minister being limited to a few words from the pulpit in the exercise of the Supper itself (leaving the matter to the discretion of

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33   R. Scott Clark, 'Calvin's Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper (1541, Part 5: "The Imperfections of Believers Should Rather Incline Them to Use the Supper")', The Heidelblog, https://worldea.org/yourls/46350.

34   Material History of Religion Project, 'Communion Tokens'.

35   Powell, Communion Tokens of the British Isles'.

36   Presbyterian Historical Society, 'Communion Tokens'. A single instance of use by an Irish Presbyterian church as late as 1995 was cited in a comment by Phil Pockras on 10 March 2020. See Glens of Antrim Historical Society, 'Presbyterian Church Communion Tokens'.

37   Presbyterian Historical Society, 'Communion Tokens'. The Protestant church has generally held a consistent view that communion is a means of grace; see for example Luke Stamps, 'Especially Preaching: The Ordinary Means of Grace', The Gospel Coalition, 10 February 2011, https://worldea.org/yourls/46351. As an illustration, see question and answer 88 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

38   Material History of Religion Project, 'Communion Tokens'.

the individual) rather than the elders lovingly and pastorally inquiring into the condition of each of their sheep'.[39] Recently in Texas, I visited a large evangelical church for the first time. As I walked into the sanctuary, a stranger handed me, and all those arriving, a tiny plastic apparatus with bread and juice in it. What a contrast to the careful accountability and reconciliation process of prior centuries in Europe and North America.

Christians in persecuting countries today may attach added significance to exclusion from communion. I have learned from my work in such environments that pastors may meet with a new convert for months before they can trust the person to meet the rest of the fellowship and share in their rituals. Accurately discerning the sincere state of a soul can be a matter of life and death for fellow believers in such circumstances.

What would it have been like to participate in communion season? The kind of shepherding involved then would splinter and outrage most congregations now. But in some cases, domestic abuse or relational wounds are probably festering without the routine inquiry that communion season once brought. Who can say what an old-fashioned communion season could accomplish in bringing interpersonal justice, healing and restitution? Perhaps we have more to learn—or remember—about spiritual hygiene: confession, accountability, reconciliation.

A friend of mine left the Reformed faith for Orthodoxy because she wanted to be able to confess sin and seek restoration with someone who was charged with her spiritual care, had training and experience in receiving such confessions, and wouldn't minimize her concern through premature assurances that she was doing fine.

I admit that I will feel more comfortable not being scrutinized by elders before I take the bread and the cup next Sunday morning. But Christians today may be missing out on something by coming to the supper without their token. Perhaps cleansing in both heart and community could emerge if we could somehow restore a dedicated season of self-examination, accountability and reconciliation around communion.

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39   Fentiman and Myers, 'Communion Tokens'.

Building Bridges: Luther, the Lord's Supper and the Ethiopian Church

Geoffrey Butler

Luther and other Reformers, especially Zwingli, had passionate disagreements over the theology of the Lord's Supper. Surprisingly, Luther seemed to have more in common on this topic with an Ethiopian Christian who visited him in 1534. This article places that interaction in its historical context, suggesting that Ethiopian Christianity in that time period had significant theological similarities with and may even have influenced the European Reformation.

When Protestants reflect on the catalysts of their tradition's separation from Rome, justification by faith, the sole authority of Scripture and rejection of papal power typically arise. However, the Reformers' objections to the mass also served as a key battleground. Martin Luther fiercely attacked Rome's medieval practice—lamenting the church's denial of the cup to laity, attacking the doctrine of transubstantiation and condemning as the most 'wicked abuse of all' the belief 'that the mass is a good work and a sacrifice'.[1] But he also relentlessly critiqued Protestant understandings of the Lord's Supper that he deemed insufficient, labelling Ulrich Zwingli's view 'the prince of hell's poison'[2] and accusing him of Nestorianism, an ancient heresy that denies the unity of Christ's human and divine natures.[3] We have little information on Luther's assessment of John Calvin's view, as the Genevan was a generation younger and shared more in common with Luther than Zwingli did.[4] However, whereas Calvin denied the physical presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, Luther continued to insist on it.[5] Thus, identifiable, fundamental differences remained between Luther's eucharistic theology and every 16th-century European alternative.

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1   Martin Luther, 'The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Part I', in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 210. Subsequent references to this edited volume containing primary sources from Luther will be identified by the abbreviation *LW*.

2   *LW*, 262.

3   *LW*, 266.

4   See for example Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 71.

5   Herman Bavinck, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper', trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 130, https://worldea.org/yourls/46353.

The intra-Protestant debate on the Supper, however, should not lead observers to immediately conclude that Luther's doctrine was just a novelty,[6] or that nobody within the church viewed the Supper in a similar light at the time of the Reformation. To address this charge, the unusual step of looking beyond Europe to Africa may prove helpful.

One of the most destructive myths that has hampered Christian mission during an era of rapid globalization is the idea that Christianity is a 'white man's religion'. Rather, as Vince Bantu argues, Christianity has 'always has been a global religion. For this reason, it is important never to think of Christianity as *becoming* global.'[7] Not only does Bantu's brilliant documentation of Christian theological reflection outside the West hold great potential for missiological purposes, but his discussion of the Ethiopian church indicates that some of the principles that underlay the Protestant Reformation in Europe were prized in Africa long before Luther's time. Regarding 15th-century African Christianity, he explains:

> During the heavy-handed reign of Zar'a Ya'qob, there was a monastic movement that originated in Ethiopia named after their founder, Stephan. These ascetic Ethiopians—Stephanites—challenged the heightened authority of the Ethiopian king in church affairs, the veneration of Mary, and the elevation of any church documents in addition to Scripture. Therefore, over a century before Martin Luther nailed up the Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg, Ethiopia was experiencing its own Reformation that addressed many of the same theological concerns that were raised in Europe.[8]

The parallels between 15th-century Ethiopia and 16th-century Wittenberg are intriguing. One need not look far in Luther's writings to find challenges to papal authority, chastisement of Catholic Mariology, or a defence of *sola scriptura.* But what of the sacrament? Although Bantu does not discuss this topic, David Daniels and Lawrence Anglin claim that Luther and Melanchthon's 1534 dialogue with Michael the Deacon of the Ethiopian church reveals substantial agreement on that question too.[9] Luther claims that in their discussion, 'We also ascertained from him that the rite, which we observe in the practice of the Lord's Supper and the Mass, agrees with the Eastern Church.'[10] While Michael was a guest in Wittenberg, according to Melanchthon, the Ethiopian informed them that no public masses existed in his home country and recognized Lutheran doctrine as 'a good "credo", that is, faith'.[11] Daniels has called on Reformation scholars to pay closer attention to Luther's interactions with the African church so as to obtain a better sense of how it

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6   Luther, in fact, felt strongly that his position was consistent with that of the primitive church, and he appealed heavily to the Fathers for support. See Esther Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority: The Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), esp. chapter 1.

7   Vince L. Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 1.

8   Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples*, 108. For more on Stephan (or Estifanos) and his movement, see Getachew Haile, *History of the First Estifanosite Monks* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2011).

9   David D. Daniels and Lawrence Anglin, 'Luther and the Ethiopian Deacon', *Lutheran Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2018): 428, https://doi.org/10.1353/lut.2018.0062.

