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## Editorial: Mission

We commence this new volume with an examination of the ‘strategic missional opportunity’ of one of the oldest civilisations of our world as Keith Campbell (USA) draws upon his long acquaintance with Chinese intelligentsia to alert us to a significant trend in which a love for science leads to the attribution of ‘religion-like characteristics’ to that discipline. Although, according to Campbell, this creates an unhealthy schism between science and philosophy, it also opens the way for thoughtful Christians to bear witness to the gospel.

We move back in history for Peter Morden (UK) to expound the spirituality of one of the pioneers of the modern missionary movement—Samuel Pierce (1766-1799) which is widely recognised as ‘underpinning a period of great advance for the churches’ and mission. Although his life was short, he exemplified powerfully an evangelical piety focused on ‘conversion, the Bible and the message of the cross; it was also deeply felt with an emphasis on both personal and corporate devotion, and, perhaps above all, it was active, both moulding and being moulded by missional concerns.’

On a practical level, Gregg Okesson (USA) discusses, from personal experience, the importance of understanding social institutions when moving into a new culture, and the dangers of failing to do so. He points out that evangelical theology provides ample resources to understand this situation, and to demonstrate his point, draws upon some historical and current examples –

ranging from John Wesley and Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Vinoth Ramachandra and Andrew Walls.

To engage with the values of the secular community also involves a certain theological framework and in our next paper, Pavel Hošek (Czech Republic) takes up the value of natural moral law thinking for this process. He compares the approaches of two scholars writing in this area to show how one approach seems better fitted for the task than the other.

We now turn to two more specialised (although quite different) areas in the work of mission – John Johnson (USA) discusses the approach of the Koran to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in historical and hermeneutical terms, arguing that there are serious shortcomings evident. Johannes Reimer (Germany) deals with the proper training of church planters, assessing different approaches that have been employed, and concluding that a more integrated model is urgently needed.

To round off this valuable collection of papers, our General Editor, Dr Thomas Schirrmacher (Germany), reviews the significance and reception of the important document, ‘Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World’, which was developed by the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches and the Vatican, under the topics of interreligious dialogue, mission studies, ecumenical relations and human rights.

**Thomas Schirrmacher, General Editor**  
**David Parker, Executive Editor**

# China's Intelligentsia: A Strategic Missional Opportunity

D. Keith Campbell

## I Introduction

Science has emerged triumphantly in modern China and, as in the West, has left no aspect of society untouched. From the government to the peasant, and from the university to the primary schools, science reigns supreme. China's intelligentsia—a term I use to refer to China's formally educated population, including professors, students, and politicians—reveres and applies science rigorously to all academic disciplines and to everyday life. This benefits China in innumerable ways: in medicine, technology, travel, etc.

Amidst this admirable excitement and reverence for one of the most influential disciplines in history, I explore in this article<sup>1</sup> how China's intelligentsia attributes religion-like characteristics

to its science, how this engenders an unhealthy divorce between science and philosophy. I also discuss how addressing these religion-like characteristics affords, especially for certain, qualified missionaries, a strategic and influential missional opportunity that far exceeds China's geographical borders.

Instead of using the phrase 'religion-like characteristics', I could perhaps use the abbreviated term 'scientism' (the philosophical belief that science is the most authoritative worldview to the exclusion of all others) to note this relatively new phenomenon in China (arriving circa 1950).<sup>2</sup> I highlight, however, a nuanced aspect of scientism, namely one possessing religious overtones (perhaps similar to what

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1 I am grateful to Dr. Stan Wallace, President of Global Scholars, for commenting on an early draft of this article. I also deeply appreciate insightful input from Brian and Melanie, two colleagues who serve with me in China.

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2 Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (vol. 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 78–79. See also Shiping Hua, *Scientism and Humanism: Two Cultures in Post-Mao China (1978–1989)* (Albany: State University Press, 1995).

Mikael Stenmark calls 'redemptive scientism').<sup>3</sup>

I intentionally retain the phrase, 'religion-like characteristics', to note the irony of China's official policies that seek to separate science from religion while attributing similar religion-like characteristics to their science. If one disagrees with my use of the phrase, 'religion-like characteristics' or with whether these characteristics are themselves technically religion-like (see below), my argument still stands because whatever one calls these characteristics, they are not scientific within the standard, contemporary understanding of science.

I am not the first to note a divorce between science and philosophy among China's intelligentsia. Xia Li observes something similar in an insightful 2010 article, wherein he summarizes the history of the relationship between the disciplines of the Philosophy of Science and the disciplines of Science, Technology, and Society.<sup>4</sup> He concludes that, although these two disciplines in China interacted well in the 1970s and 1980s, there has, in the last 20 years, been an increasing separation of the two, a separation that Xia Li thinks will ultimately end in divorce. He finds this trend unfortunate and argues for their reunification.

In this article, I substantiate the phenomenon that Li pointed out several years ago. Additionally, in build-

ing on his work, I note a trend wherein China's intelligentsia ironically adheres to 'science' in religion-like ways, and I suggest an evangelical, missional response to it. Before examining this phenomenon in China, I first need to define what I mean by 'science' and explain how I use the term 'religion'.

## II Science and Religion

In 2009, after a year of research and collaboration, the United Kingdom's Science Council, whose goal is to advance science and its application in the UK, presented this succinct, commonly accepted, definition of science: 'Science is the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence.'<sup>5</sup> Scientific methodology, according to The Science Council, includes the following eight items: objective observation via measurement and data; evidence; experiment and/or observation as benchmarks for testing hypotheses; induction (use of reason to establish general rules or conclusions drawn from facts or examples); repetition; analysis; and verification (including testing, critical exposure to scrutiny, peer review, and assessment).

Although science can refer to a method (as just mentioned), an institution (e.g., the Institution of Environmental Sciences), or a branch of knowledge (e.g., mathematical

<sup>3</sup> Mikael Stenmark, 'What is Scientism?' *Religious Studies: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 33 [1997]: 27–29.

<sup>4</sup> 'Philosophy of Science and STS in China: From Coexistence to Separation', *East Asia Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* (2010): 57–66.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, 'What is Science: The Science Council's Definition of Science,' <<http://www.sciencecouncil.org/definition>> accessed 15 October 2014. Cf. *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (2d ed.; USA: William Collins World Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), 1622.

sciences),<sup>6</sup> the method is foundational to the other two. In other words, the institution and branch, generally referred to as science, should flow from the method and not vice versa. As discussed in the next two sections, this method, as beneficial and influential as it is, has its limitations in what it can examine.<sup>7</sup> And, in ignoring these limitations, some among China's intelligentsia have included (perhaps inadvertently) religion-like characteristics with this method.

Religion is more difficult to define than science.<sup>8</sup> If defined too narrowly, it inevitably omits certain beliefs that some scholars find religious. If defined too broadly, then almost anything can be classified as a religion (e.g., a university fraternity). Space here does not permit engaging these debates. Nor is it necessary because I am not arguing, as I reiterate below, that China's science is a religion proper. Furthermore, it is not necessary because I focus here on *characteristics* that are generally perceived as religious. Scholars of religion can easily debate the degree to which some of these characteristics are religious. Entering these debates is unnecessary also because, however one classifies them, they do not, as mentioned above, represent any standard definition of science. These characteristics are my focus in the next section.<sup>9</sup>

### III 'Science' with Religion-Like Characteristics among China's Intelligentsia(?)

With science and religion explained, I now turn attention to how I think 'science' manifests itself with certain religion-like characteristics among China's intelligentsia. To preface this discussion, I note three important things about this subtitle. First, notice that I place 'science' in quotation marks. I do this to indicate that to the degree that science assimilates these religion-like characteristics is to the same degree that it fails to meet the criteria of science as defined above.

Second, notice that I place a question mark in parenthesis (?) at the end of this subtitle. This indicates my humble speculation about the degree to which science, indeed, appears in China with certain religion-like characteristics. I hedge this suggestion not because I believe it to be inaccurate, but because I have not conducted a statistical analysis of a large cross-section of China's academic population on this topic. I am aware, in other words, that this suggestion—that science appears among China's intellectuals with religion-like characteristics—represents an initial, personal observation that social scientists, and others in the field more qualified than myself, should verify and quantify more specifically through statistical research.

My contention, though, is not un-

<sup>6</sup> See *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 1622.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Nicholas Rescher, *The Limits of Science* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), esp. 243–51.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Craig Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2012), 1–6.

<sup>9</sup> For definitions and characteristics of re-

ligion, see Niels Nielsen, ed., *Religions of the World* (3d ed.; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 4–17, and Jacob Neusner, ed., *Introduction to World Religions: Communities and Cultures* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), x–xxiii.

founded because it is based on the following experiences: teaching over a thousand students during four years in Chinese classrooms in Shanghai, Beijing, and Harbin (to undergraduates, graduates, and PhD students from three different departments: Philosophy, Humanities, and English), informal interviews with students, professors, and expatriates living in China, and observing Chinese political speeches both in person and in the media.

Aside from my personal observations, it is noteworthy that in 1999 Frank E. Budenholzer briefly alluded to this phenomenon in China,<sup>10</sup> my discussion below further confirms Budenholzer's inclinations. To the degree that the cumulative weight of my observations is accurate, to the same degree my suggested missional response in the next section is appropriate.

The risk of prematurely basing the missional strategies discussed below on my observations prior to conducting statistical analyses will cause no harm. If my observations turn out to be too subjectively founded and/or too narrowly perceived relative to China's broader intelligentsia, the result is harmless because evangelical scholars, who should be adept at rapidly assessing new and changing situations, will, in practice, simply and quickly learn that it is unnecessary to address these observations. But, if my observations are correct, then addressing them quickly, especially in light of China's well-documented rapid change—change that shows no signs

of abating—could have a more timely influence.

A final important note about this sub-title is to emphasize 'religion-like'. To further highlight a point I mention above, I do not wish to imply that China's science is a religion proper. Nor do I suggest that they *intentionally* attribute religion-like characteristics to certain aspects of their scientific enterprises. Rather, my goal is simply to note a trend among some of China's intelligentsia to implicitly believe (and at times explicitly argue) that science can accomplish more than it actually can. When this happens, that particular view of science inevitably takes on the following religious characteristics.

Aside from noting several issues concerning this sub-title, I should also mention several caveats. First, China's intelligentsia is very complex and far from monolithic. The religious characteristics that I discuss below do not apply pervasively to all of China's intelligentsia but represent general trends. Second, we can assume that Chinese scholars and leaders understand what science is because they remarkably push forward with many scientific advancements. I simply note trends about which the Chinese intelligentsia seems largely unaware, trends that result in misunderstandings about philosophy (including Christianity) and that afford evangelical missionaries strategic opportunities for service.

#### IV Eight Characteristics

With these issues and caveats in mind, I now turn attention to eight religion-like characteristics that surface in the appropriation of science among some

<sup>10</sup> 'Religion and Science in a Non-Western Setting', *Mission Studies* 16 (1999): 61.

of China's intelligentsia.<sup>11</sup> *First*, science among China's intelligentsia is often anthropomorphized in ways similar to how religions anthropomorphize their deities. Religions usually ascribe human traits to their gods such as seeing, hearing, walking, touching, thinking, and human motive, personality, and creativity. In my experience, science among China's intelligentsia is repeatedly endowed with motive, personality, and creativity, as if it is a thinking entity and not a benign method.

This anthropomorphism is not used solely with reference to science. In fact, scholars anthropomorphize most disciplines, as evidenced in phrases like 'psychology rescues schizophrenics from the brink of insanity.' Such anthropomorphism is not intrinsically problematic and, when used colloquially, is understandable. It is philosophically problematic because of the degree to which it permeates China's intelligentsia and because it presents in concert with the next eight religion-like characteristics.

*Second*, there is a pervasive assumption that science is the best or only source for adequately answering life's philosophical questions. My students and colleagues often assume that when scientific education advances far enough, then questions such as 'Why do some people do very evil things?' and 'Does God exist?' will be definitively answered or (philosophically more ill-informed) that it already has answered such questions. These assumptions are similar to those of some

religious adherents who view certain texts, leaders, and dogmas as the only sources that address the philosophical questions of life.

There is also, *third*, an assumption that science can provide an objective, ethical framework for life. This usually surfaces in my conversations regarding education. The assumption—an assumption that draws heavily on Confucianism—is that as good, scientific, modern education increases, better morals and ethics will inevitably follow. In light of moral problems among the educated in recent history (e.g., Hitler and Stalin) and among today's academic elites (e.g., corruption among some Chinese political leaders), this is demonstrably inaccurate.

My home country (the USA), for example, is among the most educated in the world; it is among the world's leaders in advancing scientific causes, contributions, and teaching methods. Yet, as is clear from a brief perusal of the daily news, sadly, heinous crimes are frighteningly too common in the United States, even among the formally educated. Scientific advancement alone, as beneficial and admirable as it is, does not, and perhaps cannot, solve the world's ethical problems.

Carrying points two and three (that science answers life's philosophical questions and that science provides ethics) to their logical conclusion, my students and colleagues, *fourth*, frequently assume (and sometimes overtly state) that science one day will, or (philosophically more ill-informed) already does, provide objective meaning to human life, including joy, contentment, and happiness. A firm belief that life has objective meaning is a religious and not a scientific characteristic. This

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<sup>11</sup> Some see similar trends in the west (Rustrum Roy, 'Scientism and Technology as Religions'. *Zygon* 40 [2005]: 835–44; Hua, *Scientism and Humanism*, esp. 141–56).

meaning is often attached to the notion that as science continually improves people's general quality of life (e.g., air conditioners, running water, indoor plumbing, electricity, and sanitized kitchens), then inevitably life's problems will dissipate. Not only is this notion a *non sequitur*, it also misunderstands the limits of science.

Another religion-like characteristic that, in my experience, manifests itself among China's intelligentsia is that, *fifth*, science is often accepted dogmatically without critical assessment of its purposes (to study the physical universe) and current limitations (cannot directly examine abstract thinking, compose ethics, etc.). This is similar to the way that some religious adherents uncritically, but tenaciously, hold to their beliefs. Although Philosophy of Science is a robust and established discipline in China, it is, as mentioned above, yielding decreasing influence on the field of science. In order to remain aware of methodological purposes, consistency, and limitations, every method should frequently undergo the rigors of philosophical inquiry. Otherwise, dogmatization results.

*Sixth*, this dogmatization, has made the word 'science' itself into a shibboleth. Examples of shibboleths among religious adherents include how deities are defined, which ethics are normative, and which religious texts are authoritative. The word 'science' is often used as a shibboleth among my students and colleagues to demarcate 'true academic research' from 'sub-standard academic research' without critical consideration of academic disciplines that explore data that the scientific method currently cannot assess.

A *seventh* religion-like characteris-

tic is the attributing of intrinsic value and uniqueness to humans. Religions almost universally prescribe ontological value to (at least some) human beings. Science, when properly understood, simply cannot ascribe special, ontological worth to humans relative to other life forms. It is simply an unscientific presupposition to objectivize such mantras as 'all people are created equal' or 'it is evil to eat for supper the neighbouring tribe'. Yet, every Chinese student and colleague with whom I have engaged about this issue believes that science demonstrates the ontological value of human beings.

*Finally*, and by way of summary, just as some religious adherents uncritically venerate their deities, my students and colleagues often venerate science without critical assessment.<sup>12</sup> By mentioning this veneration, I am not criticizing the justifiable admiration for what the scientific method contributes to humanity, a particular sentiment with which I resonate.<sup>13</sup> Rather, I question the veneration of it *without critical assessment*.

There are some differences, of course. Whereas religious adherents often go to a specific location and sometimes erect images to aid in venerating their deities, my Chinese students and colleagues, especially as encapsulated in public slogans embedded in political speeches, venerate the idea of science via the eight characteristics just discussed.

<sup>12</sup> Hua hinted at this in 1995 (*Scientism and Humanism*, 143–44, 145). For an earlier era, see also, D. W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought* (Biblo-Moser, 1972), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to Steven J. Heatherly, M.D., for pointing this out to me.

### V A Missional Response

Ministry in China at the intersection of these eight religion-like characteristics is precisely where an evangelical, missional response can have significant local and global influence—an influence on at least two levels. On one level, responding to these religion-like characteristics is influential whether one is evangelical or not; addressing them is simply good pedagogy and research. Beyond this, on another level, these characteristics philosophically impede a Christian worldview by, in essence, erecting a foundationless philosophy in its place—a philosophy that seeks to address issues that, according to believers, only Christianity can properly and most satisfyingly explain.

Correcting these religion-like characteristics is a particularly strategic way to advance Christ's Kingdom. This will have an influence not only locally in China but, because of China's emerging significance in world politics, economics, and humanitarian views, also more globally. China's intelligentsia, in other words, are no longer geo-political leaders only in China, but they are now influential leaders beyond her borders.

Although missionaries need to address these characteristics in every sector of Chinese society, perhaps the most strategic place to address them is within universities and, to the degree that local law permits, via scholarly publications. Those most qualified to do this are evangelical professors with terminal degrees in their respective fields, especially those in fields related to science and philosophy. Simply put, there is a dire need for evangelical scholars to practise their respective disciplines in China by incrementally (and more aggressively where local

restrictions on freedom-of-speech are lax) addressing these eight religion-like characteristics.

In order to avoid hegemonic insinuations, I should pause here and explain who I identify as 'missionaries'. The missional paradigm that Timothy Tennent calls the 'west-reaches-the-rest' died a beneficial death in the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the days should be long past when many westerners see themselves as God's only missionaries to the world. Modern missions, especially in light of Christianity's global shift toward the east and south, should be practised 'from everywhere to everywhere'.<sup>15</sup> This includes missions in mainland China.

With this said, however, there is a continued need, not to mention a biblical command, for cross-cultural missionaries (Mt 28:19–20), including those who travel from the west.<sup>16</sup> The following suggestions, therefore, apply both to academic missionaries who are native to mainland China and to those who are not.

Although these suggestions apply to all evangelicals serving in China, I will direct the conversation toward westerners for at least two reasons. First, it is very unlikely that there are

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<sup>14</sup> *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 31. On the demise of the west-reaches-the-rest paradigm, see Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, with Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 218–19.

<sup>15</sup> Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 219–21.

many subscribers to this journal residing in mainland China or a large number in Taiwan or Hong Kong. Thus, it is not so important to address Chinese scholars in this journal. Second, as I have argued elsewhere, evangelical scholars, especially in the west, are vocationally drowning in flooded academic markets. In light of fewer places to lay their academic heads, evangelical scholars in the west, because of Scripture's missional, theological mandate, should prayerfully consider practising their disciplines more globally.<sup>17</sup> An exceptionally strategic place to do this is in Chinese universities.

Credentialed evangelical scholars from disciplines such as science, technology, psychology, and mathematics have unprecedentedly open-doors to teach both short- and long-term in China. One avenue through which to explore such options is Global Scholars (formerly the International Institute for Christian Studies), the only organization in the world that connects evangelical scholars from every discipline to secular universities worldwide.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Chinese universities are partnering with western universities at a staggering rate, presenting further opportunities to teach in China.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> D. Keith Campbell, 'The American Evangelical Academy and the World: A Challenge to Practice More Globally', *JETS* 56 (2013): 337–53.

<sup>18</sup> See [www.global-scholars.org](http://www.global-scholars.org).

<sup>19</sup> Tamar Lewin, 'U.S. Universities Rush to Set Up Outposts Abroad', <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/education/10global.html?pagewanted=all>> accessed 8 October 2013; and Debra Erdley, 'Carnegie Mellon Joins Popular Trend of U.S., China Universities Partnering,' <[http://triblive.com/news/alleggheny/3786897-74/china-university-](http://triblive.com/news/alleggheny/3786897-74/china-university-engineering#axzz2h6oTKwdN)

Among the top missional priorities that Christian scholars from these disciplines who serve in China should address are the eight religion-like characteristics mentioned above. Scholars should, of course, address these characteristics as directly as possible through teaching and writing. More indirectly, but perhaps equally influential, are the following four ways to address these characteristics. These form a rudimentary platform upon which other, more specialized, scholars can build, and they, furthermore, address more deeply the erroneous philosophical perspectives that undergird these religion-like characteristics. Sometimes, depending on where one lives in China, these must be addressed only incrementally and/or peripherally due to China's current restrictions on free thought.

## VI Four Strategies

*First*, evangelical scholars in China, while applying the scientific method rigorously to every discipline, should patiently and respectfully teach China's intelligentsia about science's current, and perhaps indefinite, limits in evaluating and explaining certain phenomena.<sup>20</sup> For example, the scientific method is at present simply unable to establish and/or to empirically examine issues like justice, ethics, love, intuition, consciousness, and abstract thinking such as the empirical exist-

[engineering#axzz2h6oTKwdN](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/education/10global.html?pagewanted=all) accessed 3 September 2014.

<sup>20</sup> See especially Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001) and Rescher, *The Limits of Science*.

ence of higher mathematics. Whether or not science will one day evolve to the point that it can empirically examine these phenomena is debatable.<sup>21</sup> In the meantime, evangelical scholars would serve China's intelligentsia well by encouraging them to exhibit philosophical and methodological humility concerning these and similar issues.

Consonant with espousing the current limits of the scientific method, scholars in China, as argued in any introduction to philosophy,<sup>22</sup> should, *second*, teach their students and colleagues to submit every research method, including the scientific method, to rigorous philosophical evaluations. Interdisciplinary methodological checks-and-balances, especially amidst today's tendency towards intense vocational specialization, are a must for every field. Without such checks-and-balances, potential research flaws and reductionisms will result. Examples, I suggest, include the religion-like characteristics I address above.

Implied in this suggestion to submit every research method to rigorous philosophical evaluation is, *third*, that evangelical scholars serving in China should nudge her intelligentsia towards interdisciplinary approaches and methods. Especially important is for Chinese students and scholars from

every discipline to become more familiar with the prevailing arguments of modern philosophy.

My Chinese students and colleagues generally operate within the philosophy of the 18th and 19th century Enlightenment wherein scholars assumed that complete objectivity was possible (e.g., logical positivism).<sup>23</sup> This runs contrary to, and completely ignores, the consensus of modern philosophical scholarship that no one is completely objective and that everyone is influenced by their culture, worldview, upbringing, etc. Ignoring these arguments of modern philosophy results, at least partially, in scholars inadvertently synchronizing their scientific pursuits with the religion-like characteristics mentioned above.

My purpose in making this suggestion is not to deny the existence of objective truth since I personally believe he exists (Jn 14:6). Neither do I suggest that the Chinese intelligentsia surrender to some intellectual relativism by surrendering the pursuit of truth. They should pursue it, though, through rigorous methods, the best of which for the Chinese intelligentsia, I propose, is something akin to N. T. Wright's and Ben Meyer's 'critical realism'.<sup>24</sup> Critical realism admits the subjectivity of researchers but still suggests that they, with rigorous effort informed by the checks-and-balances of others, can

**21** Rescher, *The Limits of Science*, 111–27. Contra Stephen Hawking (see Matt Warman, 'Stephen Hawking tells Google "Philosophy is Dead"', <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/google/8520033/Stephen-Hawking-tells-Google-philosophy-is-dead.html>> accessed 13 October 2014).

**22** For example, see Alex Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Science: A Contemporary Introduction* (2d ed.; New York: Routledge, 2005), 2–6.

**23** An observation also noted by Budenholzer, 'Religion and Science in a Non-Western Setting', 44, and Hua, *Scientism and Humanism*, 143.

**24** N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 32–37; Ben F. Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament* (Alison Park: Pickwick, 1989).

speak cogently about their object of research.

*Fourth*, as implied throughout this article, evangelical scholars practising in China should remind their students that a healthy scientific method needs robust philosophical inquiry. Aside from the innate academic and practical problems that stem from permeating science with the religion-like characteristics addressed earlier, the disciplines of science and philosophy, as I mention several times above, sometimes explore phenomena that the other discipline does not and cannot address. Excluding philosophical voices from any academic conversation (whether it be science, jurisprudence, ethics, etc.) is both academically myopic and, relative to an evangelical worldview and ethic, practically unwise.

## VII Conclusion

The Chinese intelligentsia admirably herald science in nearly every political speech and, in my experience, are the

mantra of academic disciplines from Zhanjiang to Harbin. This benefits China both politically and academically. Less beneficial for China is my observation of at least eight religion-like characteristics that contravene standard understandings of science and that impede evangelical Christianity. Addressing these religion-like characteristics at the juncture of China's intelligentsia provides a strategic, missional opportunity for evangelical scholars—those who can articulately integrate their faith with their respective disciplines—to reintroduce a philosophical voice to China's scientific claims and endeavours.

Western evangelical scholars who will pay the necessary price of leaving family, familiarity, and, in some cases, promising careers in order to teach in a distant classroom, can play a helpful role in addressing this missional opportunity. Because of China's recent move onto the geo-political world scene, the success of this mission will have influence well beyond her current borders.

# Samuel Pearce (1766-99): An Example of Missional Spirituality

Peter J. Morden

## I Introduction

In March 1815 the English Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist journal, the *Baptist Magazine*, carried a review of a volume of missionary correspondence, published the previous year, which included some letters written by the late Samuel Pearce (1766-99). The anonymous reviewer commented especially on these letters, declaring that, like their author, they were full of 'tender' benevolence and 'ardent' piety. He further commented that if his readers already had in their possession the 'excellent Memoirs of [Pearce's] life, published by Mr Fuller' then the letters in this new volume would need no recommendation from him.<sup>1</sup> Andrew Fuller's (1754-1815) *Memoirs of Pearce* had first been published in 1800 and had enjoyed a wide circulation, with a sec-

ond edition appearing a year later.<sup>2</sup> The review concluded with the following words,

[T]he spirit which animated Pearce did not die with him. His falling mantle, through the publication of his memoirs, has descended upon others; and we know there are some young men, now in the ministry, whose thoughts were first directed to the sacred employment by reading the letters of Samuel Pearce. May similar beneficial effects attend the present publication.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *Baptist Magazine (BM)*, Vol. VII (London: W. Button, 1815), 119. The volume reviewed was *Missionary Correspondence: Containing Extracts of Letters from the late Mr Samuel Pearce... and from Mr John Thomas* (London: T. Gardiner and Son, 1814).

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Fuller, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. Samuel Pearce... with Extracts from Some of his Most Interesting Letters* (Clipstone: J.W. Morris, 1st edn., 1800; 2nd edn., 1801). I have worked from the first edition. The 3rd edn. (Dunstable: J.W. Morris, 1808) is an important one as it was the last over which Fuller had control. He may also have had some input into the fourth edition (London: W. Baynes *et al*, 1816), which appeared the year after his death. Michael A.G. Haykin is preparing a critical edition of the *Memoir*, due to be published by Walter de Gruyter.

<sup>3</sup> *BM*, Vol. VII, 119.

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Sixteen years after Pearce's death, he was still being held up as an example of piety to be emulated;<sup>4</sup> fifteen years after they had first appeared, Fuller's *Memoirs* of the man who had been his close friend remained influential.

As this review in the *Baptist Magazine* suggests, Samuel Pearce was a significant figure in eighteenth-century Particular Baptist life, despite his having died so young. This article firstly offers a brief biographical sketch of this neglected but important Baptist pastor, one which sets the man in his wider context and seeks to show why he was considered so noteworthy, especially as an exemplar of spirituality.<sup>5</sup> In the second half of the article Fuller's *Memoirs*, upon which Pearce's reputation largely rested, are analysed, with key themes isolated and evaluated. Fuller was himself one of the foremost Calvinistic Baptist ministers of his day and alongside the cross-cultural missionary William Carey (1761-1834) probably the best known. He was a pastor, theologian and missionary statesman of the first rank.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is a range of positive references to Pearce scattered throughout Vol. VII of the *BM*. See, for example, 228; 295; 489.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed treatment of Pearce's life, see the fine biographical sketch by Michael A.G. Haykin in, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah Pearce* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2012), 1-41. The rest of the book is a carefully edited collection of Pearce's letters, many of which are published in Haykin's book for the first time.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed study of Fuller, see Peter J. Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015).

In the analysis of the *Memoirs* offered here the focus is, once again, on spirituality (with 'spirituality' understood as more than just the 'interior life of the soul'; it also encompasses the way that life is expressed and, crucially, lived<sup>7</sup>). In Fuller's view, Pearce embodied the ideal of evangelical Particular Baptist spirituality. In writing his friend's *Memoirs* he wanted to encourage others to emulate his piety,<sup>8</sup> the same concern which was later expressed by the *Baptist Magazine* reviewer.

Consequently, as well as illuminating Pearce's life and ministry, the *Memoir* gives us a window onto the practical piety that leading Particular Baptists valued. This was the type of missional spirituality they believed had underpinned a period of great advance for the churches and one which they sought to commend to a new generation.

## II Biographical Sketch

Samuel Pearce was born on 20 July 1766, in the town of Plymouth in the south west of England. His parents were Particular Baptists but, according to his own testimony he turned from his Christian background, and followed 'evil' and 'wicked inclinations',<sup>9</sup> although he continued attending chapel. His conversion came in 1782 when he heard a sermon from Isaiah Birt

<sup>7</sup> Cf. my comments in Peter J. Morden, 'Communion with Christ and his People': *The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2010), 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Memoirs*, 288.

<sup>9</sup> *Memoirs*, 73-74. For the information in this paragraph, see *Memoirs*, 73-76.

(1758-1837), a young man who was 'on trial' as potential co-pastor of the Plymouth church. 'I believe', Pearce said later, that 'few conversions were more joyful. The change produced in my views, feelings, and conduct, was so evident to myself, that I could no more doubt of its being from God, than of my existence. I had the witness in myself, and was filled with peace and joy unspeakable.'<sup>10</sup> On his seventeenth birthday he was baptised as a believer and became a member of the Plymouth church.<sup>11</sup>

Pearce was working as an apprentice silversmith but a call to pastoral and preaching ministry was soon discerned. In 1786 he was sent to the Bristol Baptist Academy to train.<sup>12</sup> This Academy had been established thanks to a deed of gift given in 1679, although it was only from the 1720s, under the leadership of first Bernard Foskett (1685-1759) and then Hugh Evans (1712-81), that the vision truly became a reality.<sup>13</sup> The Bristol Academy that welcomed Pearce had never capitulated to the 'high Calvinism' which had become the dominant theol-

ogy in many Particular Baptist churches in England.

High Calvinists held it was not the 'duty' of the unconverted to believe the gospel, since total depravity rendered them incapable of doing so. Consequently, it was not considered the duty of preachers to offer the gospel to all. This belief helped foster an insular ecclesiology and militated against vigorous evangelistic activity; indeed, in the church in which Andrew Fuller grew up in Soham, Cambridgeshire, the pastor 'had little or nothing to say to the unconverted'.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Bristol was committed to a more expansive, evangelistically minded brand of Calvinism.<sup>15</sup> By the time Pearce arrived as a student, leadership of the Academy had passed to Hugh Evans' son, Caleb (1737-91). Caleb Evans was a committed evangelical and an enthusiast for the writings of the New England theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-58).<sup>16</sup>

At Bristol, Pearce's passion for evangelism grew. On one occasion he preached in a simple hut to a group of between thirty and forty coal miners, reducing them to tears and weeping himself as he spoke of the cross of Christ.<sup>17</sup> Understandably, he was high-

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<sup>10</sup> *Memoirs*, 75.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Hayden, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism Among Eighteenth-Century Baptist Ministers Trained at Bristol Academy, 1690-1791* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2006), 225.

<sup>12</sup> *Memoirs*, 73; 76.

<sup>13</sup> See Anthony R. Cross, 'The Early Bristol Tradition as a Seedbed for Evangelical Reception among British Baptists, c.1720-c.1770', in Anthony R. Cross, Peter J. Morden, and Ian M. Randall (eds), *Pathways and Patterns in History: Essays on Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Modern World in Honour of David Bebbington* (London: Baptist Historical Society / Spurgeon's College, 2015), 50-77.

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<sup>14</sup> John Ryland, Jr., *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope Illustrated in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London: Button and Son, 2nd edn., 1818), 11. For more on high Calvinism and the extent to which Particular Baptists had adopted this theology, see Morden, *Fuller*, 15-20; 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> On this see, Hayden, *Continuity and Change*, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> For Caleb Evans, see Cross, 'Early Bristol Tradition', 66-70; 74-76.

<sup>17</sup> *Memoirs*, 108, 247; S. Pearce Carey, *Samuel Pearce M.A., The Baptist Brainerd* (London: Carey Press, n.d. [1922]), 83.

ly regarded in the Academy.

It is worth pausing to note the evangelical nature of Pearce's early experiences, training and developing ministry. The evangelical revival of George Whitefield (1714-70), John Wesley (1703-91) and Howell Harris (1714-73) had been sweeping through the British Isles since the 1730s.<sup>18</sup> By Pearce's day it was beginning to have a significant, shaping effect on Particular Baptist life, with the influence of high Calvinism diminishing, although it remained strong in some areas.<sup>19</sup> The evangelical movement was both doctrinal and experiential, emphasising the Bible, the cross, conversion, and activity in the cause of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Pearce's conversion was due to evangelical, invitational gospel preaching: Birt was himself Bristol-trained, and had imbibed Caleb Evans' theology and practical, applied approach.<sup>21</sup> Pearce's description of his conversion, with the emphases on felt joy and assurance of faith was typical of evangelicalism too; indeed, elements of his experience are redolent of that of John Wesley's, who, in 1738, had felt his heart 'strangely warmed' and 'felt

[he] did trust in Christ', receiving full 'assurance' of salvation.<sup>22</sup>

Pearce's experience fitted the classic evangelical mould. He then followed Birt by studying under Caleb Evans himself. Finally, his approach to preaching, typified by his experiences with the miners, was evangelical, both in content (the focus on the cross), in delivery (applied), and in effect (his hearers were deeply moved). The young Samuel Pearce was both Baptist and evangelical.

As he came to the end of his course at Bristol, Pearce was recommended to the Particular Baptist church meeting in Cannon Street, Birmingham. He was called as their pastor, and ordained on Wednesday 18 August 1790. Caleb Evans preached at the ordination service, and the minister from a church some sixty miles away in Kettering, Northamptonshire—Andrew Fuller—led in prayer. Pearce submitted a report of his own ordination to the *Baptist Annual Register*. In it he said that 'Mr Fuller...implored the divine blessing on the new relation which the church had then formed.'<sup>23</sup> Such heartfelt prayer would have resonated with the new pastor.

This was probably the first time the two men met. As to theology and outlook, they held to similar beliefs. As a

<sup>18</sup> See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-74, for a description of the Revival and its characteristics which includes material on modern evangelicalism's impact on sections of 'Old Dissent', including the Particular Baptists.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in Suffolk and Norfolk in the east of England.

<sup>20</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 5-17.

<sup>21</sup> See Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *The Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860 (DEB)* (2 Vols; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), Vol. I, 101.

<sup>22</sup> *The Works of John Wesley* (eds Richard P. Heitzenrater and Frank Baker) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975-), Vol. XVIII, 249-50. Whether Wesley's experience can rightly be described as his 'conversion' has been warmly debated. On this, see Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989), 145-57.

<sup>23</sup> John Rippon (ed.), *The Baptist Annual Register*, Vol. I, 1790-93 (London: Dilly, Brown and James, 1793), 517.

youth Fuller had been brought up in a church that espoused high Calvinism, as already noted. But he had abandoned this approach to embrace an evangelical Calvinism, the contours of which were shaped by the theology of Jonathan Edwards.<sup>24</sup> This shift in thinking and praxis was facilitated, in part, by his friendship with the Bristol trained minister John Sutcliff (1752-1814).<sup>25</sup> Pearce and Fuller were like-minded and they would become firm friends.

Pearce was the evangelistically-minded pastor of the Birmingham church for the rest of his life. As a minister he gave himself wholeheartedly to his work. Birmingham was England's second city and the leading industrial centre of the Midlands. Birt visited his convert in 1792 and described the country near Birmingham as full of 'coal and iron works', speaking evocatively of a land of 'burning, of smoke, and of terror'.<sup>26</sup>

In this urban centre Pearce ministered with remarkable effectiveness. 335 new members joined the church during his pastorate.<sup>27</sup> In one five-month period he baptised almost forty people, nearly all of whom he described

as 'newly awakened'.<sup>28</sup> One of those who came to Christ in the early days of his time at Cannon Street was Sarah Hopkins (1771-1804), and in 1791 she became Samuel Pearce's wife. She was a woman of deep piety and their marriage was a happy one.<sup>29</sup>

One incident which helps illustrate his ministry also relates to Andrew Fuller and can be inserted here. Pearce was preaching in 1794 at Guilsborough, Northamptonshire, at the opening of a new meeting house. A number of other ministers were in attendance, among them Fuller. Pearce's sermon was so effective he was asked to speak again the next day, with the service beginning at 5.00 a.m.. The early start was to enable labourers to attend before they started work.

After this second sermon had been given, Fuller declared how much he had appreciated the content of the message. He suggested there were some issues with the structure however. 'I thought', Fuller said, 'you did not seem to close when you had really finished... you seemed, as it were, to begin again at the end—how was it?' According to Francis Cox (1783-1853), who was present, the preacher was reluctant to respond but after being pressed for an answer eventually said,

Well, my brother, you shall have the secret... Just at the moment I was about to resume my seat, thinking I had finished, the door opened, and I saw a poor man enter, of the work-

<sup>24</sup> See Chris Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Morden, *Fuller*, 56-59.

<sup>26</sup> Isaiah Birt, Diary entry, 7 June 1793, cited in John Birt, 'Memoir of the Late Rev. Isaiah Birt', *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XXX (London: G. Wightman, 1838), 107. Birt is describing the industrialisation that marked the landscape especially to the north and west of the city.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists... Vol. IV* (London: Taylor Hinton, Holdsworth and Ball, 1830), 543.

<sup>28</sup> Pearce to William Steadman, 8 Feb 1793, *Memoirs*, 100. Probably the five-month period referred to was in 1792.

<sup>29</sup> *Memoirs*, 78. For more detail, see the evidence collected by Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 18-24.

ing class; and from the sweat on his brow, and the symptoms of his fatigue, I conjectured that he had walked some miles to this early service, but that he had been unable to reach the place till the close. A momentary thought glanced through my mind—here may be a man who never heard the gospel, or it may be he is one that regards it as a feast of fat things; in either case, the effort on his part demands one on mine. So with the hope of doing him good, I resolved at once to forget all else, and, in despite of criticism, and the apprehension of being thought tedious, to give him a quarter of an hour.<sup>30</sup>

Pearce had finished his message, but continued preaching just for this man. This was an example of what Fuller would later term Pearce's 'holy love'—a heartfelt love for God, the gospel and people which was central to the piety they so admired.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to ministry at Cannon Street and his preaching elsewhere, Pearce was involved in the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society (henceforth the BMS) in 1792. He was present at the Society's founding meeting on 2 October 1792 at Kettering, Northamptonshire, and arrived at the second meeting at Northampton, which

was on 31 October 1792, with a gift of £70. This had been collected from his Cannon Street congregation in the intervening period.<sup>32</sup> £70 was an astonishing sum, given that the total amount of subscriptions raised at Kettering had been only a little over £13. Pearce's gift, said John Ryland Jr. (1753-1825), another prominent Particular Baptist who was present at both meetings, 'put new spirits into us all.'<sup>33</sup> The Cannon Street pastor came also with a proposal that an auxiliary society should be formed, based in Birmingham, to help support the new venture. This was accepted and Pearce was welcomed onto the full BMS committee.<sup>34</sup>

It is easy to underestimate the significance of the BMS, given its humble beginnings among a group of English Dissenters. Yet, as Brian Stanley states, the Society's foundation 'marks a turning point in the history of Christian missionary endeavour'.<sup>35</sup> There were precedents for Protestant cross-cultural missionary effort, for instance in the work of David Brainerd amongst Native Americans and in the efforts of the Moravians, for example in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, the BMS helped spark the formation of many other 'voluntary societies' seeking to engage in

**30** Francis A. Cox, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society* (2 vols; London: T. Ward and G. & J. Dyer, 1842), Vol. I, 52–53. It should be noted that Cox was only a boy at the time of the incident, and so it is unlikely he captured Pearce's actual words in his later account. Cox went on to train at Bristol and enjoyed a significant ministry in London. See *DEB*, Vol. I, 263–64.

**31** *Memoirs*, 242.

**32** Anon. [Andrew Fuller?], 'An Account of the Particular Baptist Society (BMS)...including a Narrative of its Rise and Plan', in Rippon (ed.), *The Baptist Annual Register*, Vol. I, 1790–93, 376; *Memoirs*, 99. The BMS was originally known as the 'Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen'.

**33** Ryland, *Fuller*, 150.

**34** 'An Account of the Particular Baptist Society', 377.

**35** Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), 2.

overseas mission, based both in Britain and North America.<sup>36</sup> Pearce was an important member of the group who helped to establish the BMS, and hence he was involved in something of global significance. More will be said about his passion for cross-cultural mission in the second half of this article.

Pearce's ministry in Birmingham continued, and in June 1796 he also visited Ireland and preached there, having responded to an invitation from the General Evangelical Society in Dublin.<sup>37</sup> The Christians in Dublin were so taken with Pearce that he was urged to stay, and offered a generous stipend to minister at a church in a well-to-do area of the city. When he demurred, arrangements were proposed which would necessitate the Englishman being in Ireland for only part of each year, perhaps for as little as three months. Again Pearce declined, this time after a short period of reflection and prayer. As we shall see, he had wanted to go overseas under the auspices of the BMS, but had not been accepted. Yet he could not be tempted away from his Birmingham congregation by what Fuller called 'the most flattering prospects of a worldly nature'.<sup>38</sup>

Pearce would almost certainly have been unsuitable for overseas service with the BMS due to his delicate health. From the early 1790s onwards he was often unwell, and in 1798 he was caught in a rainstorm, developing

a fever he could not shake off. In the final months of his life he spent some time in Plymouth in a vain attempt to recover some strength. From there he wrote to his church, a letter which included the following,

You, beloved, who have found the peace speaking blood of the atonement, must not be satisfied with what you have already known or enjoyed. The only way to be constantly happy, and constantly prepared for the most awful changes which we must all experience, is to be constantly *looking* and *coming* to a dying Savior... if you thus live (and oh that you may daily receive fresh life from Christ so to do) 'the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds', and you will be filled with 'joy unspeakable and full of glory'.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, Pearce quoted the same text (1 Peter 3:8) he had cited in his earlier account of his conversion. He returned to Birmingham, but his condition continued to deteriorate. For the whole of August it seems he was unable to write, although he did receive visitors and was able to communicate briefly with some of them.<sup>40</sup>

The diagnosis was 'consumption' (that is pulmonary tuberculosis) and it was clear he was slipping away. He died on 10 October 1799. Fuller heard the news whilst he was on a speaking tour of Scotland on behalf of the BMS. On 19 October he composed a letter to Sarah Pearce which included the comments, 'Try, while your mind is warm, to draw [i.e. write a few lines on] his

<sup>36</sup> For more detail, see Morden, *Fuller*, 2; 97; 109-23; 162-81.

<sup>37</sup> *Memoirs*, 146. Birt, who spent two months in Dublin with the same Society in 1792, had probably recommended his friend. See 'Memor of Isaiah Birt', 107.

<sup>38</sup> *Memoirs*, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Pearce to the 'Church in Cannon-street', 31 May 1799, in *Memoirs*, 224-25.

<sup>40</sup> *Memoirs*, 238-39.

character. Memoirs of his life must be published.<sup>41</sup> Soon he would personally make good on this commitment.

### III Andrew Fuller's Memoirs of Samuel Pearce

Fuller had been thinking of Pearce's *Memoirs*—and indeed about writing them himself—for several months before he wrote to Sarah from Scotland. In a letter to his ailing friend on 30 August, he declared his intentions, reassuring Pearce,

[Y]ou need not fear that I will puff [up] your character, any more than you would mine. We are all of us, God knows it, poor unworthy creatures. Yet the truth may be told to the glory of sovereign grace; and I long to express my inextinguishable affection for you in something more than words, I mean by doing something that shall be of use to your family.<sup>42</sup>

In his final comment, Fuller indicated he would donate the profits from the sales of any work to Sarah, as indeed happened.<sup>43</sup> Despite his eagerness to write Pearce's life, and the benefits he thought would accrue from it—financial in the case of Sarah; spiritual in the case of the reading public—he did

not find the book easy to write due to the pressures he was under. He was working full tilt in the years 1799-1801 as he gave himself increasingly to the work of the BMS as its secretary, whilst continuing as pastor at Kettering. A letter from March 1800 captures his dilemma,

Pearce's memoirs are now loudly called for. I sit down almost in despair... My wife looks at me with a tear ready to drop, and says, 'My dear, you have hardly time to speak to me.' My friends at home are kind, but they also say, 'You have no time to see us or know us, and you will soon be worn out.' Amidst all this there is 'Come again to Scotland—come to Portsmouth—come to Plymouth—come to Bristol'.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, as already noted, Pearce's *Memoirs* did appear later that year. It was the only book-length biography Fuller ever wrote. It is to three of the central themes of these *Memoirs* which we now turn.

### IV A Biblical, Calvinistic, Evangelical Theology

Fuller included much material which emphasised the essential biblicism of his subject. For Pearce, the Bible was an 'inspired book' which should be received 'not as the word of man, but as the word of God'.<sup>45</sup> This commitment was deeply held. As part of a day of fasting and prayer in October 1794 he read the whole of Psalm 119. As he did so he found its focus on God's 'law' res-

41 Andrew Fuller Letter to Sarah Pearce, 19 October 1799, in Carey, *Samuel Pearce*, 216.

42 Andrew Fuller Letter to Samuel Pearce, 30 August 1799, as cited in Ernest A. Payne, 'Some Sidelights on Pearce and his Friends', *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. VII (1934-1935), 275. Fuller appears to have written 'puff off your character'. Probably he meant to write 'puff up', i.e. 'inflate'.

43 See the 'Advertisement' immediately after the title page of the *Memoirs*.

44 Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Andrew Fuller* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), 91-92.

45 *Memoirs*, 269-70.

onated—had much ‘congruity’—with the ‘breathings of [his] own heart’.<sup>46</sup>

His particular approach to the Bible was christocentric. For him, both the Old and New Testament scriptures pointed to Christ. Some lines he composed around the time he started work as pastor serve to highlight this, as well as illuminating other dimensions of his biblical theology. The verses were entitled ‘On the Scriptures’, the second, third and fifth stanzas of which ran,

*Here in those lines of love I see  
What Christ my Savior did for me;  
Here I behold the wondrous plan  
By which he saves rebellious man.  
Here we may view the Savior, God,  
Oppress'd by pain, o'erwhelm'd with  
blood;  
And if we ask the reason, why?  
He kindly says, 'For you I die.'  
O boundless grace! O matchless love!  
That brought the Savior from above,  
That caus'd the God for man to die,  
Expiring in an agony.<sup>47</sup>*

The scriptures, the ‘lines of love’ pointed to Christ, in particular to Christ crucified. The cross was the fulcrum of God’s ‘wondrous plan’ of salvation. The horror of the cross is not sidestepped: Christ was ‘Oppress’d by pain’ and ‘o’erwhelm’d with blood’. But it is the theology of the atonement that is the central concern here. The ‘boundless grace’ of God led Christ to die for ‘rebellious’ sinners; indeed, Pearce has Christ saying, ‘For you I die’, applying the message of the cross in a way that is intensely personal.

Elsewhere in the *Memoirs* Fuller includes a letter in which Pearce states his belief in the atonement as the ‘leading truth of the New Testament’.<sup>48</sup> There is much evidence to support Fuller’s own comment on his subject, ‘Christ crucified was his...theme, from first to last.’<sup>49</sup>

Further theological emphases can be discerned in the lines of ‘On the Scriptures’. Pearce’s essential Calvinism is hinted at by the emphasis on God’s sovereignty: God put *his* ‘plan’ of salvation into effect; salvation was all dependent on God’s grace. If his biblicism and crucicentrism were typical of evangelicalism generally, Pearce here reveals himself to be a particular type of evangelical, a Calvinistic one.

His predecessor as pastor of Cannon Street left because he had embraced Wesleyan convictions,<sup>50</sup> but this did not happen with Pearce. Elsewhere in the *Memoirs* there is material indicating his firm rejection of Arminianism,<sup>51</sup> although he could still appreciate and be influenced by the preaching of Arminians, for example the Wesleyan Methodist Thomas Coke (1747-1814).<sup>52</sup> Moreover, he always sought to distinguish between principles and personalities.<sup>53</sup> This was typical of the evangelical Calvinism which character-

<sup>46</sup> *Memoirs*, 129.

<sup>47</sup> ‘On the Scriptures’, *Memoirs*, 97. The spelling of ‘Savior’ is original to the British first edition.

<sup>48</sup> Letter ‘To a young man...’, n.d., *Memoirs*, 269.

<sup>49</sup> *Memoirs*, 247.

<sup>50</sup> Ivimey, *History of English Baptists*, Vol. IV, 542.

<sup>51</sup> *Memoirs*, 84-86.

<sup>52</sup> *Memoirs*, 108. For Coke, see *DEB*, Vol. I, 238-39.

<sup>53</sup> A trait that was also evident in his relationships with many Anglicans. See *Memoirs*, 253.

ised late eighteenth-century Particular Baptists.

Finally, the striking Christological statements in Pearce's stanzas can be noted. Christ came 'from above'; indeed, on the cross 'God' could be viewed. There 'God' was dying for 'man'. The language is explicit; for the author of 'On the Scriptures' there could be no ambiguity. In other poetry he emphasised the humanity of Christ, speaking of him as the 'Friend of sinful man' whose 'humble love' and commitment to do his 'duty' were examples to all.<sup>54</sup> But here it was his divinity which was boldly stated, and this in the context of eighteenth-century debates concerning Christ's deity.

One of the effects of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment was a growth in Unitarianism, a doctrine which ravaged many English General Baptist congregations and influenced some Particular Baptists as well (for example, Robert Robinson [1735-90], the minister of St Andrew's Street Baptist in Cambridge, who became unorthodox on the Trinity later in life). True, Pearce was influenced by the 'enlightened' culture of his day,<sup>55</sup> and he was not immune to some brief doubts about the deity of Christ, confessing to a friend that he had been 'perplexed' about Christology for a short period which coincided with his reading of several Socinian authors, including Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), who between 1780 and 1791 was based in Birmingham.

But Fuller makes it clear his subject decisively rejected Priestley's ap-

proach.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, according to him, this short struggle led to Pearce holding even more 'firmly' to orthodox views of the person of Christ.<sup>57</sup> In an age when Unitarianism was culturally attractive, he remained wedded to an orthodox Christology and to Trinitarianism. Thus, the *Memoirs* contain much material illuminating the essential content of their subject's theology.

## V A Spiritual Theology

Yet the *Memoirs* reveal something further: Pearce's theology was not only 'orthodox' but deeply 'spiritual'; we might say that his was an approach which encompassed both 'head' and 'heart'. So, whilst his vision of doctrinal orthodoxy was essential to his spirituality, the truth had to be prayed and sung and lived. In his reading of Psalm 119 on the aforementioned fast day, he took care to pray slowly through the Psalm, meditating on particular verses. 'Often with holy admiration I paused and read, and thought, and prayed over the verse again', he declared.<sup>58</sup> This same commitment to reflect on truth so it became deeply embedded in his own experience is evident in 'On the Scriptures', with the appreciation of Christ's 'kindness' and the emotional exclamations, 'O boundless grace! O matchless love!' brought on by meditation on the atonement.<sup>59</sup>

Study and devotion were closely integrated in his approach to theology. In

<sup>54</sup> See the verses, 'Excitement to Early Duty: Or, The Lord's-day Morning', *Memoirs*, 96.

<sup>55</sup> On this, see Morden, *Fuller*, 190-91.

<sup>56</sup> *Memoirs*, 84-85.; cf. 247. Socinians rejected, amongst other things, the doctrine of the Trinity.

<sup>57</sup> *Memoirs*, 247.

<sup>58</sup> *Memoirs*, 129.

<sup>59</sup> 'On the Scriptures', *Memoirs*, 97.

a letter dated 19 August 1793 he wrote of the need for both more 'light' (i.e. truth) and 'heat' (meaning 'sincerity and ardour'). Whilst pursuing these twin goals himself he sought to commend them to others. In the letter he spoke also about his preaching to his people 'urging the necessity of *heart religion*'.<sup>60</sup>

Here was what evangelicals habitually called an 'experimental' faith. It was not enough to know about some aspect of doctrinal truth, important as that was. That truth had to be known and experienced in ways that fired the heart and shaped the inner and outer dimensions of Christian discipleship. This was a trait exemplified by Pearce as he appears in the pages of the *Memoirs*. For Fuller, his friend's 'religion was that of the heart'.<sup>61</sup>

The corporate dimensions of learning and devotion were important to Pearce. He was committed not only to 'secret', private prayer but also to family prayer.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, he engaged wholeheartedly in the corporate prayer meetings of his church. On 10 October 1794 he wrote,

Whilst at the prayer meeting tonight, I learned more of the meaning of some passages of Scripture than ever before. Suitable frames of soul are like good lights in which a painting appears to its full advantage. I had often meditated on Phil. iii. 7, 8. and Gal. vi. 14: but never *felt* crucifixion to the world, and dis-

esteem for all that it contains as at that time.<sup>63</sup>

A number of points can be made in respect of this entry from his diary. Firstly, here is further evidence of the importance to Pearce of 'experimental' religion: 'crucifixion to the world' was a truth, the importance of which he had known previously, but he had never 'felt' it in the way he did in this meeting. Secondly, prayerful meditation on the scriptures can be seen again, as was the case with his approach to Psalm 119. Thirdly, and perhaps most strikingly, corporate worship and prayer are the contexts in which a deeper learning is experienced. The meeting had got him into a 'suitable frame of soul', thus shedding 'light' on verses of scripture so they could be seen more clearly.

Pearce's theology then, was doctrinal, 'experimental' and applied. For him the ideal was for God's truth as revealed in Christ to penetrate deeply into heart and mind by the Holy Spirit. To miss this is to fail to understand the man; to grasp this takes us towards the heart of his spirituality.

## VI Outwardly focused

Already the emphasis on the application of scripture to the Christian life has been seen. Truth had to penetrate both mind and heart and then make a difference to the way life was lived. There were some in Pearce's congregation who were, as Fuller put it, 'infected' with an 'antinomian spirit'—they did not believe that Christians were called to obey the moral law. 'Sooth-

<sup>60</sup> Samuel Pearce Letter to William Summers, 19 August 1793, *Memoirs*, 88. Italics original.

<sup>61</sup> *Memoirs*, 242.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, *Memoirs*, 120.

<sup>63</sup> *Memoirs*, 120. Italics original.

ing doctrine was all they desired.' By contrast, Pearce exhorted his Christian hearers to press on in 'practical godliness'.<sup>64</sup> Antinomianism was a significant problem in eighteenth-century Particular Baptist life,<sup>65</sup> with antinomian preachers such as William Huntington (1745-1813) popular.<sup>66</sup> Yet this was a movement evangelicals in the Pearce / Fuller circle were determined to resist.

For Pearce, the Christian life had to be lived with a passion, and so a vital dimension of his 'practical godliness' was activity in the cause of Christ. On the day of prayer and fasting during which he meditated on Psalm 119, he also gave time to 'visiting the wretched, and relieving the needy'.<sup>67</sup> His activity here included a strong social element—'relieving the needy'—but evangelism was the overriding concern of the Pearce presented to us in the *Memoirs*. He engaged in vigorous evangelistic ministry at home and had a deep concern for such work overseas.