10   Daniels and Anglin. 'Luther and the Ethiopian', 433.

11   Daniels and Anglin. 'Luther and the Ethiopian', 433–34.

might have impacted his convictions. Though not a Luther scholar,[12] Daniels asserts that 'the influence of Ethiopian Christianity upon Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation' is an 'historical omission' deserving further study.[13] In light of Luther's conciliatory tone toward Michael on the Supper, perhaps further probing this 'historical omission' would help to explain his approach.

Substantially less material exists on the dialogue between Luther and the Ethiopian church than, for example, on his quarrels with Zwingli. However, their dialogue is worth exploring, especially since some of the principles that bolstered the European Reformation were viewed favourably in Ethiopia. The common ground that Luther found with his Ethiopian contemporary on the sacrament demonstrates that *certain core principles which underlay the Reformation never belonged to European Christians alone*. In this paper, I will use the Lord's Supper to illustrate that point, since unity on how to celebrate the Supper proved elusive in Europe.

I first outline how Luther's eucharistic doctrine put him at odds not only with the Roman Catholic Church but also with fellow Reformers Calvin and Zwingli. I then consider how Luther appears to have found more common ground with the Ethiopian church than with his fellow Europeans on this point. Indeed, this fact may help to counter claims that Reformation theology is simply a construct of a 16th-century European worldview,[14] since similar doctrines arose elsewhere apart from Luther's influence. Finally, the implications of this conversation for the global church will be considered. One hopeful implication is that evangelical theology has never been the domain of just one people and should expect a vibrant future worldwide.

'The misuse of the mass': Luther's challenge and alternative to Catholicism

Even some Roman Catholic scholars grant that serious abuses existed in the practice of the mass during Luther's era.[15] The Reformer was convinced that reforming the

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12   See David D. Daniels, 'Martin Luther, Michael the Deacon, and Ethiopian Christianity' (lecture, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, 1 November 2017), https://worldea.org/yourls/46354.
13   David D. Daniels, 'Reclaiming Africa's Role in Reformation History', in *Reformation Reset: A Collection of Conference Papers, Sermon Excerpts, and Travel Reflections from Members of the McCormick Theological Seminary Community* (2018), 21, https://worldea.org/yourls/46355.
14   This is a question that black evangelical scholars have previously sought to address. Mika Edmondson has argued that white evangelicals who have condoned injustices such as slavery and segregation were being untrue to their Reformation roots in doing so; see Mika Edmondson et al., 'The Reformation Is Not Just a White Man's Legacy', *The Gospel Coalition*, 18 October 2017, https://worldea.org/yourls/46356. Likewise, Jemar Tisby contends that the presence of evangelical doctrine in the black church in America and in global Christianity counters the idea that Reformation theology is just a European phenomenon; see Tisby, 'Is Reformed Theology for Black People?' Religion News Service, 31 October 2017, https://worldea.org/yourls/46357). Both, of course, argue that evangelical theology is first and foremost not simply a European phenomenon because it is firmly grounded in Scripture. However, showing that Luther was in agreement with or even influenced by Ethiopian Christianity on several core principles would greatly strengthen their case.
15   Robert C. Croken, *Luther's First Front: The Eucharist as Sacrifice* (Ottawa, Canada: University of Ottawa Press, 1990), 114.

mass necessitated not just a change in practice but a reconsideration of the church's entire understanding. Luther held that 'the papacy enslaves the church with three "captivities"—withholding of the cup from the laity, transubstantiation, and the sacrifice of the mass.'[16] In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,* Luther commenced his critique on the first of these issues by challenging the Roman Catholic interpretation of John 6:25–59. Luther argues that this passage does not prefigure the sacrament at all, but that 'to eat' in the context of this text means to believe in Christ. Texts that do speak to the Supper, especially Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11, clearly indicate that the New Testament church offered both the bread and the cup to all the congregation's members. Moreover, when Christ instituted the sacrament, as recorded in the Gospels, he explicitly instructed all his disciples to drink of the cup, the very element denied to the laity in the medieval mass.[17]

Furthermore, in the passages in Matthew 26 and Luke 22 that describe the institution of the Supper, Luther observes that Jesus pours out his blood 'for many' to forgive their sins. His blood, therefore, is not for the clergy alone. 'Here you see very clearly', Luther asserts, 'that the blood is given to all those for whose sins it was poured out. But who will dare to say that it was not poured out for the laity?'[18] Nothing in the passage suggests that Christ is referring exclusively to the priests, who have no right to withhold any part of the sacrament from the laity since it does not belong to them in the first place.

Luther goes on to explain his objection to the doctrine of transubstantiation, a 'less grievous' error than the denial of the cup. He decries Aristotle's influence upon scholastic theology, which precluded Scripture from being interpreted according to its 'grammatical and proper sense'.[19] Neither Jesus nor the apostles suggested that the bread and wine with which the Eucharist is celebrated are not truly bread and wine, nor do they speak of an occasion wherein the elements are transformed into Christ's body and blood. Such a doctrine, therefore, 'must be regarded as a figment of the human mind, for it rests neither on the Scriptures nor on reason.'[20] This 'monstrous idea', he argues, is without historical merit, as it dates only to the medieval era. Near-obsessive speculation on the relationship between accidents and substances drove Luther to wonder aloud why Aristotle had been appointed an 'arbiter' of Christian doctrine in the first place. Believers ought not feel the need to engage in philosophical hypothesizing but should be content with the 'simple faith' that Jesus intended his disciples to enjoy, 'sufficient for us to believe that his blood was in the cup'.[21]

Finally, the Wittenberger rails against the depiction of the mass as a sacrifice, asserting that 'the holy sacrament has been turned into mere merchandise.'[22] Again,

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16   William R. Russell, editor's preface in *LW*, 196.
17   *LW*, 201. Luther observes of Paul and Jesus, 'Both attach the note of universality to the cup, not to the bread, as though the Spirit foresaw this schism, by which some would be forbidden to partake of the cup, which Christ desired should be common to all.'
18   *LW*, 202.
19   *LW*, 206–7.
20   *LW*, 207.
21   *LW*, 209.
22   *LW*, 210.

Luther turns to the words of Jesus at the table with his disciples, where 'Christ, who is the truth, truly says that this is the new testament in his blood, poured out for us.'[23] The central point of contention is that whereas Rome conceived of the mass as a sacrifice, Luther views the Lord's Supper as a testament of God's promise. 'Let this stand', Luther declares, 'as our first and infallible proposition—the mass or sacrament of the altar is Christ's testament, which he left behind him at his death to be distributed among his believers.'[24] What Rome labelled 'the mass' was biblically intended as Christ's promise to pour out his blood to forgive the sins of his people. Far from a good work, observing the Supper demonstrates the believers' faith in God's promises.[25]

Luther consistently appeals to the church fathers in his challenge; though he was firmly committed to the final authority of Scripture, any caricature of Luther as entirely opposed to church tradition is misguided. He argues from Cyprian's work, for example, that the early church served both the bread and cup to all its members, including children.[26] The only individuals denied were 'irreverent laymen', who were turned away on account of 'sacrilegious' behaviour, not a lack of credentials. A pivotal charge against transubstantiation is the lack of precedent; 'the church kept the true faith for more than twelve hundred years, during which time the holy fathers never, at any time or place, mentioned this', Luther declares.[27] And he appeals to Augustine repeatedly to demonstrate that faith is inextricably tied to reception of the sacrament. Despite Luther's opposition to transubstantiation, however, some Protestants have struggled to clearly distinguish the view of communion that Luther proposed from Rome's position.