On 10 October 1794 he recorded: 'Enjoyed much freedom today in the family [i.e., family devotions]. Whilst noticing in prayer the state of the millions of heathen who know not God, I felt the aggregate value of their immortal souls with peculiar energy.'<sup>68</sup> Pearce threw himself into the work of the BMS and, as already noted, wanted to go overseas himself. In fact, a significant amount of space in the *Mem-*

*oirs* is taken up with letters relating to this and entries from a diary he kept as he waited for the decision of the rest of the BMS committee.<sup>69</sup>

The Cannon Street pastor believed the Great Commission (Mt 28.19-20) was binding on his own generation,<sup>70</sup> a view which was by no means universally held, and he wanted to play his part in fulfilling it.<sup>71</sup> Even when he was turned down by the BMS, he continued to give himself zealously to the cause; in fact, a central reason he was rejected was because he was so important to the promotion of the work of the Society at home.<sup>72</sup> Pearce's piety was an active piety.

At one point in the *Memoirs* Fuller made an important observation, declaring, 'Mr Pearce has been uniformly the spiritual and the active servant of Christ; but neither his spirituality nor his activity would have appeared in the manner they have, but for his engagements in the *introduction of the gospel among the heathen*.'<sup>73</sup> Note first of all that Fuller's understanding of 'spirituality' is different from the one I offered in the Introduction to this article. He appears to limit its meaning to 'spiritual exercises' such as prayer, fasting and meditative Bible reading, together with one's 'heart' relationship with

<sup>64</sup> *Memoirs*, 86-87.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, the comments of Ryland, Fuller, 6.

<sup>66</sup> *Memoirs*, 248. For Huntington, see *DEB*, Vol. II, 586-67.

<sup>67</sup> *Memoirs*, 129.

<sup>68</sup> *Memoirs*, 120.

<sup>69</sup> *Memoirs*, ch. 2, 98-141. Fuller's comments are interspersed with these.

<sup>70</sup> *Memoirs*, 122; 124.

<sup>71</sup> See Ronald Davies, 'The Great Commission from Christ to Carey', *Evangel* 14.2 (1996), pp. 46-49.

<sup>72</sup> *Memoirs*, 103; 114.

<sup>73</sup> *Memoirs*, 98. Fuller and Pearce's use of the term 'heathen' can sound pejorative, but it was deployed simply to denote someone who was 'without Christ'.

God: hence the distinction between 'spirituality' and 'activity' which is one I am reluctant to make.

Having established this difference in meaning, Fuller's comments about Pearce can be analysed. I believe they are astute. Firstly, he recognises that both 'spirituality' (as he understands it) and 'activity' were crucial to Pearce. Secondly, he sees both Pearce's 'spirituality' and 'activity' have been decisively shaped by the context of the foundation and development of the BMS, specifically by his own 'engagements' in this work. His was a missional piety. Mission was the outworking of his prayer and devotion but it was also the essential context which shaped that devotion.

In fact, the broader but still focused understanding of spirituality I am working with fits Pearce very well. Even as he endured the illness that would eventually claim his life he would say, 'My soul pants for usefulness more extensive than ever: I long to be an apostle to the world!'<sup>74</sup> To the very last he was expressing an evangelical desire to be active in the pursuit of conversions. This was a crucial dimension of his 'practical godliness'.

If we want to understand Pearce's conception of the spiritual life we need to see him not only in private prayer but as he solicits funding for the BMS, preaches for conversions and gives himself in a whole range of gospel activity. The Pearce that Fuller commended in the pages of his *Memoir* was a man of prayer *and* action, with the two dimensions of discipleship informing and shaping each other. Indeed,

in Fuller's view, 'There have been few men in whom has been united a greater portion of the contemplative and active.'<sup>75</sup> Here was one of the central reasons he wanted to commend the example of Samuel Pearce to others.

## VII Conclusion

Pearce was regarded as having exemplified the spirituality—the practical godliness—which represented evangelical Particular Baptist life at its best. This spirituality was evangelical, with a strong focus on conversion, the Bible and the message of the cross. It was also deeply felt with an emphasis on both personal and corporate devotion. And, perhaps above all, it was active, both moulding and being moulded by missional concerns.

The same 1815 volume of *The Baptist Magazine* in which the review of missionary correspondence appeared also included much material on Andrew Fuller, who died in the May of that year. Fuller's death, coming right at the end of the so-called long eighteenth century, represented a watershed moment in English Particular Baptist life. Leadership of the churches at home and of the BMS was passing to a new generation.

For a whole host of complex factors the evangelical Calvinism typified by Pearce and Fuller fell out of vogue in Baptist life as the nineteenth century progressed (although it enjoyed a significant resurgence in the person of C.H. Spurgeon [1834-92], albeit in a slightly different form). Fuller's *Memoirs* of his friend provide a snapshot

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74 *Memoirs*, 255.

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75 *Memoirs*, 245.

of the spirituality which both helped shape a period of hugely significant missional activity and was in turn shaped by it. It was a spirituality embedded in a particular time and con-

text. And yet there are broad principles here which have the potential to enrich those seeking to pursue 'practical godliness' today.

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# A Theology of Institutions: A Survey of Global Evangelical Voices

Gregg A. Okesson

I FIRST RECALL encountering institutions when I was living in a small village in Tanzania. I had of course experienced them before, countless times during my life. But I had never really stopped to consider them. Institutions were a part of the world: a given that I merely accepted. They were a part of the public realm: the 'world' with all its ambiguous connotations. Nothing in my theological education prepared me for engaging institutions in that village. At the time, I possessed advanced degrees in biblical studies and intercultural studies, prepared (or so I thought) to face 'culture' with orthodoxy and acuity. But here I was thinking about institutions for what seemed the first time.

The institutions we faced during those years were small, parochial, yet intricately connected to larger structures in the region with deep, tangled, fibrous roots stretching in every direction. All my efforts to share the gospel and/or witness to people through holistic development projects encountered heavily reified social norms of 'health', 'economics', and 'politics', fed

by an ever flowing stream of religious sources. I experienced institutions in the form of local leaders, supported by clans. I met them also in visible structures such as clinics, schools, and political parties. But most significantly I felt them. The institutions we bumped up against represented a kind of invisible power in the community.

Christians have long struggled with what to do with institutions in society, evangelicals no less so. For some, any such involvement smacks of Christendom or neo-colonialism. For others western Christianity's historic separation of public and private has not only left an empirical divide between the Church and State (and/or with other structures in society), but perhaps more significantly, nurtured a kind of 'social imaginary' that lends institutions the perception of power, and dirty power at that.<sup>1</sup> What is more, Chris-

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor defines 'social imaginary' as 'the ways in which they [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally

tian attempts to take back power and/or create rival structures have often been misguided, adding layers to the implicit impression that institutions such as politics (or economics) stand impervious to the gospel. The subject becomes more complicated if we look at how sin reifies in institutional forms, to create what biblical writers refer to as ‘powers.’

In this paper, I will examine the theology of institutions through the lenses of John Wesley, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Howard Yoder, and conclude with the work of a few global scholars such as Emmanuel Katongole, Vinoth Ramachandra and Andrew Walls. I argue that evangelicals do indeed have theological resources for engaging institutions, but need to keep nurturing these further if we are going to participate in the reconciliation of all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:10).

## I Understanding Institutions: Different Maps of the Cosmos

One of the first things that alerted me to the need to engage institutions in Tanzania was encountering a different map of the cosmos. In the West, we often operate with the *perception* of distance between a person and an institution, although the actual distance tends to be more imagined than real. But in the village, the institutions we faced seemed to morph into human identity. This was the case for things

like ethnicity, religion, but no less politics, economics and agriculture. Whenever I met people, I also came face-to-face with the institution behind them.

This is to argue that institutions operate according to certain cultural givens. For western societies this tends to follow strict lines, distinguishing a person from the larger social entity along with equally clear markers between religion and public life. My experience in Tanzania, however, presented a different case altogether. Not only was the perceived distance between the person and institution completely different, but in most cases religion provided the rationale and warrant for the institution’s very existence.<sup>2</sup>

The mention of religion introduces a key distinction in how societies map institutions. In the West, the Enlightenment project reshuffled the deck with regard to how societies look at cosmological issues. The public realm became associated with the scientific method while religion became relegated to the private domain and thought of in terms of ‘personal belief’. This bifurcation enlarged the former, while it diminished the latter.

One of the results of this heritage was the prevalence of a ‘secular imaginary’ within western societies where institutions (for the sake of this discussion) became largely viewed as empirical realities, ‘Or put another way, people understand what markets

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met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations’ (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* [Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007], 171).

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this see W. Arens and Ivan Karp (ed.), *Creativity of Power: Cosmology and Action in African Societies* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); or Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (London: Hurst, 2004).

are by means of a social imaginary in which the relevant explanations of their operations are all this-worldly.<sup>3</sup> Craig Calhoun explains that this 'secular imaginary' was not only the default position of secularists, but even people who operate according to religious beliefs accepted this to be the case.<sup>4</sup> Charles Taylor's monumental work, *A Secular Age*, shows how people in western societies think of themselves and the world according to 'the immanent frame' or this-worldly ways, without respect to religious beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

Calhoun argues that the secular, or *saeculum*, from its Greek and Latin use, was not meant to contrast with sacred, but with eternity: 'It was temporary, a time of waiting, not simply years stretching infinitely into the future.'<sup>6</sup> However, despite the legitimacy of the secular realm for all societies, and notwithstanding the vitality of religion all around the world, the western heritage continues to feed an imaginary theory that life revolves around the secular. Institutions get interpreted through such lenses.

Other cultures around the world do not suffer the same problem. In Africa, as in places in Asia and Latin America, one might argue quite the opposite, where a 'sacred imaginary' operates. People look at the secular realm through the lenses of religion, or as Ellis and Haar remark: 'it is largely through religious ideas that Africans

think about the world today, and that religious ideas provide them with a means of becoming social and political actors'.<sup>7</sup> Andrew Walls explains that Africans operate on a fundamentally different map of the universe, with traffic constantly moving back and forth across spiritual and material divides.<sup>8</sup>

This does not mean that religion controls institutions. Perhaps Harri Englund says it best:

The relationship between Christianity and public culture in Africa is not so much an instance of religion determining some people's approach to apparently secular institutions as an invitation to rethink the manner in which influential academic and popular theories, with the secularization thesis *and its inversions* at the helm, have partitioned society into subsystems.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, the phrases, 'secular imaginary' and 'sacred imaginary' at once foreground the importance of secular and sacred for different societies without running the risk of binary speech and making the mistake of suggesting that such cultures are somehow intrinsically secular or sacred. The word 'imaginary' focuses upon perception, or deep underlying mythic beliefs. People from these societies do indeed map the cosmos differently with regard to institutions, but more significantly they believe that religion either does or does

3 Craig Calhoun, 'Rethinking Secularism', *The Hedgehog Review* 12:3 (Fall 2010), 35–48: 37.

4 Calhoun, 'Rethinking', 38.

5 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007).

6 Calhoun, 'Rethinking', 38.

7 Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*, 2.

8 Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 122ff.

9 Harri Englund, 'Introduction', In Englund (ed.) *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), 19.

not underlie societal structures, often through symbolic imagery.

In the remainder of this article I will explore how different theologians have looked at institutions. In some cases, the resources will be more generally presented such as was the case with John Wesley, who, at times, was actively engaged in theological activity with a given institution (such as economics or the slave trade) but rarely in such direct language as we find later. In other instances, scholars more overtly mention institutions, such as with Bonhoeffer and Yoder who lived during unique epochs (ie Nazi regime and Cold War) where the subject of institutions became more pronounced.

At the end I include some voices from global scholars to show some of the emerging contributions from the global south (which is where the material regarding a 'sacred imaginary' and 'secular imaginary' just presented will be more fully developed).

## II Theological Reflections on Institutions

As intimated in my previous narrative, institutions represent a vital part of our world; however, theologians have often struggled to know what to do with them. There are many reasons for this, whether because of Christianity's long history of collusion with institutions in society (Christendom, colonialism, etc); the paucity of theological resources for thinking of institutions in the context of creation or humanity; general uneasiness in regard to what to do about structural sin (whether because of western evangelicalism's bias toward the individual, or out of fear of being accused of Marxism or Liberation Theology); or because of the insti-

tutional nature of the church with all its internal fallibilities.

Whatever the reasons, institutions have not featured prominently in our theological heritage. With this admitted, I would like to suggest that we are not as disadvantaged as this implies. In what follows I would like to outline some foundational thoughts regarding a theology of institutions from key evangelical theologians with the hope of better positioning us for engagement with this vital part of our world.<sup>10</sup>

### III John Wesley's Trinitarian and 'Political' Image of God:

The difficulty of using Wesley for tackling the thorny issue of institutions becomes apparent within the contextual nature of his writings.<sup>11</sup> He was above all a child of his day. Both of his parents, with slight differences, supported the British monarchy. His theology was thus largely derived from the belief that all power comes from God and rests upon certain persons who then have the obligation to use it as a trust. As such, he was pro-monarchy, but with a healthy role for the constitution and Parliament (he advocated a more restricted, constitutional monarchy

<sup>10</sup> For much of what follows, the context for talking about institutions will be the political realm. Rather than seeing this as a weakness, I would have us extrapolate what we learn from these scholars for dealing with broader institutions in society.

<sup>11</sup> For this section, I will draw upon two books: Theodore R. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2001); and Gregory R. Coates, *Politics Strangely Warned: Political Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

than the divine-right royalists; hence, he was a moderate Tory, and certainly not a Jacobite).<sup>12</sup>

As such, Wesley was adamant in opposing the belief that power comes from the people, seen in his criticism of the American colonies, as outlined in his treatise, 'Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power'. Wesley further believed, perhaps pragmatically, that the preeminent goal of religious liberty and the spread of the gospel required sovereign political order. As his Methodist movement grew in size and scope, he received pressure to assuage any concerns about revolution against the government by assuring people of his allegiance to King and country. He did this with great energy. Thus Theodore Weber says of Wesley, '[His] political thinking and acting were of the eighteenth century, contextualized in contemporary British struggles over absolutism, constitutionalism, and liberalism, and the unity or division of the empire.'<sup>13</sup>

Contrary to other faith traditions, Weber argues that Methodists lack an adequate symbol for engaging in political discourse. Unlike Lutherans who talk about 'Two Kingdoms', or Anabaptists who might use the language of 'alternative communities',<sup>14</sup> those from a Wesleyan heritage often find themselves deficient in political language, which Weber defines as 'a form of communication that interprets political reality and sets expectations for political behavior'.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these reasons to dismiss Wesley as having anything substantive to contribute to a theology of institutions, we must also acknowledge that he represents a very important figure. Firstly, Wesley represents something of an enigma, providing a continual stream of seemingly paradoxical statements, where, for example, he cautions preachers not to speak about politics, but then freely addresses political realities; or where he supports the prevailing institutions of his day, but then harshly maligns social, economic, and political forces that supported slavery; or where he talks in unflinching terms about the gospel and evangelism, but then moves with equal resolve into the dire circumstances of those living in poverty, engaging social, economic, and political ills.<sup>16</sup>

What are we to make of these seemingly contradictory statements? Does Wesley speak out of both sides of his mouth or is there something deeper that allows him to move in such seemingly irreconcilable ways? What is more, after his death we find a wide range of Wesleyan streams contributing an incredible force for social change: through the abolition of slavery, fighting for the rights for women, countering the excesses of alcohol, leading to relief and development all around the world.<sup>17</sup> What is behind all of this?

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<sup>16</sup> See Christine Pohl, 'Practicing Hospitality in the face of "Complicated Wickedness"', *Wesley Theological Journal* 42:1 (2007), 7–31.

<sup>17</sup> See Donald W. Dayton and Douglas M. Strong, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage: A Tradition and Trajectory of Integrating Piety and Justice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).

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<sup>12</sup> Weber, *Politics*, 191ff.

<sup>13</sup> Weber, *Politics*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Weber, *Politics*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Weber, *Politics*, 17.

Perhaps some of it can be attributed to the contextual nature of Wesley's theology, where he resists inflexible categories and relies more on integration, synthesis, and imagination, drawing from such sources as the Eastern Church, Reformation, Pietism, while firmly rooted in Anglicanism.<sup>18</sup> But deeper down we find a basic trinitarian theology that flows from God to humanity through the image of God concept (in its moral, natural, and political dimensions).

It is with such a mind set that Weber offers what might be called a constructionist view of Wesley's theology that takes the pieces already there, but brings them together into a larger framework to provide a 'symbol' or 'political language' for engagement with societal institutions. While Weber articulates this in terms of Wesley's *ordo salutis*, or way of salvation (through prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace), it actually begins earlier, with God's nature.

For Wesley everything begins with God's character, where the love experienced in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit spills forth to create and redeem human nature. While Wesley's political views tended to be more top-down hierarchical than diffused egalitarian, his views of the Trinity lay the foundation for a more dynamic, participative, and grace-defining view of the world.<sup>19</sup> As such, rather than locating politics in creation, or theological anthropology, for Wesley it actually begins with God. Weber explains,

Government as disclosed in human nature as political image is what God does in ordering, preserving, and developing the creation.... It is the government at once of Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer; of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as unified divine personality.<sup>20</sup>

While such a view might be specifically located in Christ, since the work of salvation on the cross remains foundational for redeeming the world, it would also make room for God the loving Father and the Holy Spirit to bring efficacious salvation to the world.

From God's nature, Wesley moves comfortably to human nature, since the fundamental task of humans is to imitate God, which they accomplish through the redemption of the *imago dei*. Although Wesley spends most of his time on the *moral* image, Weber argues that we should equally consider the *natural* image (which might include how humans organize themselves socially) and *political* image (related to the issue of 'dominion' over the rest of creation, but might also include how humans govern themselves).<sup>21</sup>

Wesley argues that the moral image is completely lost in humanity and requires God's gift of grace to redeem it; however, the other two aspects of the image of God are only partially lost, marred by sin so they cannot adequately bear witness to God without the redemption of the moral image.<sup>22</sup> Fur-

<sup>18</sup> See Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Weber, *Politics*, 201, 231, 396f, 411.

<sup>20</sup> Weber, *Politics*, 396.

<sup>21</sup> See Wesley's notes on Genesis 1:26-28 where he intimates that the political image has more significance than just 'dominion' over animals. Weber, *Politics*, 403.

<sup>22</sup> In relation to the political image, Weber says, under the effects of sin, 'dominance is no

thermore, by locating all of this within the *ordo salutis*, it actually allows Wesleyan theology the possibility of talking about political or economic witness within a soteriological framework.

What are the implications of this for institutions? Firstly, institutions begin within the Godhead, laying a foundation that involves the Trinity. While some begin with anthropology, Wesley begins with God, which then allows him to move into the image of God concept, having already laid the framework for institutions within the Trinity. By beginning with God, he was thus able to take seriously social, economic, and political dimensions of life. Weber says,

Political institutions fashioned in the image of God must concern themselves in good conscience and with adequate resources—with education, the needs of the poor, public and private health, the arts, and other matters that enable the members of the community to fulfill their political vocation of imaging God.<sup>23</sup>

This should not come across as trying to orient all of life around politics, something James Davidson Hunter cautions already takes place in our overly politicized world.<sup>24</sup> Rather, it is an effort to interpret institutions from

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longer the dominion of responsible stewardship, one characterized by hostility between the human creature and the other animals.... The *constitution* of the political image has not been lost, but the *representational aspect* of imaging has been redirected.' (*Politics*, 395)

23 Weber, *Politics*, 406.

24 James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

God's nature. 'Political image keeps the focus of political institutions and their operators on God's political work, not themselves.'<sup>25</sup>

Second, Weber explains that such a view reorients institutions from a top-down hierarchical perspective to become a fundamental facet of human identity. All people image God and do it most faithfully together, which moves theological anthropology into its institutional forms.<sup>26</sup> Humanity can be comprehended only in its corporate sense (which is always how Wesley spoke about the political image) guarding it from the dangers of individual interests. Furthermore, the natural image and political image work together to help frame 'political institutions [as] a rational exercise of the *natural image* to fashion proper instruments for the fulfillment of the vocation of the *political image*'.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the political image makes it possible to talk about institutions in the context of salvation. This should not intimate that political engagement is somehow the same as evangelism, or social engagement as redemption. Rather, by drawing institutions into a larger soteriological framework, it is possible to first think theologically before we think politically, and thus apply the redemption of the moral image to the larger, social construct.<sup>28</sup>

What is more, because of the *ordo salutis*, it is possible to speak of the redemption of humans in terms of prevent grace (allowing us to see a meas-

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25 Weber, *Politics*, 407.

26 Weber, *Politics*, 399f.

27 Weber, *Politics*, 400.

28 Weber says something similar; see *Politics*, 417.

ure of good in all human societies), justifying grace (where salvation begins to redeem the moral image, making it possible for humans to imitate God), and finally, in sanctifying grace: conjecturing what holiness might look like in institutional form.

While Wesley never fully articulated these things to the extent expressed above, he did move aggressively into societal constructs (slavery, poverty, health-related concerns) with theological energies emanating from God's Trinitarian nature and the image of God concept.

#### IV Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Lordship of Jesus Christ

Like Wesley, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings need to be understood within his immediate context as a German Lutheran theologian/pastor living during the time of liberal theology and the Weimar and Nazi regimes. Each of these definitive experiences marks Bonhoeffer's thoughts with regard to institutions and structures. For this article, I will limit my scope to his unfinished book, *Ethics*,<sup>29</sup> where he most fully lays out his thoughts on politics and institutions.

Perhaps the most important piece for interpreting Bonhoeffer relates to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Contra liberal theologians and the oppressive Nazi regime, Bonhoeffer sees the entire world through Jesus Christ. He says we cannot understand the world apart from Christ, and we cannot talk

about Christ apart from the world. All of this is possible because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, his death, and his resurrection, by which God speaks a resounding 'yes' to the goodness of the world through the incarnation, a decisive 'no' to the sinful world via the cross, and a final 'yes' to the world by means of Christ's exalted humanity.

All of this is captured in his often repeated paraphrase of Colossians 1:15ff, where the apostle Paul says of Christ: 'all things were created by him and for him, and have their existence only in him'.<sup>30</sup> For Bonhoeffer, this is the very message of humanity and thus the underlying meaning of the world. Contra the liberal theologians of his day, he brings a Christology to the world that is divine, human, and comprehensive of everything. There is nothing, not even the devil that stands independent from Christ.

Before arriving at how Bonhoeffer understands institutions, it is first necessary to see some of the theological anthropology in his writings. He moves from Christ to humanity through the incarnation, saying such things as 'God becomes man and we have to recognize that God wishes us men, too, to be real men';<sup>31</sup> or 'To be conformed to the Incarnate—that is to be a real man'.<sup>32</sup> This sounds quite different from the divinization proposed by the Eastern Church. But its rationale can be found in the conviction that God defines humanity and not the other way around.

His Christology thus leads to theological anthropology, which, as we will

<sup>29</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Edited by Eberhard Bethge (New York: Collier Books, 1955).

<sup>30</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 296.

<sup>31</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 81.

see shortly, leads him into cosmological issues and eventually how he understands institutions. Hence it is no surprise that Bonhoeffer covers all of this terrain in *Ethics* before the end of the book where he takes up the issue of church and state.

How does anthropology move to cosmology? It is possible only through Christ. There are not two kingdoms, he argues, since that would introduce a reality independent of Christ, but one reality, and that is Christ.<sup>33</sup> He brings the two together while keeping them distinct from each other. Hence, he talks about the 'penultimate' and the 'ultimate' or the 'natural' and the 'supernatural'. While these might seem dichotomous, Bonhoeffer understands them coming together in Christ: 'Christ himself entered into the natural life, and it is only through the incarnation of Christ that the natural life becomes the penultimate which is directed towards the ultimate.'<sup>34</sup>

While he locates the basis for this in the incarnation, a fuller picture requires the cross and the resurrection. We need the totality of Christ to understand the totality of this world. 'In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other.'<sup>35</sup> Hence, he argues that there are not two kingdoms but one; not two different realities but one in Jesus Christ: 'The reality of Christ comprises the reality of the

world within itself;<sup>36</sup> or, 'The purpose and aim of the dominion of Christ is not to make the worldly order godly or to subordinate it to the Church but to set it free for true worldliness.'<sup>37</sup>

With this as backdrop, we now arrive at Bonhoeffer's theology of institutions. He understands institutions such as marriage, work, and government as authorized by God, which means they all point ahead to their ultimate consummation in Jesus Christ. But each of these (what he calls 'mandates') is not the same. He understands the first two, marriage and labour, as divinely ordained in creation, while the third (government) emanates from their foundation.

Work is not just work, but participation in what God has made. Marriage is not just for the procreation of children, but also their education. With these enlarged understandings of 'work' and 'marriage' he then shows how the two lead to the mandate of government. In a powerful statement about the role of government he says:

The divine mandate of government presupposes the divine mandates of labour and marriage. In the world which it rules, the governing authority finds already present the two mandates through which God the Creator exercises his creative power, and is therefore dependent on these. Government cannot itself produce life or values. It is not creative.<sup>38</sup>

This does not mean that government represents something inferior

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33 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 199–200. He says, 'If the secular becomes an independent realm by itself, then the fact of the world having been taken up into Christ is denied.'

34 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 145.

35 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 195.

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36 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 197.

37 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 328–9.

38 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 210.

for Bonhoeffer, only that he locates it coming out of the two creational mandates. Hence the state must never try to 'become the subject, the driving force' of labour, or marriage, since that would 'imperil gravely both the divine mandate of labour and its own divine mandate'.<sup>39</sup> Government arises from God and serves the purposes of Christ, which locates it in the world for the good of all. Christians do not know everything about the political realm, and thus must trust those with expertise to guide in these affairs, but the state will always seek to assert its own deification and the church must remind it of who orders the world.

How then is the church to witness to the state? It should never do so by trying to assume more territory in the world, since Christ has already claimed that for himself.<sup>40</sup> Christians bear witness to Christ through the 'yes' of the incarnation, while pointing toward the fullness of Christ who defines the world.

Bonhoeffer reminds Christians that they owe allegiance to the authorities, even to the point of paying taxes to an anti-Christian government.<sup>41</sup> Each person contributes to the larger whole through obedience and service. "The "world" is thus the sphere of concrete responsibility which is given to us in and through Jesus Christ."<sup>42</sup> But the

cross also reminds us of God's 'no' to idolatry and autonomy and every effort to see the realms as independent of Christ. The church testifies to government about the ultimate reality that Christ defines the entire world.

Her aim is not that government should pursue a Christian policy, enact Christian laws, etc., but that it should be true government in accordance with its own special task. Only the Church brings government to an understanding of itself.<sup>43</sup>

### V John Howard Yoder: The 'powers' and the 'polis'

In looking at John Howard Yoder, I will largely contain my thoughts to one book, *The Christian Witness to the State*, where he lays out his fundamental argument for how Christians should engage the political realm.<sup>44</sup> It has become rather common for scholars to criticize Anabaptists of Yoder's mould, calling them sectarian pietists and faulting them for opposing the political realm and obscuring witness to institutions. Clearly, Yoder has such persons in his mind when he wrote this book. With energy, aplomb, and perhaps a flash of hubris, Yoder counters those stereotypes and shows why, how, and on what terms, the pacifist tradition

<sup>39</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 210.

<sup>40</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 202. He says, 'She [the Church] asks for no more space than she needs for the purpose of serving the world by bearing witness to Jesus Christ and to the reconciliation of the world with God through Him'.

<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 343.

<sup>42</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 233.

<sup>43</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 347.

<sup>44</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1964). It has recently come to the attention of the public that Yoder victimized women during his life. I use Yoder in this article because of his insightfulness with regard to the subject material, but with sadness to, and awareness of, the troubling legacy he leaves behind with regard to how he treated women.

engages institutions such as the state.

He begins by talking about Christ's present reign over the 'powers', which in biblical language he roughly equates with 'the equivalent of the modern term structures'.<sup>45</sup> With Christ's reign, the gospel ('good news of the kingdom of God') has come near.

But what exactly is the gospel? He faults those who would so individualise the gospel as to treat it as something bartered or exchanged between persons, or those who would privatise it without taking into consideration its broader social (or even political) appeal. In Yoder's words,

It is not the case that a witness to an individual, calling him to conversion with reference to his own personal guilt and the direction of his life, is biblically speaking evangelism whereas the witness either to groups or to persons in social responsibility, calling on them to change their dispositions and do in their offices what God would have them do, is something else.<sup>46</sup>

The gospel is not only for individuals but also larger groups; the gospel is not just a spiritual thing, but holds deeper institutional implications.