'This is my body': Protesting Protestants

The mass was not the only eucharistic theology that Luther opposed. With characteristic fervour, he also denounced Protestant understandings which he believed failed to take the biblical witness seriously. While Luther rejected transubstantiation, he continued to affirm a corporeal presence of Christ in the Eucharist; although, in his view, the bread and wine were not transformed into the body and blood of Jesus, the elements nevertheless contained them. Luther inquired:

> And why could not Christ include his body in the substance of the bread just as well as in the accidents? In red-hot iron, for instance, the two substances, fire and iron, are so mingled that every part is both iron and fire. Why is it not even more possible that the body of Christ be contained in every part of the substance of the bread?[28]

This position would come to be commonly labelled 'consubstantiation',[29] a term

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23   *LW*, 211.
24   *LW*, 211.
25   *LW*, 217.
26   *LW*, 204.
27   *LW*, 207.
28   *LW*, 208.
29   See David P. Scaer, 'Lutheran View', in *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*, ed. John H. Armstrong and Paul E. Engle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 87.

meaning 'one substance by the side of another'.[30] Luther himself did not employ the term, as he was convinced that Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper could not be fully explained.[31] For him, simple faith took precedence; the omnipresence of God ensured that Christ could at once be seated at the Father's right hand and yet be present in the elements.[32] Therefore, despite holding that the bread and wine remained as such during the Supper, Luther took literally the words of Christ, 'This is my body', arguing that 'Christ can be and is in the bread, even though he can also show himself in circumscribed and visible form wherever he wills.'[33] While all Protestants agreed that the Supper was not a sacrifice, that the laity should receive both the bread and the cup, and that the doctrine of transubstantiation was erroneous, the nature of Christ's presence sharply divided them.

The vehemence with which Luther approached his eucharistic theology was an expression of his doctrine of Scripture.[34] He was convinced that Zwingli failed to take the Lord at his word by denying his bodily presence in the Supper. The Zuricher was hardly unfamiliar with Luther's understanding; he held the same view until 1525, at which point he adopted the position that when Jesus said of the bread, 'This is my body', he meant that the bread symbolized his body, not that it contained his physical flesh or blood.[35] Substantial evidence suggests that Luther misrepresented Zwingli's understanding. In his 1528 *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, Luther spends much time arguing that Christ could, theoretically, be corporeally present in the Supper, given his divine omnipresence. However, Zwingli never denied that Christ was omnipresent; the fact he could be present in the elements if he willed does not prove that he is in fact present. Thus, Luther essentially refuted a position no one had put forth in the first place.

Luther also failed to recognize what Zwingli intended in referring to the meal as a memorial. Zwingli wanted to guard against understanding the mass as a sacrifice; as W. P. Stephens notes, he 'calls it a memorial precisely because the commemorating of a sacrifice that has happened denies the view of those who make the eucharist a sacrifice.'[36] As an exceptional Hebraist, Zwingli understood that 'to remember', in the biblical sense, did not refer simply to recollection.[37] His calling the Lord's Supper a memorial meant that the sacrament makes the past sacrifice of Christ operative in the present. Likewise, there is no need to speak of his bodily presence in the elements as such, for Jesus is omnipresent as God almighty. Therefore, it was unfair for Luther to assert that Zwingli believed 'God's power and

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30   Scaer, 'Lutheran View', 87.

31   Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 83.

32   *LW*, 268.

33   *LW*, 268.

34   'It was not simply obstinacy or fundamentalism which led him to write on the table the words which divided him and Zwingli, in the great matter of the Eucharist—*Hoc est corpus meum.*' Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), 350.

35   Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority*, 18.

36   W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 219.

37   See 'To Remember' in W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: With Topical Index* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

wisdom extend no farther than the range of our sight, and that he is able to do no more than we can physically see.'[38]

Despite their agreement on several key articles, Luther and Zwingli's failure to find common ground on Christ's presence doomed their pursuit of theological (and political) alliance. Beyond the German's misrepresentations of Zwingli, real differences did indeed exist. Zwingli's rejection of the idea of a physical presence of Christ in the elements was a non-negotiable item for Luther. Differing understandings of the interpretation of Scripture and the church fathers[39] proved irreconcilable, with Luther remaining firm that Zwingli's view, in Gordon Rupp's words, would 'turn the religion of incarnation into … docetism and subjectivism'.[40]

Calvin, unlike Zwingli, was not born until 1509 and so was still a child when Luther began to openly challenge Rome on the mass. Like Luther and Zwingli, he was well versed in patristics and sought a doctrine of the Lord's Supper consistent with that of the church fathers.[41] Like his elder Reformers, he appealed at length to Augustine, looking to the African bishop's claim that the sacraments are made effective by faith as a historical antecedent of his own position.[42]

Herein lies a crucial distinction between Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper and Luther's. For Luther, because participants in the sacrament partake of Christ orally, the believer and unbeliever alike truly receive his body and blood.[43] This was simply not an issue for Zwingli's understanding of the Supper; since Christ is not present in the elements, no one consumes his physical body and blood. Yet Calvin insisted that believers do truly (but not physically) receive them, remarking, 'In his Sacred Supper he bids me take, eat, and drink his body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine. I do not doubt that he himself truly presents them, and that I receive them.'[44] However, he simultaneously denied that believers consume the flesh of Christ orally in the way that Luther taught, declaring in his *Short Treatise on Baptism and the Lord's Supper* that 'we must raise our hearts upwards to heaven, not thinking that our Lord Jesus is so debased as to be enclosed under some corruptible element.'[45] He also denies, in his *Institutes*, that believers literally consume the flesh and blood of the Lord.[46] On the surface, these statements may seem contradictory. The latter assertion sounds compatible with Zwingli's view, whereas the former statements appear closer to Luther's.

The key, however, to understanding Calvin's third way is his view of the Holy Spirit's role in the sacrament. Calvin taught that in the Eucharist, believers really and

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38   *LW*, 263.
39   See Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority*, particularly chapter 1, for an overview of how both parties cited the church fathers to defend their respective positions at Marburg.
40   Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 350.
41   See Kim, *Inventing Authority*, chapter 2.
42   Kim, *Inventing Authority*, 37.
43   Anthony N. S. Lane, 'Was Calvin a Crypto-Zwinglian?' in *Adaptations of Calvinism in Reformation Europe: Essays in Honour of Brian G. Armstrong*, ed. Mack P. Holt (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 22.
44   John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.33.
45   John Calvin, *John Calvin: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), 51.
46   Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.7

truly received Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, who unites what is separated by distance.[47] Christ does not leave heaven, nor is his body in multiple places at once as Luther's position required. However, he is indeed present in the elements in a manner Zwingli's view did not account for. According to Calvin, the Spirit unites the church with Christ, nourishing them with his body and blood.