How do Christians witness to the state? For Yoder there is only one way and that is through the church, which Yoder describes as 'a society' or 'polis' functioning as the 'aftertaste of God's loving triumph on the cross and foretaste of His ultimate loving triumph in His kingdom'.<sup>47</sup>

At the heart of Yoder's theology

therefore lies the church as an alternative community (or society) that lives out authentic Christian discipleship within her social, economic, and political identity, showing the world what love looks like within social arrangements. He understands the church as more than a moral rudder, but as the ultimate meaning of history: demonstrating to the world where history is headed. The state can define things only temporally, through coercion; the church defines things eternally, through love.

Unlike theologians from other traditions, Yoder does not see politics as intrinsic to the created order, but as a kind of this-worldly necessity arising from the ways sin distorts power within social relations. Here and elsewhere, he argues that the 'sword' cannot be part of God's original intent.<sup>48</sup> This also colours his reading of the state, as that part of society that wields 'force as ultimate authority',<sup>49</sup> revealing certain biases in his overall thinking. However, the state still has a purpose in the world, as an 'order of providence' in society.

Its function, according to Yoder, is to prevent evil and provide for a kind of 'ordering' of society, serving as a 'historical mediation between continued rebellion and the orderliness of the kingdom to come'.<sup>50</sup> He acknowledges the state will never live up to the standards of the Lordship of Christ. At best, the church can help the state better serve society 'when the political apparatus is held in check and where the

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<sup>45</sup> Yoder, *The Christian*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Yoder, *The Christian*, 23.

<sup>47</sup> Yoder, *The Christian*, 10.

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<sup>48</sup> *The Christian*, 34.

<sup>49</sup> *The Christian*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> *The Christian*, 33–4.

church is thereby most free to carry out her first task of evangelization and discipleship and her second task of witness to the social order'.<sup>51</sup>

This results in the tensions between the realms where he tries to articulate a specific kind of tension or dualism, not founded upon arbitrary delineations of church and state, but between faith and unbelief.<sup>52</sup> Yoder calls this a 'duality without dualism' to keep the distinction, but allowing for certain overlap that allows the church to nevertheless engage the state.<sup>53</sup> How well he manages these semantic gymnastics is up to the reader to discern, but his basic point is an important one: there are many different kinds of dualisms, not all noxious in character.

How then can the church engage the state? Foremost by her 'inner life', which is not some kind of privatised, separate reality but something lived openly before the world. Here Yoder envisions love rather than hate, egalitarian constructs rather than hierarchies, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ defining social, economic, and political relations.

Flowing from this he proceeds to describe the church's role to the state through a rich variety of images, including where she functions as a 'scaffolding service'<sup>54</sup> or 'moral osmosis'.<sup>55</sup> The church has historically contributed these roles with regard to alternative structures in society, such as with schools, hospitals, or relief agencies.

But the church can also speak directly and when it does so, she must speak with conviction, consistent with her own behaviour (for example, not speaking against the state where she herself has problems, as in the case of racial discrimination), and only when she has something to significant to say.<sup>56</sup> He sees these changes happening incrementally: 'The world can be challenged, at the most, on one point at a time, to take one step in the right direction, to approximate in a slightly greater degree the righteousness of love.'<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Yoder understands the state as made up of people. Witness to the state must be witness to people. 'We must not think of society or the state as some sort of vast and chaotic multitude, but rather as a great number of individuals each responsible for his own response to what he himself hears.'<sup>58</sup> Here we find his pastoral, evangelistic heart seen most clearly, along with continued vigilance not to allow the statesperson to occupy too important a role in history. Talking about the statesperson, he says:

He needs neither to be fawned over or to be feared as if he were truly strong, nor to be threatened as if he were an adversary, neither to be blamed for his failures nor to be praised for his noble intentions. He needs, like any man, to be respected, to be esteemed worthy of personal concern, to be invited to discover—whether within his office or beyond its bounds, he can know

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51 *The Christian*, 40.

52 *The Christian*, 29.

53 *The Christian*, 31.

54 *The Christian*, 11.

55 *The Christian*, 21.

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56 *The Christian*, 21–2.

57 *The Christian*, 39.

58 *The Christian*, 24.

only later—a way more excellent, more human, both for his subject and for himself.<sup>59</sup>

Ultimately any engagement with the state is an engagement with a person: a human person, someone for whom Christ died.

With Yoder, we find the centrality of the lordship of Jesus Christ, the instrument of church, the ethic of the kingdom (seen most clearly in the Sermon on the Mount), along with important distinctions between the church and state, yet never wavering in his commitment to engage the state, especially through the statesperson with the gospel: a gospel of love, peace, and hope that will someday define history.

## VI Global Voices: Emmanuel Katongole, Vinoth Ramachandra, Andrew Walls

I conclude this article by returning to the alternate map of the universe I first encountered in the village in Tanzania. Much of what I outlined through the previous theological discussion largely emanates from a western reading of the cosmos, where there exists a *perceived* distance between an individual and an institution, along with a ‘secular imaginary’ that colours how people think about institutions. However, this is not so for people in other parts of the world. In what follows, I will try to construct an alternative reading of institutions by drawing upon the work of Sri Lankan theologian Vinoth Ramachandra, Emmanuel Katongole, and the eminent scholar of ‘World Christi-

anity’, Andrew Walls.<sup>60</sup>

Andrew Walls talks readily, almost eagerly, about the different maps of the universe we find in places like Africa. As mentioned earlier, these maps provide a wide range of movement between material and spiritual realities. If the west struggles to move outside of its inherited dichotomies, then ‘the real strength of Christianity in Africa’, Walls argues, ‘may prove to be its capacity for independence of Enlightenment categories’.<sup>61</sup>

In order to tap these resources, the global south must deal with three important things: (1) its colonial past, especially in regard to how this past has influenced how Christians think about structures in society; (2) its spiritual legacy, and particularly the ‘powers’ which occupies such an important biblical if not cultural basis for engaging institutions; and (3) creativity, as people in the global south chart a course to craft new societal realities. Let me draw upon the works of these three authors to develop each of these in turn.

Much ink has been spilled about the horrific legacy colonialism left around the world. I won’t chronicle this sordid past, but use Katongole’s *The Sacrifice of Africa* as a launching pad to begin this discussion.<sup>62</sup> He starts with the story of Africa: a story largely writ-

<sup>60</sup> I regret not including a voice from Latin America. Admittedly, people from this part of the world have had more experience than many others in thoughtfully engaging sinful structures. I am, however, simply drawing upon the resources I am most familiar with.

<sup>61</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 122.

<sup>62</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> *The Christian*, 14–5.

ten by abuse, violence, war, and the devaluing of life, which Katongole explains has become the story of the continent. As an ethicist, he argues that: 'Christian social ethics must uncover the underlying stories of the key social institutions in Africa that affect both their performance and the types of characters they produce'.<sup>63</sup>

Retracing the story of western engagement with Africa will be painful, he contends, but we must nevertheless piece our way through the 'layers of memory',<sup>64</sup> through the official scripts, but no less the unofficial texts such as in poetry and song,<sup>65</sup> to see the lasting effect of modernity in Africa: especially how these have given rise to the present institutions. He says,

I began to see that ideals like 'democracy,' 'development,' 'civilization,' and 'progress' have become such tantalizing but misleading notions, forming the basic imagination canvas yet obscuring reality. They have become the lies that both African leaders and social ethicists desperately want to believe.<sup>66</sup>

The way forward, he argues, is by telling a different story. We counter the ignominious past of colonialism by living a new kind of future filled with hope; we stand before existing structures carved out by the western myth of the nation-state by positing new institutions emanating from the African imagination; and we oppose the 'secular imaginary' of the West with a 'sacred imaginary' that feasts upon

Africa's spiritual resources.

These new stories, Katongole maintains, do not take us away from theology but more fully into it, especially as the church embodies them before the world. He says, 'All the realities of the Christian tradition—the Scriptures, prayer, doctrine, worship, Baptism, the Eucharist, the sacraments—point to and reenact a compelling story that should claim the whole of our lives.'<sup>67</sup>

Second, as suggested by Katongole, people from the global south must lead in the creation of new institutions through spiritual resources. This is one area where Katongole, Walls, and Ramachandra all agree. But how does one counter a 'secular imaginary' with a 'sacred imaginary' without running the risk of spiritualizing everything and thus ending up with a Gnostic, vaporous form of Christianity that has nothing to do with economic or political realities? This is a concern for all three authors.

Katongole criticizes the ways Christians in Africa have used spiritual resources for countering the continent's ills, describing these in terms of the 'spiritual paradigm', 'pastoral paradigm', and 'justice paradigm' in which all three operate upon the fundamental belief that Christianity is a 'religion' and thus distinct from the social, material, economic or political realities.<sup>68</sup> By demarcating theological resources in contradistinction to institutions, Christians implicitly accept the force of structures upon their lives.

Ramachandra outlines a different

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63 Katongole, *The Sacrifice*, 3.

64 Katongole, *The Sacrifice*, 12.

65 Katongole, *The Sacrifice*, 13.

66 Katongole, *The Sacrifice*, 14.

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67 Katongole, *The Sacrifice*, 61–2.

68 Katongole, *The Sacrifice*, 33–41.

danger.<sup>69</sup> He sees the 'sacred' as a potential threat, in which it adheres to a particular structural reality and essentially 'sacralises' it. We see this in the ways religious leaders sanction particular political or economic ideologies; we see it also when political leaders use religious language. In the face of these predilections, Ramachandra advances the value of the secular, arguing even for a wide variety of 'contextual secularisms'.

Of course, Ramachandra's view of the 'secular' assumes a different character from the kinds seen in the west, where he grounds it in creation, humanity, and the person of Christ. Upon such a foundation, he moves readily into social, political, and economic facets of life, saying: 'Ultimately, "development" is not about economic growth, but the empowerment of all people so that their created gifts and capacities can flourish for the well-being of the whole society.'<sup>70</sup> And later: 'The theologian's task is to enable the Church to respond Christianly to the world it indwells.'<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps Ramachandra envisions something like de-sacralisation to take place in order to re-sacralise life, but in a way that takes seriously its secular worth. His project learns from the West, but appropriates the gifts found within the global south for a richer, fuller engagement with institutions of life.

Moving toward the future, societies

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69 Vinoth Ramachandra, 'Learning from Modern European Secularism: A View from the Third World Church', *European Journal of Theology* 12:1 (2003), 35–48.

70 Ramachandra, 'Learning', 39.

71 Ramachandra, 'Learning', 39.

in the global south need all the theological resources found within Scriptures to tell a different story; they require all the resources of their 'sacred imaginary' to guide them into life; and they need the full scope of imaginative energies to craft new institutions for the good of all, but especially those who daily feel the sting of poverty. To do so, Andrew Walls draws upon the biblical language of 'powers' to suggest that Africans need to move spiritually and materially into such realms as 'markets', 'governments', 'suprastate organizations', but no less 'ethnicity and nationality'.<sup>72</sup> He explains what this might mean for African Christianity:

Our existing theologies of church and state were carved out of the experience of Western Christendom, and were never meant to deal with anything as complicated as the networks of political and economic structures that will characterize the twenty-first century. I suspect there will be a special responsibility lying upon African theologians for constructing the new theologies of political and economic realm we need.<sup>73</sup>

To move in this direction, we need the full resources of theology, but no less the full resources of the Body of Christ around the world.

## VII Conclusions:

Where does this leave us? As I have shown, evangelicals both struggle to develop theologies of institutions, while, at the same time, possess a

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72 Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 112–3.

73 Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 113.

wealth of resources from which to engage this important facet of life. I have highlighted Wesley's trinitarian foundation and the way it moves into the natural, moral, and political facets of the image of God. We looked at how Bonhoeffer understands institutions through the Lordship of Jesus Christ, taking us by the hand into all of life, but no less the secular realm. In Yoder, we see the value of the church as a *polis*, or alternative community for witnessing to the public realm.

From the global south, we highlighted the need to tell a different story from the prevailing narratives of modernity, but one where this new story does not necessarily involve the rejection of modernity, but its renewal, especially through a more integrated understanding of spiritual and material realms. For some, any mention of a new form of modernity smacks of neo-colonialism, or a return to a failed project. But as Ramachandra points out, modernity arose from the wells of the Judeo-Christian heritage with its implicit groundings upon human rights, equality, order, and freedom.

What might institutions look like if Christians returned to these theological moorings as they engage the public realm, but no less the institutions and structures of society? This is Ramachandra's question as well.

No one, whether Christian or non-Christian, who cares about such human emancipation can rejoice in the 'end of modernity' chorus emanating from certain quarters of the Western world. But we also stand in great need of discernment lest we identify the 'spirit of the age' with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who mediates the reality of the risen Lord in the midst of historical change and uncertainty. If, indeed modernity is the prodigal son of the Christian narrative, then what would the return of the prodigal—the 'recapitulation' (*apokata-lassein*, Eph 1:10) of modern society in Christ—involve?<sup>74</sup>

As evangelicals, we have an abundance of theological resources to engage the structures of modernity. We do so not by rejecting them, or by colluding with them. We say 'yes' to institutions through the Trinity, creation, and the incarnation of Jesus Christ, while we say 'no' to their ideologies, especially as they twist and contort under the influence of sin. And by saying 'yes' and 'no' we find them ever open to the lordship of Jesus Christ and the flourishing of God's intents for the world.

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74 Ramachandra, *Learning*, 39.

# The Christian Claim for Universal Human Rights in Relation to the Natural Moral Law

A comparison and contrast of the thought of  
Božena Komárková and Thomas K. Johnson

Pavel Hošek

Freedom of religion is generally considered to be one of the basic 'universal human rights'. Since the human rights discourse has become widely accepted and influential in the contemporary world, Christians engaged in defending their own or other peoples' freedom of religion have to think through the relation between Christianity and universal human rights, and, in particular, they have to decide whether they should use the worldwide consensus concerning human rights and support their claim for religious freedom in public debates by referring to generally acknowledged and accepted sets of universal human rights, including the right for freedom of religion. In this article, I want to present and compare two alternative ways of substantiating the Christian claim for universal human rights and freedom of religion in relation to the notion of natural moral law.

## I Christianity and Human Rights

The relation between Christian theology and the idea of universal human rights is very complex, both historically and conceptually.<sup>1</sup> In the contemporary world, many Christian organizations support and defend the rights of people who suffer from human rights violations, such as denying or limiting freedom of religion, whether the people in view are fellow Christians or adherents of other faiths. On the other hand, many Christian churches and individual theologians have opposed the concept of universal human rights, including freedom of religion, as theologically wrong and unacceptable.

Moreover, in countries with a strong

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<sup>1</sup> For a general summary of issues involved, see William Brackney, *Human Rights and the World's Major Religions. The Christian Tradition* (Praeger Perspectives, London, 2005).

coalition between the majority church and the political establishment, the rights of some groups and individuals (especially freedom of religion) have been denied, and in some countries this continues today. Some human rights activists actually see religion (Christian or any other) primarily as a problem—as a source of justification for those who legitimize their abuse of power and their violations of human rights. Some of these activists also suggest that the greatest enemy of religious freedom is in fact—religion. Yet, at the same time, many other human rights activists suggest that if we give up on a religious, theological foundation and justification of human rights, including freedom of religion, we are weakening our claim for their universal validity and applicability.<sup>2</sup>

This is why many Christian theologians emphasize theological and spiritual values that have played an essential role in identifying, defining, and shaping human rights in European and American history. But there is one very important disagreement among Christian thinkers, who emphasize the specifically Judeo-Christian origin of the concept of universal human rights, including freedom of religion.

Some of them refer just to the Bible (and its understanding of God and

humanity) to substantiate their claim for universal validity of human rights and refuse to support their argument by any reference to a universally recognizable natural law of morality. Others believe that to make a Christian claim for universal human rights (and the corresponding claim for religious freedom) plausible, even for those who do not share Christian faith, a reference to some kind of universally human basis of morality, such as the Stoic notion of ‘natural law’, is legitimate and, in fact, necessary.

In this article I am going to present and compare these two conflicting views, the first represented by the Czech Christian human rights activist and defender of religious freedom, Božena Komárková (1903-1997), the second represented by the American Reformed theologian, Thomas K. Johnson.

## II Božena Komárková: the Christian Origin of Human Rights

In many of her writings Božena Komárková emphasized what she considers as unquestionable evidence for the biblical and theological roots of human rights and the notion of religious freedom.<sup>3</sup> She always claimed that the whole concept of human rights and religious freedom was inspired by Judeo-

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Max Stackhouse, ‘Human Rights and Public Theology’, in Carrie Gustafson and Peter Juviler (eds.), *Religion and Human Rights. Competing Claims?* (M. E. Sharpe, New York, 1999), 4f., and also Max Stackhouse, ‘Sources and Prospects for Human Rights Ideas. A Christian Perspective’, in Jindřich Halama (ed), *The Idea of Human Rights: Traditions and Presence* (ETF UK, Praha, 2003), 194 and 199.

<sup>3</sup> See especially her book, *Lidská práva* (Eman, Heršpice, 1997) and also *Původ a význam lidských práv*, (SPN Praha, 1990) and an English translation of her papers related to human rights, Komárková, *Human Rights and the Rise of the Secular Age* (Eman, Heršpice, 1991) (to be referred to below as HRRSA).

Christian biblical and theological values and teachings, and, in particular, by the Calvinist stream of the Reformation in its Anglo-Saxon form.<sup>4</sup>

She claimed also that this was not a matter of historical coincidence, in other words, that this theological origin of human rights and the concept of religious freedom has to be acknowledged and emphasized, because if it is forgotten, denied, or viewed as coincidental and unnecessary, the whole concept of universal human rights with their unconditional validity will lose its essential foundation and may not survive.<sup>5</sup> Human rights without substantiation in theology, i.e., without reference to the transcendent guarantee of human dignity, are an extremely vulnerable concept.<sup>6</sup>

Human rights and religious freedom must be viewed in the context of God's covenantal relationship with humanity. They must be understood in relation to God's call to freedom, responsibility, and obedience.<sup>7</sup> Only if we anchor human rights in God's will for humankind can we insist on their universal and unconditional validity.<sup>8</sup> Human rights are not created or issued by the state. They make sense only with reference

to God who revealed himself to humanity in Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Even though the logic of Komárková's argument seems sound and convincing, she and those Christians who make this claim have to face a serious difficulty. In the contemporary context of cultural and religious pluralism, insisting on a very close tie between human rights and a particular type of Christian theology may make it quite difficult to convince others of their universal applicability—especially those outside the Christian community.<sup>10</sup>

In many of her articles, Komárková argues again and again that there is sufficient historical evidence that human rights as they appeared in Europe and America have been derived from particular spiritual values of the Judeo-Christian tradition, more precisely, from its Anglo-Saxon Calvinist Protestant form. She claims again and again that without these religious values, human rights cannot stand in the long-term perspective. She insists that if human rights and the corresponding notion of religious freedom are viewed simply as a legal matter, as a consensus of a particular society, without reference to any guarantee transcending all human institutions and societies, they can be changed and abolished by political authorities just as they were accepted.

But how does such an understanding of human rights relate to Hindus, Buddhists, or Muslims? Can one say something significant about human

4 Cf. Pavel Keřkovský, Introduction, *Human Rights and the Rise of the Secular Age*, 15; see also Komárková, 'Human Rights and Christianity', in HRRSA, 69, 72, 82.

5 Komárková, 'Are Christian Institutions Possible?' in HRRSA, 42, and also Three Observations, in HRRSA, 180.

6 Komárková, 'The Reformation and the Modern State', in HRRSA, 129.

7 Komárková, 'Human Rights and Christianity', in HRRSA, 70.

8 Komárková, 'Human Rights and Christianity', in HRRSA, 99.

9 Komárková, 'Are Christian Institutions Possible?' in HRRSA, 42.

10 Cf. Stackhouse, 'Sources and Prospects for Human Rights Ideas. A Christian Perspective', 183ff.

rights in societies without such Judeo-Christian historical roots?

There is no question that Komárková's argument has actually been quite effective and fully intelligible in her central European context, because of its strong Judeo-Christian cultural heritage. In fact, she was a courageous human rights activist and defender of religious freedom in Communist Czechoslovakia, challenging the totalitarian government of this country for human rights violations and severe limitations of religious freedom, and she was persecuted by the Communist government on that account.<sup>11</sup>

Her arguments were meaningful for her central European listeners and readers, both Christian and secular. After all, she was speaking to an audience that shared the history she was referring to; the history leading up to formulating the human rights declarations and charters defending religious freedom was in a significant sense their history, which was true even of those who did not share her Christian faith. All her readers knew what she meant by the word 'human' in the phrase 'human rights', and all her readers basically agreed with that concept of humanity. But what if she spoke to Buddhists or Hindus? What if she spoke to Muslims? How would her insistence on the Christian theological origin of human rights change her claim for their universal validity in a religiously plural context, i.e., in today's social and political reality in both Europe and America, not to mention other parts of the world?

<sup>11</sup> See Keřkovský, Introduction, *Human Rights and the Rise of the Secular Age*, 7ff.

Komárková is obviously right in claiming that the universal validity and unconditional applicability of human rights is better substantiated if it is anchored in theology, i.e., in God's universal will for humankind, than if it is just based on human governments and their unpredictable decisions.<sup>12</sup> Yet, at the same time, the way Komárková links human rights and their origin with a specific theological tradition (Anglo-Saxon Calvinist Protestantism) makes it very difficult to persuade non-Europeans and non-Christians of their universal applicability.

The fact that human rights are derived from one particular tradition might seemingly limit their relevance for those who do not share the accepted religious values of that tradition or who were not raised in a cultural environment shaped by these values. Religious pluralism in the contemporary world is a serious challenge for any universal claim, especially if that universalist claim is derived from such particular theological presuppositions.

Historically speaking, there is no question that many important Judeo-Christian values have played a very significant role in the discussions leading to the formulation of the most important human rights declarations, such as the US Declaration of Independence in 1776, the French Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen in 1789 (very much influenced, in fact, by the American Declaration of Independence) and also the United Na-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also Thomas K. Johnson, 'Human Rights and Christian Ethics', in *Communio Viatorum*, III./2005, 329, see also his *Human Rights: A Christian Primer* (VKW, Bonn, 2008), 61f.

tions Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.<sup>13</sup>

But the more evidence we bring for the decisive Jewish-Christian influence on the rise and development of human rights discourse in western culture, the more we are faced with the problem of their universal validity and applicability. If human rights are intrinsically tied with a 'western', 'Euro-American', or 'Judeo-Christian' history and particularity, why should we expect them to be viewed as valid and binding for Buddhists or Hindus or Muslims? Why should Japanese or Chinese or Pakistani people feel obliged by a document based on Euro-American Christian theology?

### III Religious Pluralism and Different Understandings of Humanity

In trying to answer this question, we have to acknowledge the fact that in speaking about 'human' rights as a universal concept, we are actually using the adjective 'human' in a normative sense, which implies a particular sort of anthropology (i.e., a particular view of what the word 'human' means). And here we face a problem, which does not seem to be sufficiently addressed in Komárková's proposal. The problem is that each cultural and religious tradition has its own particular view of humanity, i.e., its own normative anthropology, based on its sacred texts.

Let us look briefly at the Muslim,

Hindu, and Buddhist understandings of humanity to see some of the most obvious similarities and differences in comparison with the Judeo-Christian anthropology, which has had, as we have seen, a strong impact on the rise and development of universal human rights discourse in western culture.

#### 1. Islam

In the Islamic tradition, the general understanding of human nature is similar to that in Jewish and Christian anthropology. Yet in spite of that similarity, the Islamic view of humanity is unique. In Islamic sacred texts and their later normative interpretations, we find a very specific understanding of human beings: every man and woman is born as a 'Muslim', i.e., with an innate inclination to be submitted to and obedient to the Creator. Each and every human being should therefore live in accordance with the revealed law of human behaviour (*shariah*). Human dignity, sanctity of human life and equality of all human beings, gender roles, family structures, etc., are all based on these theological presuppositions.<sup>14</sup>

In Islamic sacred texts (Qu'ran and *sunna*), we find many principles and ideas similar to those underlying the 1948 UN Declaration of human rights.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Roger Garaudy, 'Human Rights in Islam: Foundation, Tradition, Violation', in Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (eds.), *The Ethics of World Religions and Human Rights* (SCM Press, London, 1990), 46ff. Cf. also T. Johnson, *The Twofold Work of God in the World*, *MBS Text 102* (2008), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Riffat Hassan, 'On Human Rights and the Quranic Perspective', in Arlene Swidler (ed.), *Human Rights in Religious Traditions* (The Pilgrim Press, New York, 1982), 51ff.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Stackhouse, 'Sources and Prospects for Human Rights Ideas. A Christian Perspective', 186f.; see also Johnson, 'Human Rights and Christian Ethics', 326.

At the same time, Islamic interpretations of Qu'ran and *sunna* are in certain areas in quite obvious tension with how human rights are understood in western countries,<sup>16</sup> especially in areas such as the social role of women,<sup>17</sup> the status and treatment of non-Muslims, religious freedom, etc. The fact that Muslims have serious objections to the UN Declaration of human rights has actually led some of their leaders to formulating and publishing specifically Islamic declarations of human rights in accordance with Muslim faith and tradition.<sup>18</sup>

The Islamic view of humanity, as we have seen, is therefore not exactly the same as the implicit anthropology

of the 1948 UN Declaration.<sup>19</sup> And, whereas Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have (in spite of significant differences) many things in common, since all three are monotheistic religions and all three refer to Abraham and the ancient Israelite patriarchs as their forefathers, in the case of the two most well-known religious traditions which have their roots in India, Hinduism and Buddhism, we encounter a completely different framework.

## 2. Hinduism

In the Hindu tradition, which is in itself very diverse and multifarious, a person is a (potentially) divine being, temporarily imprisoned in this material world, a being whose individual destiny is determined by *karma*. The quality of one's *karma* depends on how that person has lived in previous lives. The goal of human existence is to achieve ultimate liberation from these conditions, i.e., to achieve ultimate union with the divine Ground of all reality, the union of individual *atman* with divine *Brahma*, which is often illustrated as the waters of a river reaching its mouth and dissolving themselves in the waters of the ocean.

The human individual, i.e., the 'subject' of human rights, is viewed as a temporary entity determined by the current state of his or her *karma*, and is understood as an intermediate stage in spiritual development, a stage to be overcome and left behind. The divine

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See also R.A. Jullundhri, 'Human Rights and Islam', in Alan Falconer (ed.), *Understanding Human Rights. An Interdisciplinary and Interfaith Study* (Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin, 1980), 34ff.

**16** Cf. Abdullah Ahmed An-Naim, 'Quran, Sharia and Human Rights: Foundations, Deficiencies and Prospects', in H. Küng and J. Moltmann (eds.), *The Ethics of World Religions and Human Rights*, 61ff. For a recent analysis of this problem, see Christine Schirmmayer, 'Islamic Human Rights Declarations and Their Critics', in *International Journal for Religious Freedom* (4/2011), 37ff.

**17** Cf. Nikki Keddie, 'The Rights of Women in Contemporary Islam', in Leroy Rouser (ed.), *Human Rights and the World's Religions* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1988), 76ff. See also Miriam Cooke, Bruce Lawrence, 'Muslim Women between Human Rights and Islamic Norms', in Irene Bloom, J. Paul Martin, Wayne Proudfoot (eds.), *Religious Diversity and Human Rights* (Columbia UP, New York, 1996), 313ff.

**18** Cf. especially *The Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights* (1981, Paris) and *The Declaration on Human Rights in Islam* (1990, Cairo).

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**19** For a general summary of issues involved, see Muddathir Abd Al-Rahim, *Human Rights and the World's Major Religions. The Islamic Tradition* (Praeger Perspectives, London, 2005).

ground of human beingness can be viewed as a foundation of a specifically Hindu understanding of human dignity, sanctity of human life, and value of each individual.<sup>20</sup> The Hindu tradition therefore contains elements supporting what in the West is called human rights.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, the sacred texts of Hinduism contain views that are in obvious tension with human rights as they are generally understood (the caste system, the social status of women, of untouchables, etc.).<sup>22</sup> This is naturally caused by the fact that the Hindu tradition has a very specific understanding of humanity (of what it means to be human), only partially compatible with the anthropology of the 1948 UN declaration.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Buddhism

The same is true about Buddhism. Its basic teaching about the human

condition, its main problem and the proposed solution for this problem, has very practical consequences. The individual self—as the ‘subject’ of human rights—actually ‘does not exist’. The empirical self is an illusion; it is a self-deception. And this self-deception, moreover, is one of the major obstacles and barriers on the way to spiritual liberation (reaching Nirvana). At the same time, all human beings (actually all sentient creatures) are, according to Buddhist ontology, mutually dependent and interconnected, and all of them are on their way to ultimate liberation from omnipresent suffering.

The most important Buddhist virtue is compassion (*karuna*)—compassion with all sentient and, therefore, suffering beings. This compassion is a powerful motivation for sacrificial care for others. Moreover, Buddha rejected the unjust Hindu stratification of society (caste system). It should not be surprising, therefore, that in Buddhist history we find many admirable examples of defending what we call today human rights: emancipation of women, care for the poor and for ill people, etc.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, Buddhist teaching has sometimes been interpreted to imply that outward conditions of human life actually do not matter. It is therefore not necessary to reform unjust social structures and fight against abuses of power and human rights

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**20** Cf. Kana Mitra, ‘Human Rights in Hinduism’, in A. Swidler (ed.), *Human Rights in Religious Traditions*, 77ff. See also Carrie Gustafson, ‘Gandhi’s Philosophy of *Satyagraha*: Cautionary Notes for the International Penal Lobby’, in C. Gustafson, P. Juviler (eds.), *Religion and Human Rights: Competing Claims?* 88ff.

**21** Cf. John Carman, ‘Duties and Rights in Hindu Society’, in L. Rouner L. (ed.), *Human Rights and the World’s Religions*, 113 ff; see also Joseph Elder, ‘Hindu Perspectives on the Individual and the Collectivity’, in I. Bloom, J. Martin, W. Proudfoot (eds.), *Religious Diversity and Human Rights*, 54ff.

**22** See especially the monograph Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism and Human Rights* (Oxford UP, Oxford, 2003).

**23** For a general summary of issues involved see Harold Coward, *Human Rights and the World’s Major Religions. The Hindu Tradition* (Praeger Perspectives, London, 2005).

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**24** Robert Thurman, ‘Human Rights and Human Responsibilities: Buddhist Views on Individualism and Altruism’, in I. Bloom, J. Martin, W. Proudfoot (eds.), *Religious Diversity and Human Rights*, 87ff. See also Taitetsu Unno, ‘Personal Rights and Contemporary Buddhism’, in L. Rouner (ed.), *Human Rights and the World’s Religions*, 129ff.

violations, because what is really important (the spiritual liberation of human beings) is actually independent of the outward circumstances of human existence.<sup>25</sup> In Buddhist history, this indifference toward social conditions has led to much passivity and to a lack of engagement in facing the structural evils in society.

Again, as was the case with Islam and Hinduism, we see in Buddhism a very specific anthropology, which has a very significant, yet not quite complete, overlap with the implicit understanding of humanity to be found in the 1948 UN Declaration and subsequent documents.<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, religious and cultural plurality is a serious challenge for the universal validity and applicability of human rights, especially if these rights are presented as anchored in a specifically Judeo-Christian understanding of humanity.

#### 4. Shared values

Many critics coming from non-European cultural and religious backgrounds naturally see human rights as formulated in the UN documents as culturally particular (Western, Euro-American, and Judeo-Christian), and they often criticize their implicit 'western indi-

vidualism' as a cultural value that cannot be translated and applied in non-European contexts shaped by different religious and cultural values.<sup>27</sup>

It seems obvious that if we as Christians want to make an effective public case for universal human rights and if we want to join forces with all people of good will, be they Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or secular, we have to look for a common language with those who do not share our Christian presuppositions. We have to search for a generally acceptable normative view of humanity, as a shared platform for communication and cooperation with people of other faiths or of no faith. And here I see a major problem in Komárková's proposal.

The key question in relation to Komárková's approach to human rights and their universal validity is the following: Should we as Christians, as we try to make a public claim for human rights and religious freedom, just witness, proclaim, and 'preach' our understanding of humanity, based on biblical texts, without any attempt to make it intelligible and plausible for those who do not share our faith? Or should we, in light of cultural and religious pluralism, try to identify and formulate transcultural, trans-contextual, universally acceptable norms of human behavior and criteria of humanity?

There is a danger, I think, that if we just insist on the essential tie between Christianity and human rights (which I think we should), without ever trying to show that they make good sense even without explicit reference to the

<sup>25</sup> See K. Inada, 'The Buddhist Perspective on Human Rights', in A. Swidler (ed.), *Human Rights in Religious Traditions*, 66ff, and also Sulak Sivaraksa, 'Human Rights in the Context of Global Problem-Solving: A Buddhist Perspective', in H. Küng and J. Moltmann (eds.), *The Ethics of World Religions and Human Rights*, 79ff.

<sup>26</sup> For a general summary of issues involved see Robert E. Florida, *Human Rights and the World's Major Religions. The Buddhist Tradition* (Praeger Perspectives, London, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Stackhouse, 'Sources and Prospects for Human Rights Ideas. A Christian Perspective', 183ff.

Bible, the claim for their universal validity will be seriously weakened, and we may actually end up leaving the victims of human rights violations in non-Christian societies in the hands of their oppressors.

These oppressors will naturally insist that if human rights and the corresponding notion of religious freedom are Christian, they apply only to Christians. Those who are in positions of power can always refer to all sorts of cultural and religious particularities of their society and thereby avoid any accountability for their exercise of injustice or for denying the religious freedom of their subjects.

It seems obvious that the contemporary world needs trans-cultural, publicly debatable, universally binding, normative principles of human behaviour and criteria of humanity, which would make sense for Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and even Atheists—in order to protect potential victims of injustice.<sup>28</sup> And in this particular respect, Komárková's view of human rights and their universal validity is deficient, I think, especially in comparison with an alternative view of a Christian approach to human rights as proposed by Thomas K. Johnson, to whose analysis I now turn.

#### IV Thomas K. Johnson: Human Rights and the Natural Moral Law

Thomas K. Johnson is an Anglo-Saxon Calvinist Protestant theologian, i.e., he belongs exactly to the tradition to

which Komárková refers in her analysis of the origin and essence of human rights. Yet his perspective is different. He agrees with Komárková in emphasizing the Christian origin of universal human rights discourse and a decisive influence of Christianity in its development. He also agrees with her that for Christians, human rights need to be anchored theologically, i.e., with reference to God as their transcendent guarantee.<sup>29</sup>

Yet Johnson disagrees with Komárková on one very important point, related to the basis on which we (as Christians) make public claim for the universal validity and applicability of human rights. For Johnson, it is very important for Christians to make an understandable public case for human rights without referring only to the Bible to substantiate their argument.<sup>30</sup> He is convinced that Christians have to formulate their view of human rights in a way that makes sense for the believers of other faiths as well as for nonbelievers. There is one tradition of Christian ethical discourse, as Johnson points out, which offers suitable conceptual tools for demonstrating universal relevance and applicability of Christian moral values outside of the Christian church, namely, natural law ethics.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, 'Human Rights and Christian Ethics', 326.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, chapters 1 and 5; see also 'Human Rights and Christian Ethics', 334, and *Biblical Principles in the Public Square*, *MBS Text 108*, 2008, 4, 17ff.

<sup>31</sup> See Johnson's monograph *Natural Law Ethics. An Evangelical Proposal*, VKW, Bonn, 2005. Cf. his 'The Twofold Work of God', 4.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Stackhouse, 'Sources and Prospects for Human Rights Ideas. A Christian Perspective', 192ff.

## 1. Natural Law Ethics

There has been much debate and misunderstanding concerning the question of whether and in what sense Christian ethics should use the notion of universal God-given natural moral law.<sup>32</sup> Whereas Roman Catholic theologians seem, by and large, quite comfortable with the notion of a God-given natural moral law, based on the doctrine of creation, many Protestant thinkers, including Božena Komárková, have argued strongly against basing Christian ethical claims on natural law, a concept they viewed as theologically questionable and actually alien to a 'biblical way of thinking'.<sup>33</sup>

Komárková claims also that natural law is an 'illusion', because each society has defined what is 'natural' very differently.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Komárková views the notion of natural law as typical of 'Roman Catholic scholasticism',<sup>35</sup>

as anchored in a questionable static metaphysical and cosmological framework,<sup>36</sup> and as basically incompatible with a biblical worldview and Protestant Christianity.<sup>37</sup>

For these theological reasons, Komárková is convinced that it is a serious mistake if Christians try to base their claim for universal human rights on natural law.<sup>38</sup> I think it can be demonstrated that Komárková's judgments concerning natural law are not quite justified or, in other words, that these judgments are justified only in relation to certain types of natural law reasoning, which is exactly what Johnson is demonstrating in his analysis of the relation of natural law and Christian ethics.

He shows quite convincingly that the sort of arguments Komárková and some other Protestant thinkers present against natural law apply only to a particular kind of natural law concept.<sup>39</sup> Natural law can be viewed as an abstract principle unrelated to God's activity or as an immanent law independent of God, or on the other hand, it can be anchored theologically in the framework of the dynamic relation between God and humanity, in the doctrine of creation and the unity of humankind under God's sovereign rule, and especially in relation to the classical theological notion of general revelation. In the latter case, there seems

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**32** Cf. the following recent literature on theological legitimacy of the concept of natural moral law: Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Robert C. Baker and Roland Cap Ehlke (eds.), *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*, (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011); and Jesse Covington, Bryan McGraw, and Micah Watson (eds.), *Natural Law and Evangelical Political Theory*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2012.)

**33** Komárková, 'Natural Law and Christianity', in HRRSA, 48.

**34** Komárková, 'Natural Law and Christianity', in HRRSA, 43, 45.

**35** Komárková, 'Natural Law and Christianity', in HRRSA, 41; see also her 'Human Rights and Christianity', in HRRSA, 70.

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**36** Komárková, 'Natural Law and Christianity', in HRRSA, 44.

**37** Komárková, 'Natural Law and Christianity', in HRRSA, 46.

**38** Komárková, 'Natural Law and Christianity', in HRRSA, 50.

**39** See Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, chapters 1 and 2.

to be no reason to reject this concept and thereby to weaken the public claim of universal applicability and validity of Christian moral values, especially those that underlie universal human rights and the corresponding notion of religious freedom.<sup>40</sup>

## 2. Two discourses

Someone might object that this theological understanding of natural moral law anchored in the Christian doctrine of creation and general revelation is open to the same sort of criticism as is Komárková's position: namely, that it is offering a particularist (i.e., biblical) foundation for a universalist claim, unintelligible for those outside the community of Christian faith. But we have to distinguish two different discourses with two different audiences (and two different sets of criteria). One is the internal debate among Christian theologians about the legitimate biblical and theological foundations of a particular notion (natural moral law in this case); the other is the public debate about human rights and religious freedom in which Christians participate together with people of other faiths and of no faith.

In the first debate, reference to creation and general revelation makes sense and is, in fact, necessary. In the second debate, criteria of intelligibility and validity are different. Instead of referring to the particular doctrines of Christian revelation, reference to em-

pirical evidence, common sense, generally accessible knowledge, and universally accepted values such as human dignity are to be used to support one's arguments.

In other words, if Christians want to make a convincing public claim for universal human rights and for the corresponding notion of religious freedom, it does not seem to be enough to refer just to the Bible, especially if we want to invite all people of good will (Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Atheists), not just fellow Christians, to join hands in fighting against human rights violations and in supporting religious freedom in the contemporary world.

I am convinced that the notion of natural law provides a meaningful conceptual framework for making an effective, understandable, and plausible public claim for universal human rights. This is a claim that, unlike some other Christian public claims in this area, cannot be dismissed by pointing to the fact that historically, it is derived from one particular sacred text of one particular faith and therefore does not seem to apply to people who base their lives on different sacred texts or on no sacred text at all.<sup>41</sup>

This claim is not weakened by the fact that in the internal Christian debate, Christian theologians have to base the notion of natural moral law on biblical doctrines of creation and general revelation. Why? Because the notion of natural moral law can be easily adapted by people of different cultural and religious backgrounds and can serve as a shared platform for communication, peaceful coexistence, and

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<sup>40</sup> See Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, chapter 5, see also 'Human Rights and Christian Ethics', 334, and also his 'Christ and Culture', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35/1 (2011) 14f.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, 88ff.

cooperation. And we need such a platform. And the fact that each religious and cultural tradition will have a different and tradition-specific substantiation of that platform does not make its functioning impossible.

### V Natural moral law and Christian public defence of human rights

The strength of natural law ethics is its reference to common sense, to generally accessible knowledge, to trans-cultural criteria of value and meaning, to observable general principles, as these can be supported by empirical research<sup>42</sup> and can also be found in all cultural and religious traditions,<sup>43</sup> in other words, its reference to what Christian theology calls general revelation. There are certain kinds of behaviour that are obviously incompatible with humanity—always and everywhere. And this fact should not be dismissed by referring to cultural differences.

Christian natural law ethics has the immense advantage that it can be argued for publicly, it can be supported by research and empirical evidence and defended in the public square, it can be formulated in universally understandable language, and therefore it cannot be silenced by referring to its Christian origin or bias.<sup>44</sup>

This is the reason why I find Božena Komarková's appeal to universal human rights vulnerable and Thomas

Johnson's argumentation more convincing. As Johnson points out, the Bible and the Reformers do, in fact, teach the doctrine of general revelation, i.e., an awareness of God and his will and his moral law, available at least to some degree to all people and at all times and places.<sup>45</sup> As Johnson reminds his readers to make this point clear, the prophets in ancient Israel do not teach the non-Israelite nations what is right and what is wrong (as if these nations did not know); they, in fact, presuppose that these nations know the difference but do not act accordingly.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, drawing on Max Weber's sociological and cultural analyses, Johnson points out that religion can, in fact, provide or inspire values that gain general acceptance and have far-reaching influence outside the religious community, and biblical religion can provide such influential values to public cultures *precisely when the biblical values correspond closely with God's general revelation of the moral law*. Christians should consciously use this sociologi-

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, 131ff., see also *Human Rights. A Christian Primer*, 47ff. and 'The Spirit of the Protestant Work Ethic and the World Economic Crisis', *MBS Text 137*, 2009, 8f., and 'The Twofold Work of God in the World,' 3ff., and 'The Protester, the Dissident, and the Christian,' *MBS Text 168*, 2012, 3f. Cf. also his 'Law and Gospel: The Hermeneutical/Homiletical Key to Reformation Theology and Ethics', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 36/2, 2012, 153f.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, 141ff. see also his 'The Protester, the Dissident, and the Christian', 5, and 'Biblical Principles in the Public Square', 5f. See also his 'Christ and Culture', 14ff., and 'Law and Gospel: The Hermeneutical/Homiletical Key to Reformation Theology and Ethics', 159.

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, 75ff.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, 85ff.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, 'Human Rights and Christian Ethics', 334.

cal/theological observation in their active involvement in public debates on human rights and religious freedom.<sup>47</sup>

I think it is obvious that in the context of contemporary cultural and religious pluralism, Johnson's proposal to base the Christian public claim for biblical moral values and for universal validity of human rights on the God-given natural moral law (anchored—for Christians—in the doctrine of creation and general revelation) offers a more promising platform for public debate and intercultural dialogue and cooperation than does Komárková's appeal to the Christian roots of human rights accompanied by a strict rejection of the notion of natural law.

I think it is vitally important for contemporary Christians to be able to present their ethical convictions in ways that are intelligible and hopefully acceptable for non-Christians, in other words, in ways that make it clear that their plausibility does not stand and fall with accepting the Christian faith and its sacred book. I think it is necessary for contemporary Christians, as they strive to fight for human rights and religious freedom, to join hands with all people of good will, not just with fellow Christians. And I think that the sort of

ethical theory proposed by Johnson can serve as a suitable and theologically sound platform for such an alliance, based on shared values and concerns. I don't think Komárková's view of human rights and natural law offers such a platform.

Moreover, if we look carefully into the sacred books and traditions of non-Christian religions, we find much evidence supporting Johnson's perspective. In spite of many above-mentioned differences in the areas of metaphysics and religiously defined anthropology, ethical guidelines and moral values tend to be quite similar across all religious traditions.<sup>48</sup> There is actually much more commonality among world religions in the area of ethical values and ideals than in the area of theological doctrines and metaphysical concepts, which substantiate those ideals and values.

In all existing world religions we find some version of the so called 'Golden Rule'. Moreover, the rules of interpersonal relationships as they are defined in all existing world religions agree generally with the principles of the second half of the biblical Decalogue. This relatively far-reaching consensus among world religions in the area of ethical values and ideals has been acknowledged and officially con-

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**47** In a book published after this article was written, Johnson has argued that people have an awareness of human dignity as a result of God's general revelation, and that even if suppressed from consciousness, this awareness continues to impinge upon human consciousness and culture. See Johnson, *The First Step in Mission Training: How our Neighbors are Wrestling with God's General Revelation* (Bonn: VKW, 2014), 21. This provides the condition necessary for a regard for human rights to gain influence within cultures that are not yet shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition.

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**48** See on this point a classical presentation of those similarities in Clive S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Collins, Glasgow, 1978, 49ff, and also the very influential statement of the same claim in Hans Küng's *Global Responsibility* (Crossroad Pub., New York, 1991). Komárková tends to neglect or underestimate this trans-cultural consensus in the area of moral values by claiming, as she does, that each society defines what is morally 'natural' very differently. It is not quite true, I think.

firmed in documents such as the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic approved by the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1993.<sup>49</sup> I think that the most plausible explanation for this universal consensus from a Christian perspective is the theological understanding of God-given natural moral law, anchored in the doctrine of creation and general revelation.

## VI A Platform for Cooperation

To summarize, in the global situation of cultural and religious pluralism, I find Johnson's proposal to develop a publicly understandable Christian natural law ethics based on the doctrine of creation and general revelation, which can be supported by empirical evidence,

generally accessible knowledge, and appeal to common sense, providing a suitable platform for cooperation with all people of good will. Johnson's theological/philosophical framework can be viewed as theologically sound within the Christian community and, at the same time, publicly intelligible for claiming the universal validity of human rights globally. This includes the right for religious freedom.

Johnson's proposal is more convincing than the alternative proposal of Božena Komárková, precisely because she refuses to relate her Christian claim for human rights to a universally human normative basis of morality such as the natural moral law. This leaves her with no basis which could serve as a plausible and acceptable platform of dialogue and cooperation, not just for Christians but also for people who do not share the Christian faith.

<sup>49</sup> *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, Parliament of the World's Religions. Chicago, 1993, [www.parliamentofreligions.org](http://www.parliamentofreligions.org).

## The Holy Trinity Revisited Essays in Response to Stephen Holmes

Thomas A. Noble & Jason S. Sexton (eds)

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# The Koran's Denial of Christ's Crucifixion: A Critique

John J. Johnson

## Introduction

It is well-known among scholars of Christianity and Islam that the holy books of each religion portray the crucifixion of Jesus quite differently. In the New Testament, of course, Christ dies on a Roman cross for the sins of the faithful, and is resurrected. In the Koran, however, we are told that Christ was not crucified at all, but rather someone who looked like him was executed in his stead. In this paper, I want to do four things.

One, to show that the New Testament account is preferable to the Koranic account on purely historical grounds (I say preferable, since neither account can be shown to be true beyond all doubt. Such 'proof' exists only in the realms of mathematics and formal logic). Two, to point out that Muslim explanations of what happened at the crucifixion are unconvincing, especially regarding the so-called 'substitution theory'. Three, to show that Muslim scholars sometimes go to such lengths to reinterpret the New Testament narrative of the crucifixion that they seek refuge in a supra-

historical realm which is inappropriate when dealing with an historical event like the crucifixion. Finally, I want to briefly raise the issue of how all of this impacts the Islamic doctrine of the infallibility of the Koran.

I do not intend this article to be an indictment of Islam as a religion; much of what is in the Koran is fully acceptable to a Christian (e.g., the great respect shown for the OT prophets and patriarchs, the stress on the Day of Judgment, and the insistence on monotheism). Still, the disagreement over what happened to Jesus is of vital importance. If Christ was not crucified, then Christianity is without its historical and theological basis. If he was indeed crucified, then Islam faces historical and theological problems of its own. This is especially true for Islam, as Muslims view their scriptures and their religion as superseding and correcting the mistakes of the earlier, mistake-riddled Christian revelation.

The story of Christ's death is well-known, and is described in detail by the four gospel writers, and is referred to in various other places in the NT. My

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goal here is not to address the topic of Christ's resurrection, as this has been done before, and in excellent manner, by numerous apologists, from C.S. Lewis to John Warwick Montgomery to N.T. Wright, Gary Habermas, and William Lane Craig.

But since the focal point of this paper is the Islamic denial of Christ's crucifixion, the Koranic verse in question reads as follows, with Jews exclaiming, in surah (chapter) 4:157-158: "[W]e have surely killed the Christ, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God." They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; rather it was made only to appear so to them. And those who have differed concerning him are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him except the following of conjecture. They did not kill him with certainty. Rather, God took him up to Himself, for God is mighty and wise.' How and when Christ *did* eventually die, is 'not able to be clearly judged from the text of the Koran....[references to Christ's ultimate fate] are acutely scanty and, moreover, ambiguous.'<sup>1</sup>

The Koran's teachings on the crucifixion 'have become the *crux interpretum*, the burden and pain of exegetes'.<sup>2</sup> Some Christian theologians have not dealt realistically with the fact that the Bible and the Koran contradict each other on this matter. Martin Bauschke writes that 'Christians and Muslims are agreed that however Jesus may have died and whatever happened to him after his death—this death did

not and does not have the last word about his life and activity on behalf of God. Rather, this death was the way through, the transition, the way back into the presence and nearness of the one who sent him.'<sup>3</sup> Such a statement is troublesome because, apparently in the name of preserving religious harmony between the two faiths, it claims there is an 'agreement' between Christians and Muslims where no such agreement exists. What Christian says it does not matter how Jesus died? And what Christian or Muslim holds that it does not matter what 'happened to him after his death'?

### I Confirmation of the Crucifixion by Non-Biblical Sources

A brief word needs to be said regarding the confirmation of the event by extra-biblical sources. It is a general rule of historical investigation that an event is more likely to have actually happened if it is multiply attested, that is, if the event is described by more than one source. Tacitus (ca 56-117 A.D.), a Roman historian and senator, confirmed the historicity of Christ's crucifixion: 'Christus, from whom the name [Christians] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hand of the procurator Pontius Pilate.'<sup>4</sup> The first-century Jewish historian Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, also confirms

1 Christine Schirrmacher, *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings* (Bonn, Germany: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2008), 23.  
2 Hans Kung, *Islam: Past, Present, and Future* (Oneworld Publications, 2007), 498.

3 Quoted in Kung, *Islam*, 499.

4 Quoted from Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 2.

that Christ was executed on the cross by Pilate.<sup>5</sup>

A somewhat later source (though still early enough to be of at least *some* historical value) comes from Lucian of Samosata, a second-century Greek writer who confirms the crucifixion in a mocking descriptions of the Christians: '[t]he Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.'<sup>6</sup> Finally, the Tannaitic Period of the Talmud (which ranges from 70-200 A.D.) references the crucifixion in Sanhedrin 43a: 'On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged.'<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that with the Talmudic evidence, '[i]t would be expected that the most reliable information from the Talmud would come from the earliest period of compilation—70 to 200 A.D., known as the Tannaitic period'.<sup>8</sup>

So, there is at least a good chance that what is recorded about Christ's death here is contemporaneous, or at least nearly contemporaneous with the event. That the Talmudic position

on Christ's death was still Jewish orthodoxy centuries later can be shown. In his debates with Jewish and Christian audiences, Petrus Alfonsi (1062-1110), a Jewish scholar who converted to Christianity, assumes that the one thing Christians and Jews can agree on is that Jesus died on a Roman cross. 'Thus, Jews, Romans, and early Christians all affirmed that Jesus really died, differing only about whether he was raised from the dead.'<sup>9</sup>

All the evidence listed above is far more decisive, from a purely historical perspective, than the Koran's account of Christ's death, which was written over 500 years after the fact. An analogy would be the life of Buddha. The earliest written records of his life date to 500 years after his death, and this huge amount of intervening time led to these writings being 'embellished with fanciful details, which makes it difficult to separate fact from legend'.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, even NT scholar John Dominic Crossan, the farthest thing from a biblical fundamentalist, can say that Christ's death 'under Pontius Pilate is as sure as anything historical ever can be'.<sup>11</sup> This is despite the fact that Crossan is well-known for doubting other portions of the New Testament's accounts of Christ's life. Even *The Journal of the American Medical Association*,

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars believe the passage in question by Josephus was later amended by Christian editors; it is unlikely that Josephus, a non-Christian, would have portrayed Christ as the resurrected Jewish messiah, but most scholars believe he did indeed confirm the basic fact of the crucifixion of Jesus. For more on this, see Norman L. Geisler, 'Flavius Josephus', in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 253-54.

<sup>6</sup> Geisler, 'Jesus, Non-Christian Sources', *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 383.

<sup>7</sup> Geisler, 'Jesus, Non-Christian Sources', 383.

<sup>8</sup> www.garyhabrmas.com/books/historicaljesus/historicaljesus.htm.

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<sup>9</sup> Steven J McMichael, 'The Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus in Medieval Christian Anti-Muslim Religious Polemics', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 21:2 (2010), 160.

<sup>10</sup> Damien Keown, *Buddhism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17.

<sup>11</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 5.

published an article explaining that, based on descriptions of Christ's suffering in the gospels, his death is not in question. 'Modern medical interpretation of the historical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead when taken down from the cross.'<sup>12</sup>

Also, the koranic denial of Christ's death is not multiply attested; there are no other sources that corroborate what the Islamic holy book says on this matter. The one exception would be the version of the crucifixion offered by the second-century Christian gnostic Basilides. His position was that Christ 'did not suffer, for at the crucifixion Christ and Simon of Cyrene (mentioned at Mark 15:21 and par) in effect traded places, each being transformed, so that Simon was crucified while Christ stood by laughing at the event. After the crucifixion had taken place, Christ ascended back to the father, knowing from when he had come.'<sup>13</sup>

But there are at least two problems here. One, Christ is presented in a quite callous manner, laughing over the death of an innocent man. Surely Muslims, who have great respect for Christ as a prophet, would find this portrayal

quite unappealing. Indeed, that an innocent man should suffer for another is unacceptable in Islam, a religion that holds each person accountable for his or her own sins, and denies the idea of substitutionary suffering.

Furthermore, a Muslim cannot accept Basilides' general view of Jesus because of Basilides' docetism (from the Greek word meaning 'to seem' or 'to appear'). Basilides 'was convinced that Jesus did not get involved in the material realm. Since matter is evil, the good Jesus could not have had a real physical body.'<sup>14</sup> This is why Basilides denies the crucifixion; what is non-material cannot suffer a material death. Thus there is no corroboration here for the koranic denial of the crucifixion, unless the Muslim wishes to accept all of the anti-Islamic theology that Basilides brings to his account of Christ's avoidance of the cross.<sup>15</sup>

## II The Spurious 'Gospel of Barnabas'

It was once commonplace for Muslim apologists to claim that the non-canonical 'Gospel of Barnabas' (first

<sup>12</sup> William D. Edwards, et al., 'On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ.' *JAMA* March 1986, vol. 225, p. 1455. This article proved controversial, not because the analysis of Christ's sufferings and death was inaccurate, but because some thought that the medical doctors of the journal were taking the passion narratives too literally and falling into the age-old trap of blaming the Jews, en masse, for the death of Jesus; I am interested only in their verdict that, from a modern medical perspective, Jesus did indeed die upon the cross.