Thus, as Anthony Lane summarizes, for Calvin there is 'no question of any oral, physical partaking of the substance of Christ's flesh and blood. But through the work of the Holy Spirit the believer is enabled to have a spiritual communion with Christ's flesh and blood.'[48] Drawing on Calvin's analogy of the sun and its rays, Lane tells of a time when he and his colleagues spent a hot summer day on the shores of Lake Michigan. The sun was millions of miles away; nobody physically touched it, nor was the sun brought down to them. For the next week, however, they suffered the consequences of sunburn; 'Thanks to its rays we had enjoyed a real communion with the sun. … This was no symbolic memorialism.'[49] The Holy Spirit, according to Calvin's articulation, acts in much the same way during the sacrament.

Some charge that Calvin's 1549 *Consensus Tigurinus,* reached in conjunction with Zwingli's successor Heinrich Bullinger, may call into question how much common ground Calvin shared with Luther, given that he attained a measure of unity with people whom Luther so strongly refuted. However, to reach a consensus with Bullinger—an act for which he incurred severe rebuke from the Lutherans—Calvin had to stretch his own tolerance to its breaking point. The *Consensus Tigurinus* did not represent the Genevan's fully developed position but the minimal amount that he required of the Zwinglians for the sake of unity.[50] Indeed, the fact that Calvin criticized and attracted criticism from proponents on both sides of his view may indicate that he fulfilled, in some sense, his own desire to chart a third way forward. Unfortunately, like Luther and Zwingli's meeting at Marburg, Calvin's dialogue with other Protestants failed to result in common ground amongst all parties involved.

'On friendly terms': Common ground with Michael the Deacon

When one goes in search of antecedents for Luther's theology in particular—and for the Reformation more broadly—certain church fathers such as Augustine might come to mind. Luther himself was an Augustinian monk, regarding him as a great doctor of the church. Late medieval figures such as John Hus and John Wycliffe might warrant mention as well, given how much common ground they shared with the magisterial Reformers.[51] Yet most Protestants conceive of the Reformation as a uniquely European project, and few would naturally associate its aims with any

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47   Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.9. Calvin asserts, 'The sacraments duly perform their office only when accompanied by the Spirit. … If he is wanting, the sacraments can avail us no more than the sun shining on the eyeballs of the blind, of sounds uttered in the ears of the deaf.'
48   Lane, 'Was Calvin a Crypto-Zwinglian?' 31.
49   Lane, 'Was Calvin a Crypto-Zwinglian?' 27.
50   Kim, *Inventing Authority*, 62. As Kim notes, rather than a full exposition of Calvin and Bullinger's convictions, 'The Consensus resembled a theological patchwork that represented the concerns of all parties at least to the extent that all could agree to sign the document.'
51   See *LW*, 206.

churches functioning in Africa at that time. Recall, however, that one of Luther's challenges to Rome concerned the idea that the papacy had the right to rule over all Christendom, as he was well aware that the church extended far beyond regions under Rome's control.

Europeans of Luther's era had some knowledge of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia,[52] and numerous African Christians lived in Europe as expatriates during this time. As Daniels observes, 'Africans are key topics within Renaissance and sixteenth century art studies. … Yet Reformation studies has been hesitant about following suit. Afro-European and African Christians living in Europe during the Reformation era are a topic awaiting scrutiny.'[53] This needed scrutiny should extend to African Christianity's impact on and relationship with the man who is frequently credited with sparking the Reformation itself. During his preparation for the Leipzig disputation, Luther's knowledge of the church beyond Western Christendom became clearer to him. 'It was thanks to [Luther's study of] Eusebius', Oberman reports, 'that he became aware of the more remote churches in Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, and North Africa, which were independent of Rome.'[54]

It is not surprising, then, that Luther would seek fellowship with communities outside Rome's control. Ethiopia had already experienced a reformation of its own long before Luther's birth. Unlike Roman Catholicism, the Ethiopian Christianity of Luther's time knew nothing of papal authority, marriage as a sacrament, selling indulgences or a doctrine of purgatory.[55] However, the Calvinists and Zwinglians, who also rejected all these views as errors, were still unable to achieve agreement on communion with Luther and his followers. Therefore, it might come as a surprise to discover that the unity Luther could not share with his fellow Europeans may have been secured with an unlikely partner from Ethiopia.

Given the clear distinctions that Luther made in Protestant debates on the Lord's Supper, it seems obvious that no matter how pure Luther perceived the Ethiopian church to be on other matters, he would not extend communion to any Christian body with whom he differed on the Eucharist. Yet Daniels and Anglin highlight a 1534 letter from Luther commending Michael the Deacon of the Ethiopian church and welcoming him to Germany for dialogue:

> Mr. Michael, an Ethiopian deacon, was with us in Germany. We spoke with him regarding Christian doctrine on friendly terms and heard him rightly agree with the creed that the Western Church holds. Nor does he think about the Trinity any differently than what the Western Church thinks. … We also ascertained from him that the rite, which we observe in the practice of the Lord's Supper and the Mass, agrees with the Eastern Church. We desire, moreover, that all people should acknowledge and glorify Christ and obey him by true trust in his mercy

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52   David D. Daniels, 'Will African Christians Become a Subject in Reformation Studies?' in *Subject to None, Servant of All: Essays in Christian Scholarship in Honor of Kurt Karl Hendel*, ed. Kenneth Sawyer and Peter Vethanayagamony (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2016), 101.

53   Daniels, 'Will African Christians', 101.

54   Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 262.

55   Daniels, 'Reclaiming Africa's Role', 22.

and by love of the neighbor. Therefore, we entreat good men that they, too, would demonstrate Christian love to this guest.[56]

Questions remain as to the nature of this dialogue. We do not know how long Michael stayed in Germany, or if he arrived in an official capacity as a representative of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, or how language barriers between himself and Europeans such as Luther would have been overcome.[57] Most importantly, we have no detailed record of exactly how Michael understood the presence of Christ as it related to the elements, a key point of division between Luther and his fellow Protestants. Nevertheless, Luther's tone and rhetoric towards this guest differed starkly from his denunciation of the Swiss churches. Recall that he adamantly opposed communion with Protestants who held Zwingli's view of the sacrament. His willingness to lavish praise on his Ethiopian contemporary, claiming agreement on the Lord's Supper and calling on fellow Europeans to 'demonstrate Christian love to this guest', is thus quite significant and in clear contrast with his savage attacks on Zwingli, a 'proud devil' who 'can understand nothing at all, and does not even comprehend what he is raving about'.[58]

Luther seems unlikely to have extended such warm fellowship to anyone, as he did to Michael, were they not in substantial agreement on crucial points of sacramental theology. Although the Deacon's precise understanding of Christ's presence in the sacrament may not be clear from their exchange,[59] we can discern from Luther and other 16th-century sources that the Ethiopian church did not practice private masses.[60] Likewise, the Ethiopians allowed the laity to receive the bread and the cup, a central concern Luther raised in his *Babylonian Captivity*. Even beyond the sacrament itself, Luther would have also approved of other Ethiopian church practices, such as allowing clergy to marry.[61] And whatever Luther might have gathered from their conversation on other matters, he seems to have been sufficiently satisfied to claim regarding Michael that 'He summed up all our articles … saying, "This is a good 'credo', that is, faith."'[62]

Daniels also notes that Luther, in his other writings, speaks highly of the Ethiopian church—labelling them as people of 'ardent faith', granting them the title 'the church of the Gentiles', and acknowledging that Scripture itself prophesies the conversion of the Ethiopian nation to Christ.[63] Moreover, in contrast to the blatantly racist rhetoric endorsing exploitation of the African people that tragically seems to have taken root by Luther's time, Mark Ellingsen shows that Luther not only rejected

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56 Daniels and Anglin, 'Luther and the Ethiopian', 433

57 See Daniels and Anglin, 'Luther and the Ethiopian', 433. Luther explains that their conversation took place through an interpreter but does not disclose what languages they employed.