<sup>13</sup> *The Earliest Cristian Heretics*, ed. Arland J. Hultgren and Steven A. Haggmark (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 60.

<sup>14</sup> William E. Phipps, *Muhammad and Jesus*, (NY: Continuum, 1996), 203.

<sup>15</sup> Although, it must be admitted that certain stories about Jesus do seem, to non-Muslims at least, to have been taken from docetic Christian sources. 'The Quran, in spite of its determination to deny that Jesus was a deity, accepts some of the tales that were invented to prove the opposite. The stories of baby Jesus performing miracles' is one example, according to Phipps (204). But this is quite different from taking the position of Basilides that Jesus was non-material, for the Koran goes to great lengths to stress that Christ was indeed fully human, and *only* human.

published in 1907) could be used to corroborate the Koran's teaching on the crucifixion. But today, all Christian scholars and most Muslim ones admit that Barnabas was written sometime in the Middle Ages, and is therefore useless as a source for the life of Christ. Still, as recently as the late 20th century, a prominent Muslim scholar could write that

The Gospel of Barnabas has provided modern commentators not only with a supposed first-hand report in support of the substitutionist theory, but also with what appears as a plausible justification. Thus we have come full circle back to the earliest interpretation of the words *shubbiha lahum* as meaning 'another took his likeness and was substituted for him.' Modern Muslim thinkers have been aware of the claim that Barnabas is a late document. Some have therefore used it only as partial evidence, while others have argued that it is the true Gospel in full or in part, which Christians had hidden for many centuries until it was found in their most sacred institution, the Vatican Library. The question of the historicity of the event of the Cross remains open, nonetheless, and a more up-to-date study of the Gospel of Barnabas would help greatly in moving Christian-Muslim dialogue from scriptural polemics to the more important task of understanding and appreciating the significance of Christ for the two religious traditions.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Mahmoud M. Ayoub, 'Towards an Islamic Christology', *The Muslim World*, LXX, no. 2 (April 1980), 113.

That the 'Gospel of Barnabas' should arouse great interest among Muslims scholars is not surprising, since it quotes Jesus not only as denying his death on the cross, but also predicting the coming of Allah's final messenger. Christ says that men will be deceived about his manner of his death, as well as his alleged divinity, 'until the advent of Mohammed, the Messenger of God, who, when he shall come, shall reveal this deception to those who believe in God's law'.<sup>17</sup>

Barnabas is full of other problems so it is problematic in relation to corroboration of the Koranic denial of the cross. Its anachronisms are many, one being that it seems to reflect the cultural life of 14th century Italy rather than first-century Palestine. Barnabas also suggests that the forty-day Lenten fast was practised in the first century, when in fact it did not start until the seventh century AD.<sup>18</sup> Most damning of all, though, is that the author of Barnabas displays a thorough knowledge of the Latin version of the Bible, which of course proves that Barnabas is hundreds of years removed from the first century AD.<sup>19</sup> Even esteemed Muslim scholar Cyril Glasse says of Barnabas, 'there is no question that it is a medieval forgery'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, by A.H. Mathias, (NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 82.

<sup>18</sup> Ayoub, 'Toward an Islamic Christology', 87, 88.

<sup>19</sup> Ayoub, 'Toward an Islamic Christology', 81.

<sup>20</sup> Cyril Glasse, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Walnut Creek, CA: Atamira Press, 2002), 78.

### III Muslim Explanations as to Who Died on the Cross

The Koran's lack of clarity led one 19th-century Muslim sect in India, the Ahmadiya, to postulate that Christ was indeed crucified, but that he

recovered from his crucifixion wounds and moved to Kashmir. After teaching there successfully for several generations, he died at the age of 120 and was buried at Srinagar. Ghulam Ahmed, the sect's founder, claimed that he found Jesus' tomb there and that he, Ahmed, was a reincarnation of Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

Another example of a rather fanciful attempt to avoid the belief that Jesus died on the cross comes from the late 19th-century Muslim scholar Sayyid Ahmad Khan:

[c]rucifixion itself does not cause the death of a man, because only the palms of his hands, or the palms of his hand and feet are pierced .... After three or four hours Christ was taken down from the cross, and it is certain that at that moment he was still alive. Then the disciples concealed him in a very secret place, out of fear of the enmity of the Jews.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, Khan's theory has a parallel in outdated European biblical scholarship, and was sometimes referred to as the 'swoon theory'. Certain biblical scholars of the eighteenth century advocated this view, and so the idea that Christ was crucified but did not actually die on the cross 'is something ad-

vocated in European rationalism prior to its discussion in Muslim apologetic literature'.<sup>23</sup> However, I know of no major NT scholar who holds to this position today. There are plenty of western scholars who doubt the truth of the resurrection, but Christ's death on the cross is not doubted by credentialed biblical scholars.

This swoon theory is of course an old canard, and the idea that the disciples stole and hid Christ's body has been refuted by various Christian apologists. As for the assertion that Christ was not on the cross long enough to die, it must be remembered that Christ was beaten and flogged before being crucified, and that the loss of blood and related trauma caused by the especially savage Roman method of flogging is 'the best explanation of his relatively speedy death'.<sup>24</sup>

Another common Muslim objection to Christ's crucifixion is that Allah would not allow so great a prophet as Jesus to suffer such an ignominious fate at the hands of sinful men. '[A] reason given for the rejection of Jesus' crucifixion comes from the report of two Gospels that, after he was nailed to a cross, he cried, "My God, why have You forsaken me?" 'This is a blatant declaration of disbelief,' writes M.T. Al-Hilari; he claims that a true believer could not utter these words. The Koran affirms that Jesus was continuously a true prophet, so an account displaying his loss of faith cannot be accepted'.<sup>25</sup>

But from a Muslim point of view,

<sup>23</sup> Schirmacher, *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Phipps, *Muhammad and Jesus*, 222.

<sup>21</sup> Phipps, *Muhammad and Jesus*, 218.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 115.

such sentiments seem problematic to say the least. Firstly, Christ's cry of dereliction from the cross need not be taken as a loss of faith at all. Had he lost his faith, he would not have bothered crying out to a God in whom he no longer believed. Secondly, even if the cry of dereliction indicates spiritual weakness in Jesus, this is not problematic for Muslims, for the Koran does not teach that any of the prophets were perfect. Muslims often take Muhammad to be in some sense the 'ideal' man of Allah, but the Koran never portrays him as perfect or sinless in a Christ-like way. In fact, when Muhammad first began to receive the koranic revelations from the angel Gabriel, he doubted his prophetic calling, and actually thought that he might be falling prey to satanic trickery:

Muslim tradition reports that Muhammad reacted to his 'call' in much the same way as the Hebrew prophets. He was both frightened and reluctant. Frightened by the unknown—for surely he did not expect such an experience. Reluctant, at first, because he feared he was possessed and that others would dismiss his claims as inspired by spirits, or *jinnns*.<sup>26</sup>

But if Muhammad, Islam's greatest prophet, had such misgivings about himself, how can Muslims cite Christ's doubt on the cross as proof that he was not crucified? Perfect knowledge or

faith is not a prerequisite for prophethood in either the Bible or in the Koran. In fact, it is precisely the doubt expressed by both Jesus and Muhammad that makes them credible figures. Had they been mythological constructs, we probably would not have such seemingly 'negative' information about them.

New Testament scholars refer to this as the 'criterion of embarrassment'. This means that any passage in the gospels that seems to 'damage' the image of Jesus is necessarily authentic, since the New Testament writers would not have invented stories or put words into Christ's mouth that seem to play against the picture they are trying to present of him as lord and saviour. An example from the NT would be Mark 6:4-6, where Jesus is said not to be able to perform miracles in unbelieving Nazareth. An example from the Koran is that a new koranic revelation had to be given by Allah to allow for Muhammad's social faux pas of marrying a woman whom his adopted son had recently divorced.<sup>27</sup>

#### IV The Question of Someone Being Made to Look like Jesus.

Muslim exegetes throughout the ages have been troubled by the idea of Christ switching paces with another man:

Important to most of the substitutionist interpretations is the idea that whoever bore the likeness of Jesus, and consequently his suffering and death, did so voluntarily. It must have been felt by hadith trans-

<sup>26</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7. It was only after his first wife, Kadijah, convinced him that he was not possessed and that he was a recipient of divine revelation, that Muhammad fully embraced his divine calling.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas W. Lippman, *Understanding Islam* (NY: Meridian, 1995), 54.

mitters and commentators that for God to cause an innocent man to die unjustly to save another would be divine wrongdoing (*culm*), which cannot be predicated of God. Thus the theory which eventually gained most popularity was that one of the disciples voluntarily accepted death as a ransom for his master.<sup>28</sup>

But in the koranic passage that describes this, we are not given any indication that human trickery was involved, so we are left to assume that it was Allah who made another man take on the semblance of Jesus.

On the face of it, there is nothing objectionable here in terms of Allah's power to do such a thing; he is omnipotent in both Muslim and Christian understandings of his nature. Yet the question must be pressed, *why* did Allah do such a thing? And it had to be his doing, for what other power could have caused another man to take on Jesus's appearance? The only other option would be that this was a satanic deception, but the Koran gives no indication of this and, given the high regard in which the Koran holds Jesus, the Muslim holy book would not portray Jesus as a plaything in the hands of a wily devil.

That all of this raises a serious problem for Muslims is partially acknowledged by Cyril Glasse when he writes, 'the crucifixion as a pointless charade can hardly be meet to God's

purpose, and two thousand years have not shown what God could have meant by such sleight of hand. Nor does the Koran warrant such a view.'<sup>29</sup> This of course is precisely my point; there is no reason why Allah should have caused such a deception to happen. Yet this is precisely what Glasse claims: '[i]t is clear from the Koran that God willed the people to see what they saw .... The Koran does say that the crucifixion of Jesus is what the people saw, and does not go into the reasons why God let the event take place and let the people see what they saw.'<sup>30</sup>

This point must be stressed. Allah is the cause of the confusion here, not Satan, not even the jinn (supernatural creatures in Islamic thought, whose essence is fire, and from which we get our English word 'genie'). Thus for Glasse, the mistaken interpretation of the crucifixion is no mere human mistake, but part of Allah's plan, although the reasons behind his plan are inscrutable, according to Glasse.

## V The Islamic Retreat into 'Supra-History'

The nineteenth-century German theologian Martin Kahler, when addressing the historicity of the resurrection, took the position that there was a 'distinction between "ordinary history" (*Historie*) and "suprahistory" (*Geschichte*)'. Rudolf Bultmann, a prominent German NT scholar, responded to this by asking, 'why regard such events as histori-

<sup>28</sup> Ayoub, 'Toward an Islamic Christology', 97. Hadith refers to the collected sayings of Muhammad, compiled by those who knew him well (often called his Companions). Throughout Islamic history, the Hadith literature has been almost as important as the Koran, especially in matters regarding Islamic law.

<sup>29</sup> Glasse, *New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 239.

<sup>30</sup> Glasse, *New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 78.

cal at all?<sup>31</sup> But this kind of Kahler-like theological sleight-of-hand seems to be what occurs when Muslim scholars examine the crucifixion.

For instance, Glasse writes that ‘the crucifixion of Jesus does not play a role in the Islamic perspective any more than does his superhuman origin, for salvation in Islam results from the recognition of the Absoluteness of God and not from a sacrificial mystery’.<sup>32</sup> If I read Glasse correctly, the issue of historical accuracy is *secondary*, since Christ’s death, whether it happened or not, plays no role in salvation for the Muslim:

Western writers who, for reasons of the defense of Christianity and Judaism, or for reasons of their disbelief (*kufi*) in any Divine Revelation, have been wont to disparage the Koran as regards factual, *historical accuracy* [emphasis mine], or have spoken of Muhammad’s confused knowledge of history or of his imperfect or deficient knowledge of Judaism are, in every respect, wide of the mark. To begin with, such observations presume the Prophet’s participation in the composition of the Koran, which is in no way admissible.<sup>33</sup>

Again, here is Glasse: ‘In Islam it is the absolute, or higher, that takes precedence in the Koran over the appearances [i.e., what appears to be the historical truth of Christ’s death as recorded in the NT] of this world, be they

of life or of death.’<sup>34</sup>

In a similar vein, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has written of the crucifixion that

[f]rom the traditional philosophical point of view it is possible for a single reality—especially of the order of Christ’s final end—to be seen in two ways by two different worlds, or from two different religious perspectives, without there being an inner contradiction. It is modern Western philosophy that does not allow such a thing.... When it comes to the question of the life of Christ, the historical life, on the level of fact it is either the Christian or the Islamic version that can be held.<sup>35</sup>

The first thing that is odd about this passage is that Nasr attributes the law of non-contradiction to ‘modern Western philosophy’ when in fact it goes back at least to the ancient Greek philosophers. Not only that, but the great Muslim philosopher Avicenna (980-1037 AD) insisted upon the importance of the law of non-contradiction as an aid to right thinking. Second, if the Koran is going to address historical subjects like the life of Christ and his crucifixion, then the Koran must play by the rules of history, like any other historical document. The facts of history do not change simply because of one’s theological worldview.

Nasr goes on to write that the ‘Qur’an is more indifferent to the historical significance of sacred history than the Bible and much more interested in the moral significance of events

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**31** Quoted in John Warwick Montgomery, ‘Speculation Versus Factuality: An Analysis of Unbelief’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168 (Jan-March 2001), 40.

**32** Glasse, *New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 239.

**33** Glasse, *New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 265.

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**34** Glasse, *New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 239.

**35** Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ‘Response to Hans Kung’s Paper on Christian-Muslim Dialogue’, *Muslim World* 77, no. 2 (April 1987), 100.

recounted in that history.<sup>36</sup> This is fine as far as it goes, for there are certainly multiple ways to interpret any historical event. But this does not allow Nasr to violate the law of non-contradiction by advocating two contradictory versions of the crucifixion, one for Christians, one for Muslims, both equally valid. Yet this is what he seems to be attempting.

Yet Nasr and Glasse cannot have it both ways. Both men, I imagine, accept as historical fact that Christ was born of a virgin, as taught in the Koran (3:45-47). This is portrayed as a surety in the Koran, without implying therefore that Christ is divine or the messiah. In the Koran, (19: 29-30) when the infant Jesus speaks, and calls himself a messenger of Allah, Nasr and Glasse surely would not reject the historicity of the event, because it fits in well with their theology, lending credence to Christ's role as only a messenger of Allah, not his Son, or his Equal.

Or, when Jesus predicts the coming of 'Ahmed' (another name for Muhammad), in Koran 61:6, what Muslim relegates such a passage to a non-historical status? The Koran teaches that Muhammad was illiterate, and this is taken as a 'real' statement of historical fact; this is proof for the Muslim that the poetic profundity of the Koran had to come from God, because the unlettered Muhammad could not have written it. The same can be said of surah 8:17 in the Koran, which explains that the Battle of Badir (the battle in 624 AD in which Muhammad's forces were victorious over his polytheistic rivals)

was won not by the Muslims alone, as some of them mistakenly believed, but by the grace of Allah.<sup>37</sup> Secular historians take Badir to be a veridical event, as do all Muslims.

My point is, Muslims *do* take the Koran as a history book when it comes to such events as enumerated above. Yet when the Koran is faced with a conflicting version of the crucifixion found in the far earlier (and therefore more reliable) NT documents, (not to mention the contemporaneous extra-biblical material) then somehow the koranic version must be interpreted in a very convenient non-historical, 'spiritual' way.

Of course, there are critical Koranic scholars, just as there are critical Old Testament and New Testament scholars. Such Islamic scholars are still probably on average more 'conservative' than 'liberal' Christian ones, but they still are forced to ask 'yes, but what does one mean when he or she says the Koran is God's word'?<sup>38</sup> This of course is a question that has bedevilled (or improved, depending on one's theological point of view) Christian scholarship since at the least the 1800s, when what was then called the higher criticism of the German biblical scholars began to question the divine origins of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. But for good or ill, the historical-crit-

<sup>36</sup> Nasr, 'Response to Hans Kung's Paper on Christian-Muslim Dialogue', 102.

<sup>37</sup> Michael G. Fonner, 'Jesus' Death by Crucifixion in the Qur'an: An Issue for Interpretation and Muslim-Christian Relations', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 29:3-4 (Summer-fall 1992), 445.

<sup>38</sup> For a helpful overview of differing Muslim attitudes toward the Koran, see Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: One-world, 2002), 1-12.

ical approach is accepted by virtually all modern scholars when studying ancient documents, be those documents secular or religious. Thus even Hans Kung, who might be called somewhat of a Christian apologist for Islam, can ask of the Muslim scholarly community, 'if we have historical criticism of the Bible (for the benefit of a contemporary biblical faith) why not then also have historical criticism of the Qur'an and this for the benefit of a Muslim faith appropriate to modern times?'<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, there is no way to divorce the Koran's theology from the historical milieu in which it was revealed: 'the Qur'an's claims to be a guide to people who are located within history mean that revelation remains related to history. Muslims, like others, have connected with a reality transcending history and that revelation, putative or real, has taken place within history and has been conditioned by history.'<sup>40</sup>

But such 'liberal' attitudes are not representative of the typical Koranic scholar. 'Both the doctrines of the Qur'an's eternalness and its inimitability have profoundly affected the nature of Qur'anic scholarship and account for the absence of historico-literary criticism in Qur'anic studies.'<sup>41</sup> Thus, it seems fair to say that while not all Muslim scholars interpret the Koran in a 'fundamentalist' manner, it would be a rare one indeed who would accuse

the Koran of incorrectly reporting the events of the crucifixion.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, one must ask if the denial that Christ died on the cross would have even been mentioned in the Koran if the crucifixion were not at the heart of the religion that Muhammad saw Islam as surpassing:

It is interesting to speculate whether or not it would have been necessary for Muslims to deny the crucifixion of Jesus if that event were a doctrinally neutral issue. In light of the almost universal acceptance that 'someone' was crucified, it appears that the problem faced by [Muslim] exegetes is not so much Jesus' death on the cross, but their inability to accept this and at the same time maintain their Islamic understanding of prophecy.<sup>42</sup>

The Muslim acceptance of Christ's death on the cross seems necessitated by the evidence presented in this paper.<sup>43</sup> Muslims could still maintain that a great prophet, Jesus, was killed by sinful men, but that Allah raised him up to heaven. The resurrection could be ignored, since it is not mentioned at all in the Koran, and is a matter of Christian doctrine, not a historical fact, as is

<sup>42</sup> Lawson, *Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, 12-13.

<sup>43</sup> Some Muslim scholars have begun to employ historical-critical methods to the Koran, although it seems safe to say they do so with more restraint than liberal Jewish or Christian scholars when approaching the Bible. Still, in 1993 Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd could write that koranic scholarship 'must proceed from reality and culture as empirical givens. From these givens we arrive at a scientific understanding of the phenomenon of the text' (quoted from Esack, *The Qur'an*, 5).

<sup>39</sup> Hans Kung, 'Christianity and World Religions: The Dialogue with Islam as One Model', *Muslim World* 77, no. 2 (April 1987), 89.

<sup>40</sup> Farid Esack, 'Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects', *The Muslim World*, vol. LXXXIII, no. 2, April 1993, 136.

<sup>41</sup> Esack, 'Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects', 101.

the crucifixion. By accepting the historicity of the crucifixion, Muslims might actually make their faith stronger, as they would be bringing it into line with what all historians, even non-Christian ones, accept as the established fact of Christ's death. Acceptance of this fact would in no way require them to accept Christ's divinity, nor his substitutionary death. All other Muslim doctrines, such as Allah's absolute oneness, the Day of Judgment, heaven and hell, and Muhammad's status as Allah's greatest and final messenger would remain untouched.

True, to admit that the Koran is wrong about the crucifixion would involve a major theological sacrifice for Muslims—the doctrine of the perfection and inerrancy of the Koran. This may seem unthinkable to many Muslims, but what is the alternative? To continue to claim that another was crucified in Jesus's stead seems to be the result of theological obscurantism, rather than the result of honestly grappling with history. Consider Nancy Roberts, who takes the rather curious position of calling herself 'a Muslim who also considers herself a follower of Christ, and for whom Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection are a meaningful reality'.<sup>44</sup> She admits that, when one surveys the theological gymnastics that Muslim exegetes have done to reconcile the contradictory crucifixion accounts found in the Bible and the Koran, it is clear

the insistence of many Muslim ex-

eges down the centuries on rejecting the historicity of the crucifixion may have been less a response to the text of Q. 4 157-158 [Koran chapter 4, the account of the crucifixion] itself than a reaction to Christian polemics against Islam and a need to assert their rejection of Christians' belief in Christ's death as atoning for others' sins.<sup>45</sup>

This type of theological 'split personality' is the inevitable outcome of Islam's inability to confront the crucifixion as an actual event in space and time. But for now, the flexibility with which some Christians have handled the Bible since the rise of the historical-critical method in the 1800s is still largely missing from the manner in which Muslims exegetes treat the Koran.

Thus, in summing up the Muslim position regarding the conflict between the Christian and the Muslim understandings of the crucifixion, 'the Koran will always have the casting vote in any debate if it is perceived to speak decisively on the topic in [sic] hand .... So long as Q 4.157 is understood to deny that Jesus was crucified, this will be the understanding which holds sway among Muslims.'<sup>46</sup> But this seems more like fideism than scholarship. The facts of history are what they are, and they do not vanish because of one's philosophical or theological commitments. Islamic thinkers must find a way to accommodate the certainty that Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy Roberts, 'A Muslim Reflects on Christ Crucified: Stumbling-Block of Blessing?' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24, 3 (May 2013), 313.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, 'A Muslim Reflects on Christ Crucified: Stumbling-Block or Blessing?' 318.

<sup>46</sup> Whittingham, 'How Could So Many Christians Be So Wrong?' 176-77.

# Empowering Church Planters. Which training system?

Johannes Reimer

## I Church Planting in a Divided Society

### 1. Leadership in Church planting matters

Planting new and replanting old churches is on the agenda of many European denominations. Some have started impressive programmes to boost a so-called church planting movement (CMP). But the overall outcome is rather questionable. Church planting in Europe is difficult. What are the obstacles and problems and which factors determine success and failure? There is obviously more than one issue to be discussed. In this paper I am addressing the importance of proper leadership in church planting. Planting needs planters. The north-American writer Steve Smith promoting church planting movements states:

Sustained CMPs are in essence *leadership multiplication movements*. The development and multiplication of leaders is what the Spirit uses to drive the movement. This is the

spiritual engine of sustained CMPs. CMPs can start without effective leadership development and multiplication, but they will be short lived without it. You must have a system in place that results in generations of *reproducing leaders*.<sup>1</sup>

Church planting is short-lived without proper leadership. The British missiologist Stuart Murray points to the Anabaptist movement which lost its vibrancy as a church planting movement by failing to address the question of leadership training, but 'in contrast, the training provided for celtic church planters was a significant component in the vibrancy of this movement'.<sup>2</sup> Other examples from the history of mission might be added. Training of church planters is crucial. Is church planting in Europe a problem because

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1 Steve Smith with Ying Kai, *T4T: Discipleship & Revolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 259.

2 Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), 256.

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we fail to rise a generation of leaders? And if so, how does one install systems that result in 'generations of reproducing leaders' in such difficult times and contexts as ours today? And what qualifies a good church planting leader?

## 2. The context demands certain leaders

In their recently published book on church planting in the UK the British authors Andy Hardy and Dan Yarnell describe Great Britain as a divided society<sup>3</sup>—divided by different cultural backgrounds, social classes, gender orientation and religious convictions, just to mention some. Church planting in the UK will have to cross those divides, overcome barriers and develop a church for every context. It is a task that is unusually complicated, so it is not surprising that the authors plead for a certain kind of leadership needed in order to complete it. They expect the future church planters to be change agents, culturally intelligent and able to operate cross culturally.<sup>4</sup> In their perspective the task shapes the demand of leadership. Competent leaders will conform to the many facades of a given context and culture. Other European experts on church planting in their respective cultures support the findings of the British authors.

The acknowledgment of the complexity of church planting in context is not new. The Fuller Theological Seminary professor, Charles Ridley, who analysed church planters, profiles in

the late 1980s and consequently developed an assessment tool, expects of church planters the following characteristics: (1) visionizing capacity, (2) self-starters' mentality, (3) sense of ownership in ministry, (4) ability to relate to unchurched people, (5) balancing family and ministry, (6) effectively building relationships, (7) commitment to church growth, (8) responsiveness to the community, (9) ability to guide others; (10) flexibility and adapting to change and ambiguity, (11) building group cohesiveness for working in a team toward common goal, (12) ability to sustain themselves through setbacks, losses, disappointments and failures, (13) translating personal faith convictions into ministry decisions and actions.<sup>5</sup>

This is a heavy load on a single shoulder. Others describe the church planter primarily as a spiritual person, adding to the list a number of other qualities.<sup>6</sup> Who is able to comply with all this? The frustration on both sides—the pastor and his congregation, the church planter and his mission board—seems to be programmed.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Charles, R. Ridley, *How to select Church Planters* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1988), 7-1; see also: J.D. Payne, *Discovering Church Planting. An Introduction to the Whats, Whys and Hows of Global Church Planting* (Colorado Springs-Milton Keynes-Hyderabad: Paternoster), 391f.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, qualifications of church planters as developed by Samuel D. Fairloth, *Church Planting for Reproduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, ), 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> See in this regard an excellent description of those feelings in Greg Ogden, *The New Reformation. Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 85-95.

<sup>3</sup> Andy Hardy and Dan Yarnell, *Forming Multicultural Partnerships: Church Planting in a Divided Society* (Watford: Instant Apostle, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Hardy, *Forming Multicultural*, 141-217.

Where does one receive proper training for all of this? Is it at all possible to train highly flexible leaders who move smoothly across the lines of our multiple societal divisions? How do you become what Hardy and Yarnell call a ‘nomadic disciple’?<sup>8</sup> Which training system might serve them best? Let us examine the options.

## II Training Models Used Today

### 1. How do we train and empower church planters in the world today?

Most experts on church planting will agree: ‘Biblical and theological equipping of leaders is not optional’.<sup>9</sup> But does this mean we will have to send all our leaders to Bible schools and colleges or seminaries? Will standardized school-based training solve the complexity of demands for leadership in church planting? Is it at all possible to run a school offering all the courses for all the demands church planting will place in front of leaders? The fact that theological education notoriously avoids issues of apostolic and prophetic leadership, concentrating primarily on shepherding and teaching competences, for instances, leaves us with an open question. Apostolic and prophetic training is very preliminary to *enlarge* and follows questionable practices. We have seen both the prophetic and the

apostolic movement sweeping over our continent with many appeals and little practical effects. So how do we train, if not in schools?

Some suggest that the level on which the leaders will accept responsibility will decide about the depth and duration of training. Edgar J. Elliston, for instance, suggested orienting the training on the different levels of leadership exercised in a movement. He names the skills and competences required and orders them into a scale of different training approaches, formal and informal, short and long cycle, in- and external and so on.<sup>10</sup>

Ott and Wilson build on Elliston’s suggestion and describe three models of equipping workers for different tasks and ministries of a local church, calling them ‘workshops, in-ministry teams and individual instruction’.<sup>11</sup> Workshops are offered locally or regionally and short-cycle, introducing main issues of the matter to beginners and those workers in transition. In-ministry teams include beginners and mature workers. They may learn by watching and doing.

Equipping is done on the job and wherever needed in a workshop style to deepen knowledge and competence. Individual instruction is done by modeling, coaching and mentoring; in other words, trainees observe their trainer at work and they are observed and guided by the trainer in their work. Individual instruction takes place in the context of praxis and is enormously time consuming.

<sup>8</sup> Hardy, *Forming Multicultural*, 142ff.

<sup>9</sup> Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting. Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 356.

<sup>10</sup> Edgar J. Elliston, *Home Grown Leaders* (Pasadena CA: WCL, 1992), 35; Ott and Wilson, *Global Church*, 354-356.

<sup>11</sup> Ott and Wilson, *Global Church*, 357-361.

All three models can be put into different frames of educational reference: church based training, in-service training or school-based education, even when some of the frames will offer more and others less flexibility. Let us explore the options in more detail.

## 2. Church based Training

In their great book on 'Global Church Planting', Craig Ott and Gene Wilson underline the fact that leaders in church planting do not appear overnight. All great leaders seem to have followed a process of becoming first a disciple, then a servant, and then a leader.<sup>12</sup> And this process takes place in the local church. In fact, the local church is ideally equipped for this, if, of course, the leaders of the church understand what is the very nature and mission of God's church.

Roger Ellis and Roger Mitchell in their book on *Radical Church Planting* clearly assign the main responsibility of leadership capacity building to the church, calling the church a 'training school'.<sup>13</sup> In their view, it is the task of the pastoral leadership to discern and develop leadership gifts in the church and open up space for potential leaders to develop in ministry.

Some churches go beyond basic discipleship and servanthood training, offering church planters workshops, seminars, training camps, residences and internships.<sup>14</sup> Here gifted members

of the churches are properly assessed and invited to spend a number of days, weeks, months and more (usually up to one–two years) in a seminar or even internship learning the skills of a church planter. A number of churches in North America offer such programmes, among which the church planter training programme of the Presbyterian Redeemer church in New York has received most international attention.<sup>15</sup> Another great programme is offered by the Nairobi Chapel in Kenya, now also moving into other cities of Africa and Europe, Berlin in Germany for instance.<sup>16</sup>

## 3. In-Service Training

Others promote on-the-job training for church planting. Their motivation comes from the common observation that people learn not because the teachers have been great and provided a maximum of knowledge. It is not what the teacher does that counts, but it is only when the learner starts doing what teachers suggest that we see how much has been understood and learned. Applying knowledge leads to competence.<sup>17</sup> In many strata of

<sup>12</sup> Ott and Wilson, *Global Church*, 351ff.

<sup>13</sup> Ellis and Mitchell, *Radical*, 148.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Glenn Smith, Models for Raising up Church Planters. How Churches Become More Effective Through Intentional Leadership Development. In: <http://storage.cloversites.com/northtexasdistrictcouncilofassembliesofgod/documents/Model%20for%20Raising%20Up%20Church%20Planters.pdf> (29.05.2015, pp. 4ff; Ott and Wilson, *Global Church*, 365ff.

<sup>15</sup> See 'City to City' programme in: <http://www.redeemercitytocity.com/about/> (20.05.2015).

<sup>16</sup> <http://nairobi chapel.org/NC/missionaries.php>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://nairobi chapel.org/NC/missionaries.php>.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Lenz, Heiner Ellebracht, Gisela Osterhold, *Coaching als Führungsprinzip. Persönlichkeit und Performance entwickeln* (Wiesbaden: Gabler, 2007), 11.

society this has been understood and systems of 'On-the-Job-Learning' have been implemented. They build on andragogy, a system of teaching adults. Glenn Smith, who studied a number of north-American church planter training programmes concludes:

The best church planter training programs understand and embrace the principles of adult learning. Trainers should keep in mind that adults have life experience, and this experience enables them to dialogue in a manner that will enhance their learning. They also have the capacity to reflect on their life experiences in a way that enables them to gain insight into the knowledge and skills being taught. The best adult training programs incorporated practices such as a personal needs assessment, sequence of content, just-in-time information, and experiential learning.<sup>18</sup>

The author of the well-known study on church planting movements, David Garrison, pleads with churches to follow the society in this matter. He warns: 'Avoid the temptation to pull new local church leaders away from their churches for years of training in an institution. A decentralized theological education which is punctuated by practical experience is preferable.'<sup>19</sup> He offers what he calls an MAWL approach for training effective church planters. MAWL stands for 'Model, Assist, Watch and Leave. Model evangelism and church planting, Assist local

believers to do the same; Watch to ensure that they are able to do it; Leave to go and start the cycle elsewhere.'<sup>20</sup>

Grassroots-Training as suggested by Garrison offers enormous chances to launch a movement, but it may also potentially introduce weak and even wrong theologies, since it does not go deep on theoretical matters, but tends to emphasise the basic questions of evangelism and discipleship.

In-house churches training of leaders is generally done informally by walking alongside a leader as Victor Chodhrie, a prominent representative of the Indian house church movement, reports.<sup>21</sup> Similarly the CMPs largely relay on in-service training of their leaders.<sup>22</sup>

Others suggest a more sophisticated model of modular training by which the church planters and their apprentices meet on a regular basis once a month, for example, to discuss issues of relevance.<sup>23</sup> The 'Modular Church Planter Training' is implemented in many countries.<sup>24</sup>

In-Service Learning also allows the trainer to see apprentices in action and identify problems early on. Few leaders fail because of a lack of knowledge. Rather leaders often

<sup>18</sup> Glenn Smith, *Models*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention), 44.

<sup>20</sup> David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 344; Ott and Wilson, *Global Church*, 364.

<sup>21</sup> Victor Chodhrie, 'The Training of House Church Leaders', in *Neus. The World House Church Reader*, edited by Rad Zdero (Pasadena, CA: WCL, 2007), 443ff.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *T4T*, 259.

<sup>23</sup> See an overview of such programmes in Glenn Smith, *Models*.

<sup>24</sup> See Ott and Wilson, *Global Church*, 365.

have relational and character problems that are rooted in unsolved attitude and value issues.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. School-oriented approach

There is a plethora of publications complaining about the state and inadequacy of formal theological education in the West.<sup>26</sup> It is blamed for being too theoretical, too academic, offering too little praxis, too expensive, too long, too incompetent in both church and society matters, concentrating on research rather than on church praxis. The well known American missiologist Wilbert R. Shenk states:

In 1990-91 I conducted a reconnaissance of mission training in several Western countries to determine: (1) if there were programs dedicated to the training of missionaries to the peoples of modern Western culture, and (2) what the curriculum comprised. I never got beyond the first question.<sup>27</sup>

Professor Shenk obviously did not find many schools offering missiological training for planting churches in the western context. In fact he found *none*. Things might have changed since, but still even in prominent books on church planting, a formal seminary education is not even considered.<sup>28</sup> And yet even a critique of modern theological training such as Eddy Gibbs, him-

self a renowned professor of theology, recognizes the fact that:

There is a danger of creating a chasm between academic theology and training in ministry competencies. This would simply reposition the already existing chasm from its present location between the church and the seminary, to create a fault-line within the institutions themselves—with fatal consequences. The challenge presented by both modernity and postmodernity require more theologically informed discernment, not less.<sup>29</sup>

He therefore suggests a process of ‘re-engineering theological education’, which in his view includes: (a) bringing churches and seminaries together into a partnership of life-long learning and equipping; (b) involving seminaries in creation of church-based ministry training, (c) readjusting the scholarly community from concentration on the discipline to concentration on theological praxis; (d) concentrating on educating equipping those who are called for ministry.<sup>30</sup> Few schools are following Gibbs’ suggestion of incorporating informal training in their curricula.

#### 5. Non-formal Training

Recognizing the importance of proper training for church planters, mission agencies and/or theological schools develop less formal training for church planters. In Germany, for instance, the Biblical-Theological Academy in Wiedenest offers a one year programme for church planters, focusing on leader-

<sup>25</sup> Ott and Wilson, *Global Church*, 360.

<sup>26</sup> See among many: Eddy Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next, Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), 93-100.

<sup>27</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 129.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance: Ott und Wilson, *Global Church*.

<sup>29</sup> Gibbs and Coffey, *Church Next*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Gibbs and Coffey, *Church Next*, 100-106.

ship development and character building and offering practical mentoring.<sup>31</sup>

In India the Hindustan Bible Institute (HBI) developed a Missionary Training Institute, offering a two year non-formal programme, training gifted young church planters with a very high praxis involvement. 'Church planting requires additional skills which are imparted through two years of on-the-job and field-based training', claims the leadership of the Institute.<sup>32</sup> The Institute has decentralized its training in a number of regional centres.<sup>33</sup> The students actually plant a church learning to plant.<sup>34</sup>

In Brasil JUVEP, a native church planting agency, offers parallel to their formal theological seminary a *school of cross-cultural ministry*, educating church planters in a comprehensive one year training programme.<sup>35</sup> Beside the central location in Joao Pessao in north-eastern Brasil they run a number of regional centres, especially in the country side to avoid taking the students out of their ministry and community.

In Latvia, the Baptist denomination established in 2008 the Baltic Pastoral Institute (BPI) alongside their

Theological Seminary. The Bishop of this denomination reports excitingly about many positive changes in the denomination especially in regard to church planting. BPI offers a 3 year programme of which the first is full-time and the last two are offered parallel to the ministry of the student. At all stages students are involved in church ministry and guided by their respected mentors.<sup>36</sup>

Other similar programmes can also be mentioned. The president of HBI, Paul R. Gupta writes: 'I have concluded that formal education is ill suited and cannot effectively equip evangelists, church planters, and apostolic leaders for ministry.' 'The skills ... can be understood and mastered only through practice.'<sup>37</sup>

## 6. We need an alternative approach

So what is then the right way to train church planters? In reference to screening church planting movements, Stuart Murray concludes:

There is an increasing awareness in the contemporary church planting movement of the importance of leadership training. Much church planting in the past twenty years has taken place without such training, but this church planting will doubtless continue. But some of the weaknesses of this methodology

31 <http://www.leiterakademie.de/k5-leitertraining/k5-gemeindegruendung/> (29.05.2015).

32 Paul R. Gupta and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision. Training Leaders for a Church-Planting Movement* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2006), 34.

33 Gupta and Lingenfelter, *Breaking tradition*, 159.

34 <http://www.hbionline.org/mission.php> (29.05.2015).

35 [http://juvep.com.br/v2/?page\\_id=700](http://juvep.com.br/v2/?page_id=700) (29.05.2015).

36 Pēteris Sproģis and Līva Fokrote, Non-Formal Education as a Tool for Church Planting in Latvia. In: *Raksts izdevumā 'Common Ground Journal'*, v8 n2, 2011 (<http://www.lbds.lv/par/publikacijas/non-formal-education-as-a-tool-for-church-planting-in-latvia—29.05.2015>).

37 Gupta and Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition*, 23.

are becoming apparent ... some of the training provided seems rather narrowly conceived, lacking theological depth and exposure to other ecclesiological and missiological perspectives.<sup>38</sup>

Such training, Murray says, might be appropriate for basic instruction of those who are interested in church planting. The context in which church planting is done today demands, however, deeper knowledge, which cannot be provided by the majority of church-based, on-the-job and in-service training models. On the other hand church-based training tends to train people in the limited competencies for which the current church leadership stands. The British leadership expert, John Finney writes about his own experience in the UK:

All studies show that churches tend to produce clones of the minister. If he or she is an evangelist, the church produces evangelists. If he or she is a dominant personality, then leadership will be seen in terms of aggression. Indeed one of the difficulties of the church is that because so many ministers are gifted as pastors they tend to produce more pastors at a time when they may require a more directly evangelistic model.<sup>39</sup>

There seems little alternative to proper school-based education for church planters. 'With the growing diversity of American culture', says Glenn Smith, 'the increasing secularization, the need for new models, and the seductiveness of popular culture,

church planting leaders are discovering that they must train their planters to think more deeply from a theological perspective.'<sup>40</sup>

But deep theological thinking alone seems not enough. What is needed is an alternative, an alternative which may reduce the load on a single shoulder and at the same time provide quality training both in theological theory and praxis. The alternative we ask for might lie in an integrated model.

### III Integrated Training

#### 1. The dream team of Church planting

Let me start with a basic observation. Most of today's experts in church planting agree that the time of the single church planter is gone. The north-American George Barna even claims that individual leadership is completely unable to grow a church to maturity.<sup>41</sup> It requires a team to start a healthy church.<sup>42</sup> Ridley's categories, as right as they might be, will still be incomplete. No single person will be

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Models*, 13.

<sup>41</sup> George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership* (Colorado Springs: Water-Book Press, 2001), 18ff.

<sup>42</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches. Planting a Church that's Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Company, 2006), 70ff; Faircloth, *Church Planting*, 48ff; Roger Ellis and Roger Mitchell, *Radical Church Planting* (Cambridge: Crossway Books), 189-200; David Gillet, 'Theological Training and Church Planting' in *Planting New Churches. Guidelines and Structures for Developing Tomorrow's Church*, ed. George Carey (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1991), 179-185; and other.

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<sup>38</sup> Murray, *Church Planting*, 256-257.

<sup>39</sup> John Finney, *Church on the Move. Leadership for Mission* (London: Daybreak, 1992), 9.

able to offer all we need in modern day church planting.

The history of church planting includes stories of effective individual church planters. But it has always been the case that to dig a bit deeper into their history will reveal a powerful team behind those apostles. Apostle Paul is the point in case. Planting a kingdom community obviously requires more than one person.<sup>43</sup> Apostle Paul speaks of a team of five in Ephesians 4:11-13. We read:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV).

To equip the saints for their ministry requires apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and teaching competence. What does the apostle mean by that? In short

(a) *Apostles lead strategically.* They understand and promote God's mission on earth. Alan Hirsh and Tim Catchim call the apostle 'custodian of the DNA'.<sup>44</sup> Apostles are responsible for what the church we plant is going to be. They see chances and provide

courage to move ahead. They are starters. They are the strategic brain of the church in mission.<sup>45</sup> Church planting needs people like them. Ed Stetzer calls the apostolically gifted church planter 'the apostolic harvest Church planter', using apostle Paul as a paradigmatical example.<sup>46</sup> Apostles usually act in a team, of which they are the leader and mentor (Eph 4:11).

(b) *Prophets lead analytically.* They see into the past, the present and the future of a given community. They are 'Guardians of faithfulness'.<sup>47</sup> They understand the obstacles and challenges, the need and the bondage of the people, see the path to take and the traps to avoid. Prophets are analysts—they see where people are and determine ways to get them out of there.<sup>48</sup> Church planting is all about people. Without knowing their context and understanding their condition, there will be no effective planting. Church planting needs prophetic vision.

(c) *Evangelists lead through communication.* They know how to communicate the gospel to the people across boundaries and cultures.<sup>49</sup> Guided by an apostolic plan and prophetic insight they are powerful communicators winning people for Jesus. Church planting

<sup>43</sup> See as an excellent survey of teamwork in the New Testament, David W. Shenk and Erwin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1988), 42-55.

<sup>44</sup> Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution. Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2012), 29.

<sup>45</sup> See more in Johannes Reimer, *Die Welt umarmen. Theologie des gesellschaftsrelevanten Gemeindebaus.* Transformationsstudien Bd. 1, 2. Auflage (Marburg: Francke Verlag, 2013), 306-310.

<sup>46</sup> Stetzer, *Planting*, 53ff.

<sup>47</sup> Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> See the discussion of the validity of prophetic leadership for church planting in Reimer, *Die Welt umarmen*, 309-313.

<sup>49</sup> Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent*, 35-42; Reimer, *Die Welt umarmen*, 314ff.

presupposes evangelism. In fact, without evangelism there can be no proper church planting.

(d) *Pastors lead by caring.* They are the shepherds who will walk long distances with the individual and the flock to grow them into maturity and spiritual strength. They disciple people, creating an 'empathic community',<sup>50</sup> mentor them into a missional lifestyle.<sup>51</sup> Discipleship is the core ministry of church planting. Without discipleship, there will be no clear identity, no sense of belonging, no community—all in all—no church! Pastoral leadership is central to church planting. Many modern day church plants follow the classic 'founding pastor paradigm', following, as Ed Stetzer observes, the example of apostle Peter, who founded churches outside of Jerusalem by staying in Jerusalem.<sup>52</sup>

(e) *Teachers lead by teaching the word of God,* 'bringing wisdom and understanding'.<sup>53</sup> They lay solid foundations in scripture and theology, providing a strong base for identity, ethics and morals, values and life praxis. Teachers help to avoid sectarianism and build a church according to God's design. You need teachers in your church planting team.

The Pauline church planting team is a team of five. Alan Hirsh speaks of a genius of APEST,<sup>54</sup> the abbreviation for Apostle-Prophet-Evangelist-Shepherd-Teacher. APEST represents a power team, a strong right hand of God, with

all five fingers, by which God equips the saints to the work of their ministry in order that the body may grow (Eph 4:16). It is God himself who sets the team in motion, a highly qualified team.

What concrete qualities are we looking for in church planters? Ed Stetzer speaks of a planter's SHAPE we have to keep in mind in order to train planters.<sup>55</sup> SHAPE includes: (a) *Spiritual gifts* needed in church planting and bestowed by the Holy Spirit on the people; (b) *Heart of passion* or a missional spirituality towards church planting; (c) *Abilities* required in many practical matters of church planting, such as organisational skills or fund raising; (d) *Personality* able to manage unavoidable stress of crossing frontiers; (e) *Experience* in church work and planting.

Talking of equipping church planters, we need to think of training systems to empower the SHAPE of apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and teaching gifts and competence. Especially the ministries of apostles and prophets, largely neglected in our churches, need to be recovered, as Stuart Murray rightly demands.<sup>56</sup> How do you do this? What educational tools do we use?

## 2. Shaping roots and wings

Glenn Smith observes some north-American church planting movements seeking strategic alliances with traditional schools. He writes: 'Some churches like Perimeter, Redeemer, and West Ridge look to Bible colleges and seminaries. Increasingly more of these types of schools are placing em-

50 Hirsch and Carchim, *The Permanent*, 42.

51 Reimer, *Die Welt umarmen*, 316-317.

52 Stetzer, *Planting*, 61ff.

53 Hirsch and Carchim, *The Permanent*, 45.

54 Hirsch and Carchim, *The Permanent*, 8.

55 Stetzer, *Planting*, 81-82.

56 Murray, *Church Planting*, 240-243.

phasis on church planting.<sup>57</sup>

An example of this new trend is the Cypress Creek Church in Wimberley, Texas, which has established more than 70 churches and recruits its church planters among college students by offering them a discipleship and training programme parallel to their studies at the university. The students are well prepared academically at the university to face challenges of modernity and they understand the church dynamics, having observed and worked inside a well-functioning body of Christ.<sup>58</sup>

Church planters seem to discover the validity of solid theological education, even if traditional theological education is still viewed as ill equipped to train church planters, concentrating on pastoral care of existing congregations rather than on a mission of expanding the kingdom, as Lesslie Newbigin puts it.<sup>59</sup>

Theological training Institutes will have to change their pattern of teaching and their curricula if they are to add to the proper training of church planters.<sup>60</sup> Robert Banks claims that the 'credibility gap' between theology and everyday life is far too deep.<sup>61</sup> But there is a deep necessity for solid theological teaching in training apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors

and teachers for church planting—and therefore a place for formal education! Church planters need roots, deep roots if they want to grow a stable and solid church!

On the other hand, colleges and seminaries need to see the shortcomings of their education wherever it has separated itself from the church. David Gillett from the Anglican College in Bristol, UK states:

In a sense the training establishments are a child of the church. This is true in the area of church planting: we depend on it actually happening in real life; so that we can learn from it, reflect on it, and evaluate it in the light of scripture and the history of the church's mission. So we depend on students' experience in church planting before they enter college. We need to be able to give them placement experience where they can be involved in church planting during their time in college, and we need training parishes where a newly ordained deacon can go and learn the habits of church planting at the beginning of his or her ministry.<sup>62</sup>

Gillett offers a path for our future training. No, we do not have to drop the very important church and ministry-based training options. On the contrary, they are valid and must be strengthened by the greater church as well as her educational wings. Church planters will have to strengthen their wings and one does so only by flying, by practising. On the other hand, church planters must understand the danger of insufficient training provided

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57 Smith, *Models*, 13.

58 Joel Cominsky, *Planting Churches that Reproduce* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing), 62.

59 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 231.

60 Murray, *Church Planting*, 257-258.

61 Robert Banks, *All the Business of Life. Bringing Theology Dawn to Earth* (Oxford; Lion Publishing, 1989), 35ff.

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62 Gillett 1991:182.

by short term schemes, and reduced to simple mentoring models.

The danger of moving from church planting to church cloning is obvious. The complexity of life today will never accept clones, regardless of their sources—the Americas, Africa or Asia. Copying the success of others under different cultural and societal conditions will never guarantee success at home. What we need is a renewed alliance of theological educators and practitioners of church planting—our education must become praxiological and theology a *handlungstheorie* (*action theory*). In practice this would mean that our churches, agencies and colleges will have to look into the experience of programmes like the HBI in India or the BPI in Latvia, not to copy them, but rather contextualizing their experience into our own context.

#### IV Church Planting and the Future of the Church in Europe

It is true that Christianity in Europe is suffering setbacks. Churches close their doors by hundreds and Christians leave their churches by hundreds of thousands. Nothing is more urgent than a process of re-evangelisation of

the European population and replanting of a strong and vital church. To accomplish the task, however, means that we will have to train leaders properly prepared for the task.

The systems in place, as promising as they are, are by and large, not sufficient. What is needed is a strategic alliance between educators in all models of training. High priority must be given to training of church planters in all departments of church life, including the educational and parachurch bodies.

Time is pressing. The situation is becoming more and more complicated. Europe is changing by the day. Already now major parts of some European cities are inhabited by more Muslims than Christians. In my own country, Germany, many church buildings have been turned into mosques due to the lack of ability to revitalize the church formerly meeting in those buildings.

It is more than complicated to evangelise people who witness a church dying. But it is far from impossible. God raises apostolic teams to move into such places and plant new churches. They will need all our support. And they need proper training, praxiological and at the same deeply theological.

# The Code: 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World'—Its Significance and Reception

Thomas Schirmmacher

## I The Document

### Its origin

The question of ethics in missions and dialogue has in recent years increasingly been asked in intra-Christian dialogue<sup>1</sup> as well as in relationships between religions.<sup>2</sup> However, a political question has also been asked, and that is the extent to which the human right of religious freedom, including the right to public self-expression on the part of religions and the right to reli-

gious conversion, may and must be limited by other human rights.<sup>3</sup> Christian witness is not an ethics-free space; it requires an ethical foundation which is biblically based, so that we truly do what Christ has assigned us to do.

With this background, the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and Interreligious Relations and Dialogue (IRRD, the dialogue programme of WCC) started a process of small and larger consultation. WEA entered on IIRD's side. This process finally led to the launch of the document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World*<sup>4</sup> in 2011 by the Vatican, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and

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1 See Elmer Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism. A Philosophical Defence of Proselytizing and Persuasion*, Exeter: Paternoster, 2011; Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclica, *Spe salvi*, 2007.

2 All codes on mission existing worldwide, secular, religious or Christian, are discussed and compared in Matthew K. Richards, Are L. Svendsen, Rainer Bless, 'Codes of Conduct for Religious Persuasion. The Legal Practice and Best Practices', in *International Journal for Religious Freedom* (Cape Town) 3 (2010), 2, 65-104. The ecumenical document is discussed pp. 67, 93-94, 103.

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3 See the Oslo Declaration, 'Oslo Declaration, Missionary Activities and Human Rights: Recommended Ground Rules for Missionary Activities', [www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php](http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php) (5.7.2011).

4 [http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian\\_Witness\\_in\\_a\\_Multi-Religious\\_World.pdf](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian_Witness_in_a_Multi-Religious_World.pdf)

the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

The document does not have any canonical or legal character. Situations in different countries and cultures are in fact so different that short, succinct statements can often not do them justice. For that reason, general guidelines and recommendations have been formulated at the last part of the document. (Throughout this article I will call it 'the document' for the sake of convenience.)

### Tracking its use

Even though Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran stated at the launch of the document: 'Today represents an historic moment in our shared Christian witness' and the WEA said, 'Today we write history',<sup>5</sup> one rarely knows of documents of this kind what their future will be after having been launched. This was especially so in this case because this document did not fit any earlier category, and it was not clear how it would be received beyond the interreligious dialogue community that produced it.

But somehow the document made it! Already by 2014 it has become a standard reference in interreligious dialogue and in mission. Rosalee Velloso Ewell, director of the Theological Commission (TC) of WEA, and John Baxter-Brown, formerly with WCC, now with the TC, state:

Over the past two-and-a-half years the document had been studied and appropriated in many places: Brazil, India, Norway, Thailand, Nigeria,

Myanmar and various other places. Different church bodies have used the document to draft their own codes of conduct; mission agencies and international relief organizations have also adapted its content and used it as a study guide for staff working in inter-religious contexts. In some cases the meetings to discuss the document and its contextualization have been the very first truly all-Christian gathering in that country.<sup>6</sup>

Clare Amos, WCC programme executive for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, commented in a meeting of all Canadian churches: 'The willingness of such a wide range of Christians to participate in this process is a very significant development. The key task now is to ensure that recommendations of the document are widely known and adopted through the whole Christian constituency.'<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Fr. Indunil J. K. Kodithuwakku, undersecretary of PCID, wrote: 'If implemented rightly, the recommendations for Conduct' certainly will pave the way for new ecumenical and interreligious relationship ...'<sup>8</sup>

It is amazing, that there has been

<sup>6</sup> 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World': An Interview with Rosalee Velloso Ewell and John Baxter-Brown (11.2.2014) <http://imeslebanon.wordpress.com/2014/02/11/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world-an-interview-with-rosalee-velloso-ewell-and-john-baxter-brown/>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/canadian-churches-reflect-on-identity-in-a-multi-religious-world>

<sup>8</sup> Fr. Indunil J. K. Kodithuwakku, 'Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World', *Pontificum Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones* 137 (2011/2012): June-December 2011, 269-272.

<sup>5</sup> Both quoted from [www.bucer.ch/uploads/tx\\_org/BQ0172\\_eng\\_.pdf](http://www.bucer.ch/uploads/tx_org/BQ0172_eng_.pdf).

no real criticism of the document in principle. This is even true for the vast majority of Evangelicals and Pentecostals. I know of evangelical criticism of the content from Evangelicals only in the US, but none of it reached any major evangelical body, mission society or theological school. Also where in conciliar or Catholic circles view authors raised the questions as to whether Evangelicals really meant what they signed or the fact that the authors missed the whole debate on proselytism, such criticism was not directed against the content as such.

All three bodies have sent the document to their major member bodies several times (thus to all Catholic bishop conferences, all WCC member churches, all WEA national bodies), they have propagated it on their websites and printed the document in books and readers to be used among their 'members' worldwide. The WCC and WEA websites offer translations into Dutch, French, German, Spanish; the Vatican website offers translations into French, German, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swahili. There are official translations into Swedish, Russian and Arabic not available in the web.

Already in my short speech at the launch of the document,<sup>9</sup> I started to gather information on the history of the

process, which I later expanded.<sup>10</sup> In the IIRF archive, we store not only the whole launch on film and archive photos of people involved, but also texts, press releases and discussions around the document 2011-2014. When a small group of people, having been involved in the process that led to the document, met in Geneva on invitation of Clare Amos of WCC, to review the use of the document in the 18 months since the launch,<sup>11</sup> all agreed, that the reception of the document went far beyond what anyone had expected.

Having kept up to date with the use of the document worldwide, I would judge that the three bodies are on an equal level in emphasizing the document globally. That is, they all constantly use the document on international, regional and national levels on their own motivation without waiting for the others to go ahead first. The document seems to be first of all to be

<sup>9</sup> 'People involved in the five year process leading to the ecumenical recommendations "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World"'. <http://www.thomasschirrmacher.net/blog/people-involved-in-the-five-year-process-leading-to-the-ecumenical-recommendations-christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world-whom-i-want-to-thank/> (221.2012).

<sup>10</sup> See 'An Overview of the 5-year process leading to today's launch of the ecumenical recommendations "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World"' (28.11.2011). <http://www.thomasschirrmacher.net/blog/an-overview-of-the-5-year-process-leading-to-todays-launch-of-the-ecumenical-recommendations-christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world/>; Christian Troll, Thomas Schirrmacher. 'Der innerchristliche Ethikkodex für Mission'. *Materialdienst* der EZW 74 (2011) 8: 293-299 (Text S. 295-299).