58 *LW*, 279.

59 Modern academic works detailing the theology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church describe the Eucharist in terms similar to Luther, asserting that believers truly receive the body and blood of Christ and that to consider the elements mere symbols constitutes a denial of his straightforward teaching in Scripture. See for example Alemayehu Desta, *Introduction to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Faith* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2012), 22.

60 Daniels and Anglin, 'Luther and the Ethiopian', 434.

61 Daniels, 'Reclaiming Africa's Role', 22.

62 Daniels and Anglin, 'Luther and the Ethiopian', 434.

63 Daniels, 'Reclaiming Africa's Role', 21.

such attitudes but praised ancient Egyptian culture, extolled that nation's impact upon Christian theology by way of the church fathers, and argued that one of the wise men who visited Jesus at his birth was Ethiopian.[64] Ellingsen also observes that in his *Proceedings at Augsburg*, Luther praised the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches, once again proving his knowledge of and admiration for these African Christian communities at a time when he openly railed against much of European Christendom.

Conclusion: Building bridges

Although Daniels notes that numerous scholars including Brecht, Posfay, Hardt and others have made passing references to Luther's interaction with Michael the Deacon,[65] more research involving extant Ethiopian documents could perhaps fill in some of the gaps regarding the relationship between these two church leaders and the practices of the Ethiopian church at that time.[66] Yet when one contrasts the seemingly insurmountable trouble that European Protestants faced trying to come to terms over the Eucharist with Luther's apparently warm embrace of Michael, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the Reformer was much closer to the Deacon on certain issues than to his fellow Europeans. What, then, should contemporary students of Luther make of his unlikely alliance with an Ethiopian deacon? How should they interpret his willingness to build bridges with Christians on another continent while he refused to do the same with fellow Europeans who differed with him on the Supper?

Given the prominence that the Lord's Supper occupied within theological discourse during the Reformation era, the passion with which Luther approached this subject is not surprising. What is striking is where the Reformer found common ground. His friendship with Michael reminds us that sometimes we can find spiritual unity in unlikely places should we choose to look for it.

Second, we can deduce that the evangelical principles of the Reformation are not strictly a product of European disillusionment with medieval Catholicism. The reforms that the Ethiopian church adopted at least 100 years before the Protestant Reformation—dealing with many similar issues such as the Lord's Supper, the authority of Scripture and the role of Mary—reinforce Protestants' claims that their convictions faithfully reflect what Scripture teaches.

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64 Mark Ellingsen, *Reclaiming Our Roots: An Inclusive Introduction to Church History* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 45–46. While acknowledging Luther's well-known antisemitism, Ellingsen notes how different Luther's tone is when he discusses African believers, wondering if the Reformer may 'offer promising models for developing contemporary models for social justice and multiculturalism'.

65 Daniels, 'Reclaiming Africa's Role', 24.

66 David Daniels, in personal correspondence, indicates that the primary resource most cited on the 16th-century Ethiopian liturgical practices is Petrus Abbas [Täsfa Ṣeyon], *Missa qua Ethiopes communiter ututur …* (Rome: Antonium Bladum, 1549), a Latin translation of the missal. Secondary sources include Bent Juel-Jensen, 'Potken's Psalter and Tesfa Tsion's New Testament, Modus Baptizandi and Missal', *Bodleian Library Record* 15 (1996), 480–82; Matteo Salvadore and James De Lorenzi, 'An Ethiopian Scholar in Tridentine Rome: Täsfa Ṣeyon and the Birth of Orientalism' *Itinerario* 45, no. 1 (2021): 17–46.

Finally, in an era of rapid globalization where the Christian faith appears more interconnected across borders, peoples and languages than ever before, examples of ancient dialogue between believers on different continents may prove useful for missiological purposes. Such findings might counteract the frequent charges that the Christian faith is just a product of the European psyche and not suited for all people and cultures. Vince Bantu, in his work on ancient Christianity outside the West, explains that his 'concern that motivates this book is fundamentally missiological … this investigation is rooted in the dilemma of people rejecting Christianity because of the perception that it is a Western/white religion and therefore not appropriate for non-Western/white people.'[67] For example, Bantu points to the reservations many African-American Muslims express concerning Christianity, an issue he was forced to deal with as a pastor and a participant in interfaith dialogue with that community.[68]

I hope that others, especially those with greater knowledge of 16th-century Ethiopian Christianity, will be encouraged to describe the theological background underlying Michael the Deacon's interaction with Luther and whether the trajectory of the European Reformation might actually have been influenced by a visitor from an African church. Given the potential value of such discoveries for both the church and the academy, such a project is well worth pursuing.

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67 Bantu, *A Multitude of All*, 6.
68 Bantu, *A Multitude of All*, 3-4.

Itching Ears and Willing Learners: Balancing the Clarity and Complexity of Scripture

Bruce Barron

The popularity of the 'prosperity gospel', despite its tendencies toward simplistic and unbalanced theology, epitomizes one of the biggest problems in contemporary Christianity: how to provide adequately trained leaders for the global Christian movement, especially in the Majority World. This essay explores reasons why the problem exists, summarizes the contours of what all Christian leaders need to know, and identifies the Re-Forma organization cofounded by Manfred Kohl as a strategic solution.

How deficient theology spreads

In 1987, I published *The Health and Wealth Gospel*, one of the first detailed studies of the strain of Christian teaching now widely referred to as the 'prosperity gospel' or the 'word-of-faith movement'. At that time, the movement was largely a North American phenomenon, although a few disciples had taken the message overseas. In fact, Ray McCauley, a graduate of word-of-faith teacher Kenneth Hagin's Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA, was pastoring a large interracial congregation in South Africa and making positive contributions to racial reconciliation as that nation moved toward the close of its apartheid era.

Among the various criticisms of the prosperity gospel voiced during the 1980s, one common claim was that a message that couldn't go all over the world was not the true gospel. According to these detractors, the prosperity gospel was popular in rich, materialistic nations like the United States but could never survive in economically poorer areas.

By contrast, I thought the prosperity gospel could attract followers anywhere in the world, as long as prosperity was defined appropriately for the local context. For brash televangelists such as Kenneth Copeland or Jesse Duplantis, prosperity seems to mean a lavish lifestyle and multi-million-dollar jets; in rural Kenya, prosperity might mean a secure home, good health, two ample meals a day and a few well-fed cows.