<sup>11</sup> 'Meeting on reception of guidelines' (1.1.2013). [http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/inter-religious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/meeting-on-reception-of-guidelines?set\\_language=en](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/inter-religious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/meeting-on-reception-of-guidelines?set_language=en); see the report by Clare Amos. 'Cooperation, Conversion and Christian Witness: The Continuing Conversation', *Current Dialogue* 54 (July 2013): 19.

in line with the thinking of each body itself and not because it is an ecumenical document.

## II The fourfold results of the document

The executive director of the Theological Commission of WEA, Rosalee Velloso Ewell from Brazil, stated at a study day on the document in Beirut with representation of all three major bodies and a Muslim speaker:

This document is unique and its necessity lies in its nature: it is genuinely a mission document, it is genuinely an ecumenical document, it is genuinely an inter-religious document, it is genuinely a biblical document, and it is a historic document. Despite its brevity and simplicity, it is necessary in that these things have never been said jointly, by these three bodies who represent about 95% of Christians worldwide.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly Klaus Schäfer, Director of the Center for Mission and Ecumenism of the 'Nordkirche', a German Lutheran member church of WCC, endorsed the document for the Lutheran churches in Germany (VELKD), despite missing some additional topics, and sees five areas that make the document special: 1 ecumenical relations, 2 moving dialogue and mission mindedness towards each other, 3 ethical standards for mission, 4 using human rights argumentation concerning mission and 5 the joint

emphasis on the 'missio dei'.<sup>13</sup>

From the Catholic side one can hear similar things. Fr. Indunil J. K. Kodithuwakku wrote several similar articles on behalf of PCID, looking back one year<sup>14</sup> and two years after the launch of the document<sup>15</sup> he writes: 'It is the first document of its kind in the history of the Church' because 'The three Christian world bodies' did it on the broadest ecumenical level. 'Representatives of 90% of the world Christian population have formulated an ecumenical missionary approach to witness to the world. Its success depends on how respective churches and ecclesiastical communities implement its recommendations for Christian mission worldwide.' He adds: 'The document also gives birth to a new ecumenical theology of mission.'

Let me systemise the four areas or effects of the document, even though these points can be found in most statements on the document in one form or the other:

1. Interreligious dialogue was ac-

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Schäfer. "das christliche Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt": Einführende Bemerkungen zu den, Empfehlungen für einen Verhaltenskodex'. VELKD Informationen Nr. 136—April—Juni 2012: 12-21 pp. 12, 13, 16, 20, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Fr. Indunil J. K. Kodithuwakku. 'Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World ...: First Anniversary: Rethinking back and Looking ahead'. Pontificum Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones 137 (2011/2012): June-December 2011, 269-272 = Vidyajoti Journal of Theological Reflection, 76/10 (2012 Oct), 749-759; also in East Asian Pastoral Review 49/4 (2012).

<sup>15</sup> Fr. Indunil J. K. Kodithuwakku. 'Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Recommendations for Conduct', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37 (2013), 109-113.

<sup>12</sup> <http://imeslebanon.wordpress.com/2014/02/13/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world-recommendations-for-conduct-event-highlights/>.

cepted by all three bodies and was no longer seen in opposition to the mission mindedness of the church.

2. It brought missiologists of all camps together and became a major document for mission studies. It made the discussion of 'the ethics of mission' on the base of the 'missio dei' an integral part of mission theology.

3. Ecumenical relations: Meetings with the same range of the three world bodies became normal on an international, continental and national level, as never before.

4. Human rights: Interreligious dialogue and mission go hand in hand with human rights thinking and human rights are seen as a joint ecumenical heritage.

## 1. Interreligious dialogue

This of course was the original intent of the document.<sup>16</sup> The (Buddhist) Prime Minister of Thailand said in his welcome speech at the final consultation for the document in Bangkok, that it 'is indeed an important step for the promotion of inter-religious harmony'.<sup>17</sup>

We will see that a Muslim representative spoke at the event in Beirut, and a Hindu representative in Toronto. The Council of Centers on

<sup>16</sup> The original programme is spelled out in the opening plenary in Toulouse: Thomas Schirrmacher, "But with gentleness and respect". Why missions should be ruled by ethics', short version: in: *Current Dialogue* (World Council of Churches) 50 (February 2008), 55-66.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.thaigov.go.th/en/speech-a-press-release/item/57612-address-by-prime-minister-to-the-third-consultation-meeting-of-pcid-wcc-and-wea-at-arnoma-hotel.html> (25.1.2011)

Jewish-Christian Relations proposes the document to be studied by dialogue groups.<sup>18</sup> Spring Hill College adds the document to its 'Theological Library: Jewish-Christian Dialogue'.<sup>19</sup> Rabbi A. James Rudin started his positive comments on the document: 'In a rare showing of Christian cooperation'.<sup>20</sup> At the World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Vienna, the document was discussed in several workshops. As the Vatican, WCC and WEA were all represented by their leadership and their interreligious dialogue staff, it was a good chance to evaluate the document.

The document gave interreligious dialogue a prominent place in ecumenical relations and ended the old discussion of mission versus dialogue. Yet in view of the fact that the original intent of the document was to further interreligious dialogue, one has to admit, that there is not much evidence of results beyond the Christian community.

## 2. Mission studies

The second unexpected area of influence is the academic study of mission. Missiologists and professors of mission studies around the globe welcomed the document. It became a topic at the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS) annual meeting in August 2012 in Toronto, Canada, with

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/themes-in-todays-dialogue/conversion/954-wcc2011>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/jewish.htm>

<sup>20</sup> A. James Rudin. 'Christian Witness In A Multi-Religious World'. *The Huffington Post: Religion*. 18.8.2011. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/18/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world\\_n\\_930912.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/18/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world_n_930912.html).

Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals presenting the consequences for mission studies together.

Dana L. Robert writes in her report: 'Forty years of the American Society of Missiology': 'With the shifting configuration of world Christianity, fresh patterns of ecumenical conversation became important, such as the Global Christian Forum and the 2011 document, "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World."<sup>21</sup> The emphasis on the 'Missio Dei' concept made the document of great interest to Catholic, conciliar and evangelical missiologists alike and proved that this concept has become a point of reference for all.<sup>22</sup>

The document has become a standard point of reference in all kinds of studies in the area of the science of mission<sup>23</sup> and from my judgment since 2013 has become the document that is quoted more than any other in academic mission studies.

In Germany the document led the conciliar Deutsche Gesellschaft für Missionswissenschaft (DGMV), (mainly professors teaching missions at universities), and the Association of German Speaking Evangelical Missiologists (AFEM) together when AFEM was invited to present the document at the yearly convention of DGMW in the

Akademie Chateau du Liebfrauenburg in Liebfrauenberg, Elsass, France, September 2012.<sup>24</sup> It also led to a closer relation between AFEM and other evangelical institutions and the Evangelische Missionswerk in Deutschland (EMW), especially during the official process of acceptance of the document in Germany.

### 3. Ecumenical relations

The goal of the document was not to improve ecumenical relations as such; otherwise different bodies like the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity (PCCU) would have been involved. It was specialists on dialogue, religions and mission working together on behalf of the responsible structures within the Vatican, WCC and WEA. It was built on a longstanding ecumenical relation between PCID and IRRD, with the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) of WEA coming in on the WCC's side. But the pure fact that in the end, for the first time ever, the three largest Christian bodies signed a document not only made history in itself, but changed ecumenical relations to the good and on a worldwide scale.

There has always been cooperation between the Vatican and the WCC; there was and is an ongoing dialogue between Vatican and WEA. In recent years, the WCC and WEA have started to cooperate in conferences and human rights activities. The Global Christian Forum (GCF) was instituted and still is carried out by the Catholic Church, the WCC and WEA, as well as other Chris-

<sup>21</sup> Dana L. Robert. 'Forty years of the American Society of Missiology: retrospect and prospect'. *Missiology: An International Review* 42 (2014): 6-25, 19.

<sup>22</sup> See my German book, *Missio Dei: Mission aus dem Wesen Gottes* (Hamburg: RVB & Nürnberg: VTR, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Eg Steven Bradbury. 'Mission, Missionaries and Development', 413-429, in Matthew Clarke, *Handbook on Research of Development and Research* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publ., 2013), 426-427.

<sup>24</sup> The German news <http://www.bucer.de/ressource/details/bonner-querschnitte-312012-ausgabe-225.html> (6.11.2012).

tian World Communions. But when the three bodies signed the document and brought it to their regional and national levels, they automatically brought up the question of the discussion and adaption of the document

The Academia Christiana in Seoul organised a symposium, 'A New Horizon for World Christianity: The Convergence between the Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Unity and Mission?' The document was not the only reason for this symposium, but it remained central to the debate between two Germans representing WCC and WEA (Martin Robra, Deputy General Secretary of the WCC, and Thomas Schirmmacher) and two Koreans working in high leadership positions in WCC and WEA (Joo Seop Keum, Director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of WCC and Sang Bok Kim, then Chairman of International Council of WEA).<sup>25</sup> A report states:

Robra labelled the joint declaration 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' as a major step forward. Additionally, global Christian bodies are less and less interested in expanding their own institutions or making more of themselves. Rather, they are out to promote actual cooperation between all Christians, also with those outside of these bodies.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> All lectures were published in English and Korean in Jong Yun Lee (Hg.), *A New Horizon of World Christianity: International Symposium* (Seoul: Academia Christiana of Korea, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bucer.de/ressource/details/bonner-querschnitte-352012-ausgabe-229-eng.html>

#### 4. Human rights

The question of how the human right of freedom of religion and belief (including what is integral to this, the right to propagate one's own religion) can be balanced with other rights, is discussed globally more and more.<sup>27</sup> This is a question that concerns all human rights thinking and is not in itself a Christian question only.

But with this document, world Christianity made it clear that not everything done in the name of religious freedom can be justified by human rights; it proclaimed that they deny mission to be *missio dei* if it violates the human rights of others. Human rights thinking is thus as much an ecumenical heritage of all three bodies as it is an integral part of theology, because it is not only valid as a legal category, but it sees human dignity, even importantly, as a God-given right which even mission cannot and will not deny.

That this in itself is a major achievement of the document, has been acknowledged several times from various sides.<sup>28</sup>

### III Conclusion

It is evident that this document, there-

<sup>27</sup> Matthew K. Richards, Are L. Svendsen, Rainer Bless, 'Voluntary Codes of Conduct for Religious Persuasion: Effective Tools for Balancing Human Rights and Resolving Conflicts?', *Religion and Human Rights* 6 (2011), 151-183.

<sup>28</sup> See Nelu Burcea, Thomas Schirmmacher (Hg.), *Journalul Libertatii de Constinta* (Bukarest: Editura Universitara, 2013); Thomas Schirmmacher, 'Mission und Religionsfreiheit', 113-133 in Marianne Heimbach-Steins, Heiner Bielefeldt (Hg.), *Religionen und Religionsfreiheit* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2010).

fore, has made a unique place for itself and deserves to be read and studied even more widely. The Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU) meeting in Bangkok, Thailand in December, 2013, set the pattern when it said to its members, 'AMCU VI rejoiced in the uniqueness of "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" which represents the consensus of three major world bodies of the Christian church.' It went on to explain:

'The participants in AMCU VI strongly commend this document to all the churches of Asia.

1. The document should be translated into local languages,
2. The document should be made available to theological colleges and seminaries as significant study material,
3. The document should be used to implement a living dialogue based on the Bible, recognising that Jesus is the focus of mission,
4. The articulated spirit of the document should find its way into bible studies, teaching and preaching for all ages and interest groups,
5. The churches should study the document together and use the

document for interfaith dialogue,

6. The churches should respect different cultures and apply the insights of the document in a culturally sensitive way, and
7. The churches should be prepared to accommodate and understand different approaches to implementing the document."<sup>29</sup>

This is a commendable program, and others have taken up the spirit of it.<sup>30</sup>

A much fuller record of the use of the text worldwide has been published as 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World—Three Years On'. *Current Dialogue* 56 (Dec) 2014: 67-79; <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/current-dialogue-56>

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<sup>29</sup> 'Common Statement of the Sixth Meeting of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU VI)' (5.12.2013), <http://cca.org.hk/home/asian-movement-for-christian-unity-amcu/>

<sup>30</sup> For details of some, see 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World—Three Years On', *Current Dialogue* 56 (Dec) 2014: 67-79; <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/current-dialogue-56>.

## Books Reviewed

Reviewed by David Parker  
Brian R. Talbot (ed.)  
*A Distinctive People: Aspects of the  
Witness of Baptists in Scotland in the  
Twentieth Century*

Reviewed by Michael Borowski  
Dr. James W. Thompson  
*The Church According To Paul—  
Rediscovering The Community  
Conformed To Christ*

Reviewed by Jack Barentsen  
Sharon Henderson Callahan (ed.)  
*Religious Leadership: A Reference  
Handbook*

Reviewed by David Turnbull  
Charles A. Davis  
*Making Disciples across Cultures:  
Missional Principles for a Diverse World*

Reviewed by Brian J. Wright  
Ken Gnanakan  
*Responsible Stewardship of God's  
Creation*, Revised Edition

## Book Reviews

ERT (2016) 40:1, 90-91

**A Distinctive People: Aspects  
of the Witness of Baptists in  
Scotland in the Twentieth Century**

**Edited by Brian R. Talbot  
Studies in Baptist History and  
Thought**

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2014  
ISBN 978-1-84227-851-2  
Pb, pp258, Bibliog

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

Although this book is part of the well known Paternoster series, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*, and is sharply focused on Baptists in Scotland and restricted to the 20th century, it holds interest and value for a wide range of readers. It is valuable in itself, showing how a small but diverse denomination can benefit from reflection on itself, indicating how much is owed to the team of eight writers and the editor (who is a productive historian as well as a pastor),

each one with insights often gained from deep personal participation in the areas they discuss. The coverage is as varied as home missions, war, relations with other Baptist groups (a surprisingly complex topic); there is a particularly ambitious section forming Part I of the book with a chapter each on key leaders of the Baptist Union of Scotland, laymen in the life of the denomination and the place of women in Scottish Baptist life (the latter forming the largest chapter by a significant margin). However, it is unfortunate that planned chapters on children and youth work and on overseas mission did not eventuate.

But there is more to the book than these chapters, especially for readers of this journal who may not have much affinity with Scottish Baptists themselves. This interest is found particularly in the four chapters dealing with the following topics: ecumenical relationships with other denominations, theological developments over the period covered by the book, revival and piety, and social action.

The chapter on social action, the last of the book, covers many different issues faced by the denomination, such as temperance, aged care, peace and war (supplemented by another complete chapter on this topic) and family life, reflecting some of the disturbing trends that have plagued the world during the 20th century. However, it is noticeable that the discussion is restricted to social action itself rather than the social thinking that would have prompted these efforts. However, it is different with the chapter on ecumenical relationships. As an evangelical denomination that is relatively small and of comparatively recent origin in the Scottish scene, this study shows how it has found its place within its own ecclesiastical and national context, although with some uncertainty at times.

Part of the reason for that mixed response is revealed in the chapter on theology, which moves from the early days of the 'Higher Criticism' and modernism, through confessions of faith, revival and the impact of World War I, all the way to Karl Barth's impact and finally to the theology of baptism, an important matter of national ecclesiastical debate. More insights are found in chapter 7 which deals with 'experiences of the Holy Spirit' which includes first the impact of Edward Irving and dispensationalism, then the holiness movement and the Welsh revival, followed by the charismatic movement and restorationism, all of which are set in the wider context of national and global developments. This chapter is particularly valuable in showing the influences which have shaped the faith and practice of Scottish Baptists. These influences were not confined to the Scotland, but were widely felt around the world, and so this chapter will inform readers from other places about the dynamics of evangelical

theology, spirituality and churchmanship that are likely to be relevant to their own contexts.

Even though this book is a collection of essays (with a helpful bibliography, although no index), it has a certain unity and cohesion about it, contributing to its value as a volume which will be helpful to many readers.

ERT (2016) 40:1, 91-93

**The Church according to Paul—  
Rediscovering the Community  
Conformed to Christ**

Dr. James W. Thompson

Grand Rapids (Michigan), Baker  
Academic 2014

ISBN 978-0-8010-4882-1

Pb, pp289, index

*Reviewed by Michael Borowski, Book Review  
Editor, Evangelical Review of Theology*

How can the church react to the complex and severe challenges in the West? Thompson relates his study to present challenges of a declining church both in Europe and North-America. He briefly sketches recent approaches of understanding the function of the church. However, in the light of the overall need for a reassured understanding of the concept of the church in the western hemisphere, Thompson wants to re-introduce Paul to a discussion on the renewal of the church—the church after Christendom.

In order to do so, Thompson traces within his 9 chapters the concept of the church within Paul's writings—writings, which do not contain an explicit treatise of the church, but in which—most of the time—the church is closely connected with other areas of theology. In his first chapter, Thompson turns to Paul's

first letter: From First Thessalonians, Thompson builds Paul's corporate identity, which he will use as a 'window' to Paul's ecclesiology in the following chapters. Part of this corporate identity is its existence 'in Christ' and 'with Christ'—features on which Thompson elaborates in the second chapter.

Turning from the spiritual dimension to the 'visible manifestations' of the church, baptism and eucharist are the central issues of chapter three. Consequently, the gap between the spiritual and the visible becomes evident, and so Thompson addresses the spiritual, i.e. corporal formation of the church in the fourth chapter: the church memorizes its past, but becomes transformed now and will be transformed in the future—a process which leads Thompson to term the church as 'counterculture'. Thompson's fifth chapter focuses on justification in its communal dimension. There cannot be several churches, for there is only one salvation, Thompson argues, and this salvation overcomes cultural (or ecclesiastical) boundaries.

In the last chapters Thompson switches to more practical matters by addressing several critical questions of the early 21st century: (1) What does being 'missional' mean for churches? In chapter 6 Thompson proceeds from his fourth chapter: while the church represents a humanity in transformation, the missional church 'attracts' non-believers because of the design of their new life, which is why they would turn to Christ, too. (2) What does it mean practically for churches to be part of the universal church? (chapter 5)? Primarily, Thompson argues in his seventh chapter, the need for mutual recognition and support, the latter in, for instance, financial terms. (3) What can 'Megachurches' and 'House churches' learn from Paul?

In his eighth chapter, Thompson addresses the 'disputed letters' (Ephesians, Colossians, Pastoral Letters, in his case). (4) What can we learn about leadership and authority in the church? In his ninth chapter, Thompson addresses the 'church under construction', which has to live with the tension between a 'church of all' and a 'church with offices'. In his concluding chapter, Thompson summarizes three comprehensive images of the church (the heir of Israel, the people in Christ, God's counterculture), which he applies to the ecclesiological and the missional aspect of the church.

There are a number of obvious significant benefits of Thompson's contribution: It is highly relevant, it is scholarly, easily read and personally challenging. In particular the breadth of his approach is to be complimented, for Thompson manages to establish at relatively few pages biblical perspectives without going further than scripture (see, for instance, his summary on the sacraments).

A major issue for the evangelical world will probably be Thompson's constant differentiation between Paul's undisputed and his disputed letters. While this does justice to a simple fact within biblical scholarship on the one hand, it not only gives transparency about the foundation on which Thompson is building on at a given time, but it also alters the actual content of his study. For instance, Thompson will reflect on Ephesians basically only in his penultimate chapter—together with Colossians and the Pastoral Letters. This obviously creates certain tensions for those who grant the same authority to all books within the NT.

However, Thompson's book addresses on scholarly level a crucial problem of

the western church. In this context, his contribution is of high value and will be of use as, for instance, a textbook in a setting in which the underlying differences on certain issues will be properly presented, understood in its somewhat complex nature and applied with great benefit.

ERT (2016) 40:1, 93-94

### Religious Leadership: A Reference Handbook

Sharon Henderson Callahan, ed.

Los Angeles, CA, USA: Sage  
Reference, 2013

ISBN 978-1-412-999-083

Hb, 2 vols, pp824, bibliog, index

*Reviewed by Jack Barentsen, Evangelische  
Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium.*

This reference handbook is a truly amazing collection of articles on the nature, context, exercise and goals of religious leadership (RL). With 97 chapters and over 100 contributors, the overview is vast and diverse. Many thanks to editor Sharon Henderson Callahan and her team for this unique compilation!

Callahan earned a leadership doctorate from Seattle Jesuit Catholic University, where she now serves as associate professor and associate dean in the School of Theology and Ministry. She focuses on culturally diverse lay and ordained leadership since 1992, and currently serves as president of the Academy of Religious Leadership (ARL).

How could one possibly review more than 800 pages in just a few words? One way is to look at the various traditions that are the subjects of discussion. Within Christianity, numerous chapters discuss mainline Protestant, evangelical, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic

leadership, to which are added chapters on Jewish, Islamic, Asian (Hindu, Buddhist, and much more) and Mormon leadership. Most chapters are historically and sociologically oriented, tracing denominational and immigrant histories as background for the development of RL in each context. A few chapters on biblical leadership, from Christian and Jewish perspectives, are included, while the ethnic diversity of the US context becomes visible in chapters on black church leadership, African American RL (both Christian & Islamic), Latino, Native American and Hawaiian leadership. A special spotlight includes 8 chapters on female religious leaders in most of the religious traditions. In spite of its amazing breadth, no chapter on RL in the Orthodox Churches is present, which probably indicates their marginal presence in the US.

A second way to review this 2-volume handbook is to consider its sections. However, the section headings do not always prove very helpful in organizing the many different types of content. For practical purposes, the first volume deals with the US context for religious leadership, and it discusses the individual leadership styles within these contexts. The chapters are different in tone and approach, unavoidable with such a large number of contributors from their own distinct traditions. Some chapters contain substantial leadership analysis; others present more of a historical narrative. However, since a number of chapters and contributors discuss each tradition, the overall picture that emerges is rich and broad.

The second volume contains sections on intercultural RL, on RL for the common good and again for sustainability, social justice and peace building, and on the formation of religious leaders. Each section surveys again most of the

major religious traditions of the first volume. Of special interest are some 18 small leadership biographies of key religious leaders such as Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King, Abraham Heschel, the Dalai Lama, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Fethullah Gülen. Various chapters narrate the history of particular organizations, such as the Salvation Army, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, of Islamic Relief USA in its involvement for the common good and its models of leadership.

This impression of religious traditions, their leadership structures and styles, their causes and formation is still incomplete. The 6 page Table of Contents and the 30 page index (authors, movements, traditions, and themes) are key instruments to using handbook profitably. For instance, evangelical forms of leadership can be traced across a number of chapters. Two basic chapters tell of the church growth movement and megachurches, and of the entrepreneurial model of evangelical leadership. Next follow two chapters on women leaders in evangelical congregations, and on evangelical leadership for social action. Finally, new forms of evangelical leadership are discussed. Such an approach provides a broad spectrum of studies of evangelical leadership. The same can be done for Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Jewish and Muslim leadership. Moreover, every chapter has a good selection of references for further study, so that one can quickly gain more depth in the study.

The handbook also serves well as an extensive collection of expressions of religious leadership. It provides numerous texts for the study and comparison of structures and styles of religious leadership in their relationship to social and religious contexts. To some extent, the possible influences of faith

and denomination, social and religious context, ethnicity and gender on RL can be traced. The breadth and variable approaches in each chapter imply that a direct comparison will often be difficult (the proverbial comparing of apples and oranges); yet such a study could be primarily exploratory, providing a basis for further literature and empirical research. It provides rich descriptions that help to develop our understanding of the typologies of religious leadership.

One major limitation is its predominant focus on the US context. One could only wish for a similar handbook for Europe, which would provide a significant boost for the study of religious leadership in both the religious and the public domain. It is clear that religion will remain a dominant force in the western world, even if mainline traditional churches continue to shrink very rapidly, and we need sources with this type of breadth and depth to study religious leadership in all its dimensions.

ERT (2016) 40:1, 94-96

### **Making Disciples across Cultures: Missional Principles for a Diverse World**

**Charles A. Davis**

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity  
Press, 2015

ISBN 978-0-8308-3690-1

Pb., pp 236, study questions, notes,  
index

*Reviewed by David Turnbull, Tabor  
Adelaide, South Australia.*

The mandate to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) is the backbone of Christian mission. The growth of Christianity in difficult places in the majority world and the challenges of mission as

a consequence of the demise of Christendom in the West have inspired a renewed interest in disciple-making in mission in the past decade, especially within the context of church planting movements. Recent writings have generally focused on dimensions, methods and processes associated with disciple making.

This book adds to this bank of literature by addressing significant principles and dimensions that need to feature in the disciple-making process, especially when crossing the cultural divide and engaging with believers who have a different worldview and belief system, rather than suggesting a reproducing curricula for seminars or other education type programs or a particular methodology for disciple-making.

The author's background aids his credibility to share on the subject and leads to a conversational and personable style of presentation. He draws on his vast experience over forty years which includes being a third-culture kid in Pakistan, having practical experience as a TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) missionary in Venezuela for twenty years, conducting PhD research on Venezuelan worldview and being TEAM's Executive International Director.

Ten universal principles or dimensions of disciple making are explored. Each receives its own chapter. Significant principles include disciples do what love requires, disciples live an undivided life, disciples engage in personal and cultural transformation, and disciples keep the end in mind. The principles tackle cultural and theological assumptions and baggage that need to be addressed in the disciple-making process in order to bring about the Godly transformation that occurs through the renewing of the mind, heart and hands.

These principles are described creatively around the use of a metaphor based on the sliding switches on a sound mixer. In doing so he acknowledges the spectrum of potentially competing positions that can occur with each principle and emphasizes the need to hold the two end positions on the spectrum in tension and balance-based on the cultural context of the disciples.

For each principle Davis provides a scriptural position, primarily from the New Testament, the key elements of the principle through personal and agency narratives, and provides a range of relevant, concrete examples to illustrate how the principles can be applied. Ideas abound through these illustrations and there are examples from all around the world.

The universal principles identified are sufficiently comprehensive and broad for what is sought in a disciple of Jesus. This is one expression of an integrated framework. His case could have been strengthened, though, by a greater explanation of the criteria for the logic and foundation for the selection and development of them.

In the process many of the key cultural value dimensions from the spectrum of cultural experience that impact on cross-cultural relationships have been explored in the context of disciple-making. It is acknowledged that the list of these is not exhaustive, as it was probably easier to have one slider switch per principle. However, some of the principles could have multiple slider switches associated with them such as developing relationship interdependence, living an undivided life, keeping the end in mind and organizing flexibly and purposefully. As a result several significant cultural value dimensions from scholars such as Lingenfelter and Mayers and Rah could

be acknowledged. These areas include judgment, status and self-worth, vulnerability, crises management, short term or long-term perspective, and managing differences and conflict.

Having said this, the result is still an admirable resource to encourage those who seek to understand the disciple-making process, to develop cultural

intelligence in making disciples, and to be flexible and humble enough to release their own assumptions and values so they don't impact the disciple-making process. This particularly applies to western cross-cultural workers relating to the diasporic communities in their own country or travelling to majority world contexts.

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*Responsible Stewardship of God's Creation*, Revised Edition, Ken Gnanakan Bonn, Germany: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2014, ISBN 978-3-86269-061-9, Ed. Thomas K. Johnson, The WEA Global Issues Series, Vol. 11, Original edition 2004, revised 2014, Pb, pp 126, bibliog.

*Reviewed by Brian J. Wright, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia.*

Think environmentally. That is what the author hopes Christians will do after reading his slightly updated edition of his 2004 work under the same title. Fortunately, Gnanakan provides more than just some information to consider. Among other things, he offers a set of questions, action plans, resources, and prayers at the end of each chapter for evangelicals to utilize so that they can immediately get involved in some practical and positive ways; both locally and globally.

Unfortunately, especially given the revised nature of this volume and call for evangelicals to get more involved in creation care, the publication process began before Gnanakan could mention and/or interact with a number of major evangelical conferences devoted to this topic, such as the Evangelical Theological Society's 2012 annual conference, and the various biblical scholars from a variety of backgrounds associated with evangelicalism, like Richard Bauckham, Douglas Moo, Wayne Grudem, and Russell Moore—to name just a few—who have addressed many of the texts and challenges included in this work. Nevertheless, what Gnanakan does best is to remind us that ecological issues are important and that environmental stewardship is a challenge. This edition is a welcomed continuation of his previous work.