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History has proved me right. During the last thirty years, the prosperity gospel has spread throughout the Global South and has overrun parts of Africa. After I began volunteering for the World Evangelical Alliance in 2015, two of its theological leaders asked me to consider updating *The Health and Wealth Gospel*; I said I could not do so properly without a global travel budget. I then asked a friend active in African relief work (ironically, a 1980s graduate of Rhema Bible Training Center whose theology had shifted over time) if he thought I needed to travel all over Africa to understand the impact of the prosperity gospel today. 'No', he replied, 'just go to Lagos or Nairobi and look at the billboards.'

Of course, those aren't the only two cities impacted. For example, Yoseph Yisma, in his thesis at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, has documented how the prosperity gospel migrated from Nigeria to Ethiopia and how it has affected the body of Christ there. In fact, it has spread so far and wide that one of the thirty-five outcomes identified by Re-Forma, the organization founded by Manfred Kohl and others to strengthen the quality of Christian instruction in parts of the world where church leaders receive little or no formal theological training, is that leaders should be able to 'explain why the prosperity gospel is unbiblical and unethical.' This is the only specific area of theological error identified in the thirty-five outcomes.

Teaching good theology convincingly can be hard

To a large extent, our problems with extreme versions of the prosperity gospel exist because of church leaders who are greedy for gain and followers with 'itching ears' (2 Tim 4:3). But they also exist in part because of sincere Christians' desire to read the Bible and take it at face value. Therefore, we need to find a way to help these willing learners—especially those who aspire to become church leaders and teachers—to develop a sound theological foundation, even if they don't have the time or money to obtain formal seminary training.

Beliefs about divine healing provide a good illustration of the challenge. Christian believers read in Psalm 103:3 that God 'heals all your diseases.' They read Matthew's use of Isaiah 53:5, 'With his stripes we are healed', in the context of Jesus' healings (Mt 8:17) and deduce that Jesus' atonement has guaranteed our physical as well as our spiritual health. They read of the many amazing miracles recorded in the book of Acts and see no reason why we should hope for less. They read of the broad New Testament promises offered to believers (Mk 11:24; Jn 16:23; 1 Jn 3:22) and conclude that we too should receive whatever we ask if we exercise faith.

Direct efforts to convince such well-meaning believers that they may be misinterpreting the intent of Scripture often fail, because such explanations seem to deny the apparent meaning of the text. We might try to point out to them that God may heal all our diseases but not every time, or else we would never die. We might argue that Jesus' healings on earth demonstrated his messiahship but did not constitute a promise that all Christians henceforth would be healed. We might emphasize that the promises that we can move mountains (although I've never desired to relocate a mountain anyhow) or can have whatever we ask are all subject to our conformity to God's will. To such statements, our word-of-faith friend is likely to reply that we are making excuses rather than taking God at his word. Or, as Kenneth Hagin said more humbly when I pressed him to acknowledge that healings

don't always occur even when we do everything right, 'I'd rather aim high and get half of it than aim at nothing and get all of it.'

'I can read the Bible for myself' has its limits

People who try to read the Bible for themselves, but without respect for the accumulated knowledge and experience of the Christian community, often go off the rails. The Jehovah's Witnesses, the 'Jesus only' movement with Pentecostalism, and many others have departed from Christian truth in this way. To handle the word of God properly, we have to balance the Bible's clarity (the fancy theological word for this feature is *perspicuity*) and its complexity.

The perspicuity of Scripture was an important doctrine for the Protestant Reformation. Against the Catholic claim that laypeople could not be trusted to read the Bible for themselves and needed priests, bishops, and popes to explain it to them, Luther sought to make the Bible available to the people in their own language. He firmly defended the concept of 'private judgement', or the right and duty of every believer to make their own informed decisions on matters of faith and doctrine.

The 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith expressed the principle of perspicuity in this way:

> All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

But even while stressing that the truths essential for salvation are clear, the Westminster divines also acknowledged that not everything in the Bible is clear. The condition of the contemporary Christian church makes this obvious. Today, dedicated Christians differ over the mode and appropriate age of baptism, church government, how to administer sacraments, speaking in tongues and many other matters.

Even if these differences are not directly pertinent to salvation, error in non-essential matters can have enormous impact on individual lives and on the church's effectiveness. For example, those who anticipate Christ's return at a particular time or confidently anticipate a physical healing can be bitterly disappointed or publicly embarrassed when it doesn't happen. People who are not spiritually prepared for suffering may be tempted to abandon their faith when they face persecution. Some who trusted in a 'modern-day prophet' have become trapped in authoritarian congregations or floundered spiritually when their leader went astray.

Keeping zealous believers on the right theological track

To effectively deploy the next generation of Christian leaders, especially in areas where the church is growing but the number of trained pastors and teachers is insufficient, we must enable them to gain a firm grasp of foundational essentials, handle disputable matters with balance and avoid fruitless rabbit holes.

Young Christians and new believers are the members of the body of Christ best positioned to communicate the gospel to outsiders. They have the greatest

enthusiasm and the most personal contacts outside the Christian subculture. But they also usually have the least theological knowledge. In most places where Christianity is growing, scooping up such people and placing them in a seminary for three years—the prevailing approach to training in Western Christianity—is neither feasible nor culturally effective.

How can we best ensure that enthusiastic but still-learning Christians can guide others into spiritual maturity and holiness, not into serious error? The best answer seems to be to achieve a consensus on the essential biblical, theological, spiritual, interpersonal and practical capacities needed for ministry leadership and to set up an efficient way to help people acquire those capacities, accompanied by ongoing discipleship.

One crucial ability often overlooked by those who claim they want to take the Bible at face value (and, in the process, often misinterpret it) is hermeneutics, or an understanding of proper interpretive principles. As a tongue-in-cheek way of demonstrating the need for good interpretive skills, I typically insist that the Bible does not let us eat at restaurants. When asked for proof, I turn to 1 Corinthians 11:34, where Paul tells his readers, 'If anyone is hungry, let him eat *at home.*' I have yet to persuade anyone that Paul was warning believers to beware of the threat McDonald's posed to their spiritual lives. But the only way you can refute my goofy interpretation is by (1) showing that it is not consistent with the context of the verse and the cultural milieu of that time *and* (2) invoking the principle that interpretations that ignore the context, the surrounding culture and the author's original intent are illegitimate. In the course of dispelling my silliness, you will realize that we must consistently watch out for creative, subjective interpretations that have no basis in the text—like some preachers' penchant for converting 3 John 2 from a friendly greeting into a guarantee of financial prosperity for all believers.

Where studying the Bible in its original languages is not possible, Christian leaders must be especially cautious about promoting new interpretive discoveries. Before I became a Christian, I was a nerdy, studious loner with poor social skills. When I began to read the Bible, I was excited to discover that Galatians 5:20 (in the Revised Standard Version) classified 'party spirit' among the sins of the flesh. Only later, when I began to read the New Testament in other translations, did I discover that Paul was targeting people who sowed discord in the church, not people who enjoyed having fun in social settings. The correction of that error, which had resulted from reliance on a single English translation, had a dramatic impact. I actually began making a few friends and, eventually, even got married.

Theologically, Christian leaders must be able to explain to believers and inquirers alike why the church holds to complex convictions that can't be substantiated by a single proof text: why we affirm that God is a Trinity even though that word doesn't appear in the Bible; why we have overcome sin yet we still sin; why we still suffer and groan even though the kingdom of God has already come; and in what sense we are living in the 'last days' when Jesus has tarried for two thousand years.

Spiritually, Christian leaders must sustain a daily, disciplined devotional life that keeps them humble, servant-like and seeking the kingdom of God first. Interpersonally, they must express themselves with grace and sensitivity, articulating

Christian truth unapologetically while never placing unnecessary obstacles in the way of belief or sending people on guilt trips (which the prosperity gospel has often done). Practically, they must apply the tools available to them, from liturgy to social media to cultural competence, so as to 'by all means save some' (1 Cor 9:22).

That's a lot to learn. No wonder people go to seminary for three years—and even then they don't learn everything, especially in terms of practical ministry.

Thank you for this solution, Manfred

There is a better way, and Manfred Kohl and Re-Forma have shown it to us. Without imposing any specific financial, travel, or course requirements, Re-Forma simply states, 'This is what a collection of experienced Christians believe you need to know in order to function effectively today as a Christian leader. Show us that you know these things, or if you don't know them, we'll try to help you get there.'

Re-Forma is an invaluable tool and a great legacy for which the church will be thanking Manfred for years to come. If widely embraced, it could empower willing learners for greater effectiveness, drown out the tempting siren songs that appeal to itching ears, and build greater unity in the global Christian movement.

High-Level Religion Forum Planned Alongside G20's 2022 Meeting

Individuals interested in public theology should pay attention to a remarkable undertaking being planned for November 2022 in conjunction with the annual meeting of the G20, the world's 20 most economically powerful nations.

G20 is meeting in Indonesia this year. Accordingly, Indonesia-based Nahdlatul Ulama, which claims to be the world's largest Muslim organization and which has partnered with the World Evangelical Alliance in an inter-faith effort to combat Islamic extremism, has announced a two-day G20 Religion Forum, with the short title of 'R20'.

R20's stated purpose is 'to help ensure that religion in the 21st century functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems'. The event seeks to mobilize diverse religious, political and economic leaders from G20 Member States and elsewhere throughout the world to:

- prevent the weaponization of identity;
- curtail the spread of communal hatred;
- promote solidarity and respect among the diverse peoples, cultures and nations of the world; and
- foster the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.

R20 has received official recognition as a G20 side event from the Indonesian government, including President Joko Widodo. Its developers state that the event will provide 'a global platform through which significant religious leaders of every faith and nation may unite to express their concerns and give voice to shared civilizational values'.

As a prominent global promoter of a humanitarian, non-combative version of Islam, Nahdlatul Ulama has high-level allies in this effort. Major Christian figures invited to speak at R20 include Pope Francis, WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher, Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby. Invited representatives of other major faith traditions include Indian spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar; Buddhist King Norodom Sihamoni of Cambodia; Argentine rabbi Abraham Skorka, a leading Jewish voice in inter-faith peace efforts; and Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa of the Muslim World League.

R20 proposes to enrich the G20's largely political and economic approach to global harmony and cooperation. Nahdlatul Ulama leaders contend that 'religions inculcate universal ethics and humanitarian values that foster the common good' and that world religious leaders have a unique capacity to 'help unite, rather than divide, humanity based on shared civilizational values'.

R20 will take place on the island of Bali, Indonesia on 2–3 November.

Book Reviews

Louis Markos, *From Plato to Christ: How Platonic Thought
Shaped the Christian Faith*

Edward Y. Suh, *The Empowering God: Redeeming the Prosperity Movement
and Overcoming Victim Trauma in the Poor*

Steven Paas, *Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbors:
Be Participants in the Mission of Jesus at Home and Abroad*

From Plato to Christ: How Platonic Thought Shaped the Christian Faith
Louis Markos

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021
Pb., xvi + 234 pp., scriptural index

*Reviewed by Francis Jr. S. Samdao, ThD Candidate, Asia Baptist Graduate
Theological Seminary; assistant editor, Evangelical Review of Theology; Teaching
Fellow, Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines*

The general content of this volume presents the impact of Plato on Western
Christianity. But there are obvious differences between Christianity and Plato.
Christianity offers the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ and describes humans as
fallen; Plato says humans' inability to ascend to the higher realm is due to the
limitations of our senses and our lack of self-knowledge. So what has Plato to do
with Christianity?

Louis Markos explains, arguing that 'there are a number of key elements of
Plato's philosophical and spiritual vision that can not only be reconciled with those
of Christ but can actually increase and empower the spiritual life of the Christian
humanist' (xiii). Moreover, he aims his message not only at Christians but also at
those of different worldviews who search for the ultimate True, Good and Beautiful.

The first part of the book contains a survey, explanation and assessment of the
monumental works of Plato that affected the trajectory of philosophy. Markos
examines those who influenced Plato and then expounds on the *Republic*, covering
issues of justice, death, wisdom, the afterlife and others. Plato opened his readers'
imagination to a magical world by his use of wonderful myths to explain judgement,
the spiritual journey and other concepts that have resemblances with the New
Testament—even heaven and hell.

Unlike Protagoras, who claimed that man is the measure of all things, Plato
believed there is a 'Form' higher than humans who is to be the measure of all realities.
This higher 'Form' cannot be bribed, in contrast to the common belief in Plato's time

that the gods can be 'bought off'. Plato's understanding of God in this aspect coheres with the Old Testament (e.g. Is 29:13; 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 51:16). The last chapter of the first part focuses on Plato's *Timaeus*. Christians who are very propositional in their approach to theology can learn from this section of the book.

The second part concerns the legacy of Plato to Christianity. Markos believes that Plato's thoughts can be classified as 'praeparatio evangelica', or preparation for the Gospel, though they can also lead to self-righteousness. Therefore, 'it is *how* we use them and *what* we use them to discover that will determine whether they lead us, in a straight, glorious line, to Christ or in an egocentric circle back to ourselves' (140).

Markos argues that Plato's idea about ascending to a higher realm can be integrated into Christian teachings. Of particular focus is the influence of Plato on the three Gregories of the East and on Augustine, Boethius and Dante in the West. The author also discusses briefly the Platonic thought embedded in the works of Erasmus, Descartes and C. S. Lewis. The effect on these thinkers is ubiquitous, particularly on the understanding of ascending from the physical to the spiritual.

While not seeking to equate Plato with the biblical voices, Markos endeavours to show that some of Plato's teachings are not only compatible with Christianity but can even assist the people of God in their spiritual life. One strength of the book is its bibliographical essay, which discusses some great writings and translations for those inspired to read primary sources. His short descriptions of these volumes reveal his desire for readers to go beyond just reading this book.

I also believe that this book is helpful to those studying church history and theology. However, I wish that Markos would have considered in detail some of the negative repercussions of Plato's thoughts for Christianity. Most notably, I believe Plato is reflected in modern evangelicalism's dichotomy between the body and the soul and its tendency towards dualism between this world and heaven, or between the secular and the spiritual.

The Empowering God: Redeeming the Prosperity Movement and Overcoming Victim Trauma in the Poor
Edward Y. Suh

Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018
xii + 200 pp.

Reviewed by Bruce Barron, ERT executive editor

Edward Suh knows the excesses of the prosperity gospel as well as any other theologically responsible commentator. The genius of this book is that he doesn't waste a single sentence proving what we already know. Instead, he asks two questions: what makes the prosperity gospel appealing, and can we find a constructive and healthy impulse buried in its shallow theology?

As a result, the book is a rewarding bait-and-switch. I thought I was going to get an analysis of the prosperity gospel; instead I got a far-reaching review of theological perspectives on human flourishing, victimization and empowerment. Who knew that a purported response to the prosperity gospel would turn into an analysis of

Jürgen Moltmann and Gustavo Gutierrez's theologies of liberation, Richard Bauckham's understanding of Christian freedom, Miroslav Volf's mindfulness of God, James Cone's black theology, Elizabeth Johnson's feminist theology, and more?

Let's get the book's main weakness out of the way: it doesn't engage with the prosperity movement at all. There is no fieldwork; actual prosperity preachers are barely mentioned; Suh's references to 'best practices' within the movement have no footnotes. His vision of a 'maturing prosperity movement' has little direct connection to and will never be read by the actual one. One senses that 'prosperity movement' is in the subtitle either because that was his initial inspiration or because 'A Kenotic Theology of Human Flourishing' wouldn't sell many books.

If you want a study of the real-life prosperity gospel, read Kate Bowler. This book does something very different, and perhaps more valuable. If we would apply Suh's insights to our theology and ministry, we might reduce the allure of unbiblical versions of the prosperity gospel.

Suh summarizes his perspective in this sentence: 'I believe that the liberative elements identified by sociological studies of the Prosperity movement are rooted in its inherent message of empowerment that calls people out of narratives of victimization and into narratives of self-determination.' In other words, the prosperity gospel gives people—especially poor people—a sense of hope and agency that we have often failed to instill, so we should find more theologically credible ways to make a similar positive impact.

After discussing the extent to which some basic prosperity-gospel emphases, especially its expectations of healing, miracles and victorious living, are consistent with historic Pentecostalism, Suh examines three alternative Christian accounts of human flourishing. Moltmann's emphasis that our hopeful eschatology should help us transform the present is liberative, but his preference for self-determination over any form of hierarchy may grant humans too much autonomy. Bauckham counters with a strong stress on submission to God's authority and the competing needs of fellow humans; he finds human flourishing in our freedom to live a life in service to others. While generally appreciating Bauckham, Suh expresses concern that his heavy lordship emphasis may make it hard for people who have suffered under human authorities to experience healthy encounters with God. Suh then reviews Volf's vision of human flourishing as grounded in mindfulness of God, suggesting that this laudable pursuit could also lead to an attitude of passive contentment that disempowers the disadvantaged.

Suh's ambitious work also considers views of human flourishing in the behavioral sciences, economics and politics. Particularly interesting in this group is psychiatrist Robert Cloninger, who attempts to relate his three hallmarks of a flourishing life—self-transcendence, self-directedness and cooperativeness—to faith, hope and love, respectively. After discussing liberation, Black and feminist theology, Suh concludes that evangelical theology could do better in addressing 'the specific needs of people who have been sinned against' and restoring shalom in our communities.

Contrary to the stereotype of prosperity theology heaping guilt on the sick and poor, Suh argues that it has inspired people to believe that they have the power to

change their lives. He acknowledges, though he does not fully resolve, the problem of false promises grounded in an over-realized eschatology.

Suh challenges understanding flourishing in terms of health and prosperity, offering an especially powerful argument that disability or chronic illness does not diminish human dignity or value. Instead, he redefines prosperity in terms of empowerment and calls for balancing an ethic of contentment that accepts limitations in our lives with an ethic of hunger that rejects fatalism and seeks breakthroughs in our circumstances. He wraps up these reflections by presenting his kenotic theology of human flourishing, which conceives of God as good, liberating, and hospitable—i.e. caring about personal empowerment, social justice and interpersonal harmony, respectively.

This unexpected feast, mining an impressive breadth of theological and intellectual streams for useful insights, could also empower Christian leaders who feel victimized by the popularity of crass, simplistic versions of prosperity theology. Suh reminds us that the best answer to bad theology is better theology, and he gives us plenty of it.

Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbors: Be Participants in the Mission of Jesus at Home and Abroad
Steven Paas

Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2020
Hb., 106 pp., bibliography

Reviewed by Jessica Udall, Ph.D. candidate,
Columbia International University, USA

Steven Paas is a Dutch theologian with extensive cross-cultural experience as a theological educator and Presbyterian minister in Malawi. This book adopts a humble, post-colonial perspective that seeks to reframe Christian mission in terms that eschew conquest.

Paas starts with the clear assertion that 'mission is the work of God, from beginning to end' (10). This does not mean that God is the only one engaged in the work of mission, however. Rather, a fundamental aspect of being a Christian is that we are sent by God. Jesus is both Saviour and Re-Creator and his aim is 'the restoration of all things', but unfortunately, for many he has a darkened identity because of the abuse of Western empires which used Christian language and identity to further their own agendas in undesirable ways. In the context of the West's Christian-themed justifications of world domination, theological systems 'were developed on which mission strategies were based, which benefited from the violent conquest and subjugation of foreign countries, peoples and cultures' (26). This history has caused those in the West to be plagued by equally stunting feelings of guilt (without taking right action to move forward) and superiority bias (buying into the narrative of conquest, which co-opts Christ to prop up national pride).

Paas contends that to be effective as missionaries in a world still reeling from the detrimental effects of the twisted alliance of missionary efforts and political ambitions, Western Christians must experience a 'theological reorientation to the

Sent Lord, who has become their Sender' (27). Paas seeks to establish a middle way of two-sidedness, suggesting that Christians can positively identify with and use points of contact with other religions to engage in conversations with those who do not yet know Christ.

When a church 'gradually allows worldly influences to determine her identity', Paas contends, it 'is in the process of losing her nature as a missionary community' (66). He spends two chapters delving into the specifics of what this loss looks like.

Paas goes on to examine potential 'weaknesses in the congregation, her structure and culture, which hinder participation in the mission of Jesus Christ' (82). These include extreme hierarchy, an overly loose inclusion of the non-regenerate as members in the church, introversion, any dynamic that causes divisions by elevating one member over another, and an unwillingness to contextualize in order to reach people who are different from us. In the final chapter, he reminds us that missionary work is ultimately 'about becoming sensitive and dependent on the Spirit' and that only with the Spirit's strength and wisdom can Western Christians—or any Christians, for that matter—overcome excuses, hindrances and weaknesses in our missionary endeavours.

This book has much to commend it. It reads like the letter of a Paul-type missionary to a Timothy-type mentee, written with the seasoned wisdom and evident humility of someone who has learned by experience and has walked with God in the practice of what is being preached. Paas seeks to stay in the centre of biblical tension and hold fast to biblical truth while boldly calling out harmful elements of Western missionary history, making him a helpful guide for a new generation of Western Christians who may balk at involving themselves in missionary activity for fear that they will repeat the abuses of the past. This book would have benefitted from a professional copyeditor to catch distracting typographical errors and formatting issues, but it is well worth the effort to look past these minor issues and learn from such a wise, humble theologian and missionary practitioner.